

# Between Dictatorships and Revolutions

Narratives of Argentine and Brazilian Exiles

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## Abstract

This article analyzes transnational migrations triggered by the dictatorships in Argentina (1976-1983) and Brazil (1964-1985), with attention to the representations associated to exile in these countries and in the Latin American context of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The empirical data used are the memories narrated by Argentines who took exile in Brazil and by Brazilians exiled in Mozambique. By exploring the plurality of meanings that these authors attribute to their migratory experiences, we seek to understand how different political conjunctures in the countries of origin and destination implied varied forms of *living* and understanding exile. In a comparative perspective, the case studies also explore how the experience of exile was forged not only in relation to specific national and migratory contexts but also in relation to transnational social fields.

**Keywords:** Exile; Migration; Nation; Identities; Politics; Dictatorship.

## Resumo

O presente artigo propõe analisar migrações transnacionais impulsionadas pelas ditaduras argentina (1976-1983) e brasileira (1964-1975). Por um lado, o trabalho problematiza as representações associadas ao exílio nesses países e no contexto latino-americano da segunda metade do século XX. Por outro lado, tomando como material empírico as memórias narradas por argentinos que se exilaram no Brasil e por brasileiros exilados em Moçambique,

a intenção é explorar a pluralidade de sentidos que estes atores atribuem à própria experiência migratória. Busca-se assim compreender como diferentes conjunturas políticas nos países de origem e de destino implicaram em formas variadas de *viver* e entender o exílio. Em perspectiva comparativa, os estudos de caso permitem ainda explorar como a experiência do exílio foi forjada não apenas em relação a contextos migratórios e nacionais específicos, mas também em meio a campos sociais transnacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Exílio; Migração; Nação; Identidades; Política; Ditadura Militar.

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## Introduction

In this article we analyze transnational migrations triggered by the Argentine (1976-1983) and Brazilian (1964-1985) dictatorships. We discuss aspects of political violence and representations associated to exile in these countries and in the Latin American context in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We argue that these representations shape specific meanings for the concept of exile in the region. Also, using as empirical data the memories narrated by Argentines who took exile in Brazil and by Brazilians exiled in Mozambique,<sup>1</sup> we analyze the plurality of meanings that these actors attribute to their own migratory experience. In this way, we problematize the categories (*exiles, refugees, migrants, foreigners*) which they invoke to give meaning to the trajectory of migration, seeking to understand how different political conjunctures in the countries of origin and destination imply various forms of *living* and understanding exile.

In a comparative perspective, the case studies enable us to see how the experience of exile was forged not only in relation to specific migratory and

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<sup>1</sup> The ethnographic data were taken from two different studies conducted in the realm of the project “*Globalization, Old Imaginaries and Reconstructions of Identity: Transnational Migrants, Refugees and Foreigners in Comparative Perspective*” in conjunction with CEMI and the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at IFCH/UNICAMP, both with financing from FAPESP. The first study addressed the exile of Argentines in Brazil during the dictatorship. The oral histories and field, bibliographic and document research were conducted between 2003 and 2006, resulting in the dissertation “*Narratives of Argentine Exile in Brazil: Nation memories and identities*” (See Sanjurjo 2007). The second ethnography was conducted from 2009-2011 with Brazilians exiled in Mozambique. The study included field and document research and oral history interviews, resulting in the dissertation “*The Best Years of Our Lives. Narratives, Trajectories and journeys of Brazilian exiles who became cooperators in the popular republic of Mozambique*” (See Azevedo 2013). We would like to thank the anonymous’ referees for their valuable suggestions for improving the text.

national contexts, but also amid the transnational social fields. Thus, based on the anthropological debates about transnational circulation, we investigate how the migrant actors re-elaborate feelings of belonging in specific situations and in relation to broad historical-structural contexts.<sup>2</sup>

## Exile in Latin America: a political experience

The narratives about Argentine and Brazilian exile presented below refer to the context of political conflicts established during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Southern Cone of Latin America. These conflicts gave way to successive military coups and the establishment of civil-military dictatorships throughout the continent.<sup>3</sup> In the bipolarized Cold War context, these dictatorships are noteworthy for their application of *National Security Doctrines* that focused on combating political opposition. These opposition movements identified themselves and were identified with the “international left”. More than adversaries, the so-called “subversives/leftists/Marxists/socialists/communists” were considered *internal enemies*.

Throughout the region, extensive repressive methods were employed, violence being the principal means of dissuasion of political conflict. These dictatorships were marked by generalized practices of torture, assassination, forced disappearance and arbitrary and clandestine imprisonment. The Argentine dictatorship was notorious for its systematic use of “disappearance” as a principal repressive methodology. The disclosure of part of the documentation produced by the security and information systems of these countries also confirms the existence of a transnational military alliance in the region since the early 1970s, which exchanged information and conducted joint repressive actions. Organized gradually over the years, the partnership was known as *Operation Condor* (Quadrat 2004).

The repression triggered the dislocation of thousands of people beyond

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2 From a transnational perspective of migrations (Glick-Schiller et. al. 1992 and 1995; Feldman-Bianco 2000 and 2011), we begin with the presumption that migrants construct social fields – where they maintain multiple relations (familiar, economic, social, organizational and political) which can encompass both the country of origin as well as that of destination (or more countries). We understand the need to consider the power relations that permeate the social, cultural and political dimensions of the migrant experiences, analyzing the processes of (re)configuration of memories and identities, situationally and in the face of broader hegemonic, global and national contexts.

3 Chile (1973-1990), Brazil (1964-1985), Argentina (1976-1983), Uruguay (1973-1985), Paraguay (1954-1989), as well as Bolivia (1964-1982) and Peru (1968-1980), in the South American context.

the frontiers of these countries, migrations permeated by the experience of persecution due to the adoption of political positions (more or less explicit) against these regimes. Although the migrations were largely undocumented and not registered by the national censuses, demographic studies have estimated that nearly 500 thousand people left Argentina during the 1970s (Schkolnik 1986). In Brazil, for various reasons – the temporal extension of the military regime, the absence of official studies and the diversity of forms and conditions in which people emigrated – there are no solid estimates about the number of exiles. There is not even any estimate of the number of survivors<sup>4</sup> or of deaths and disappearances in rural conflicts or of non-organized militants affected by the repression.<sup>5</sup>

In both countries, the concept of “enemy” was defined with priority given to political criteria (and not ethnic or racial ones), making politics a central marker in the processes of social-territorial exclusion.<sup>6</sup> By denoting the political nature of this migratory process, *exile* became the category used more broadly in Argentine and Brazilian societies to define the migrations triggered by the dictatorial repression. At the same time, the term was used by social movements that struggled for the end of the dictatorships, in both national and transnational space, and also became part of the autobiographical vocabulary of people who saw themselves as part of a collectivity of “exiles.”<sup>7</sup>

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4 One possible estimate would be the number of people who requested political amnesty to the Amnesty Commission of the Ministry of Justice. The Commission report from 2010, the most recent available on its site, indicates that there were 70,000 requests received until that year. Available at: <http://portal.mj.gov.br/anistia/data>. Accessed on 24/07/13. Nevertheless, these data only express the contingent of those who knew about and decided to request this right.

5 In Brazil, through Law N<sup>o</sup> 9.140/1995 and the activities of the *Special Commission about Political Deaths and Disappearances* of the Secretary of Human Rights, the state recognized 357 deaths and disappearances during the dictatorship (Brazil, 2007). Human rights organizations, formed by family members and survivors, have affirmed the number of 436 (Almeida, 2009). Most of these numbers encompass people linked to political organizations and social movements. With the advent of the *National Commission for the Truth*, which is currently conducting its work, there is a forecast that larger numbers will be estimated. In the Argentine context, human rights organizations affirm that 30,000 people disappeared, based on denunciations registered and on an estimate of the number of cases that were never denounced. The work conducted in 1984 by the *National Commission on the Disappearance of People* (CONADEP) proved the existence of 8,961 disappeared, 1,336 people summarily executed and 2,793 people released from clandestine detention centers. The last official list indicated 9,334 disappeared people. See CONADEP (2009). Beyond the possibility of factual confirmation of the number of “30 thousand detained-disappeared,” it is worth noting its strength as a symbol of the criticism of clandestine repression.

6 Unlike the Guatemalan case, for example, where racism against the indigenous population articulated the ethnic-political figure of the “Indian-communist,” in the experiences of the Argentine and Brazilian dictatorships the definition of the enemy was directly political, with the figure of the “delinquent/terrorist/subversive” separated from any ethnic or racial reference.

7 Exile is part of the autobiography of Brazilian politicians, intellectuals and artists like Fernando

For example, we can highlight the campaigns of international denunciations and in defense of human rights, organized by groups of exiled Latin Americans in Europe and North America.

The representations about what constituted the exiles' experience or of who were the exiles were thus shaping specific meanings in the region. The post-dictatorship periods came to consolidate these understandings. In both Argentina and Brazil the term is used in the historiography, cinema, literature and the press, where the communities of exiles arose as significant actors of recent history. Nevertheless, while in Brazil those who returned could see this past become a politically legitimate trajectory – the term exile is found in the Amnesty Law and, later, people who migrated because of political persecution earned a right to indemnification, as well as all those who suffered denial of rights – in the Argentine case the situation became more complex. In comparison with those who were *detained and or disappeared*, the exiled, as well as the survivors of clandestine centers and political prisoners, were not rarely considered “second-class victims,” upon whom fell the stigma of the survivor. The accusation “*Why did they disappear*”, aimed at the disappeared and their families during the dictatorship, was transferred in the post-dictatorial context to the survivors and exiles, “*Why did they appear and survive*”, to denote collaboration, betrayal, being an informant, desertion or cowardliness.

Despite the differences, in the two contexts the central focus attributed to the experience of repression associated exile to specific terms of the field of political dispute. These, as we will see below, became a key focus of the memories of the exiled Argentines and Brazilians. On the other hand, we observe that the categories mobilized by these actors also related to the way they saw themselves identified by others or legally categorized by the migratory policies of the destination nation-states.

From the perspective of international law, there are no exiles, but refugees, a legal status defined in 1951 during the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Geneva Convention. Conceived of as a person who receives protection due to a “well-founded fear

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Henrique Cardoso, Leonel Brizola, Miguel Arraes, Chico Buarque, Oscar Niemeyer, Paulo Freire, etc. Various other Brazilians have exile as part of their memories, see for example Cavalcanti (1978) and Costa (1980). In Argentina, we can also cite exiles who remain well-known because of political, legal, cinematographic or literary activity, such as Eduardo Luis Duhalde, Juan Gelman, David Viñas, Pino Solanas, Miguel Bonasso, and others.

of being persecuted” in his or her country of origin, the refugee was categorized as a specific type of migrant, whose dislocation did not occur for purely economic motives.

Considering then that international norms define the refugee as a migrant not moved by economic factors, it is fitting to problematize the risk of not considering that situations of economic vulnerability frequently stem precisely from situations of social conflict. In this regard, we agree with Schwarzstein (2001a) that the distinction between emigrants, refugees and exiles becomes ambiguous. This ambiguity is constitutive of the experiences of the exile in the destination societies, but also of the former exile, who, having returned to his or her country of origin, is found marked and recognized by this experience. Moreover, discussing the application of this status to the Latin American exiles, Rollemberg (1999) questions to what degree the criterion of victimization applied to the figure of the refugee had disqualified them as political agents, a factor that – we agree – was central to the affirmation of their identities.<sup>8</sup>

We will focus our discussion on understanding how the experience of exile is remembered and invoked by the social actors in the present. Various authors emphasize that memories and narratives about the past overlap individual and collective memories, past experience and present situations. They thus involve phenomenon that are constructed, re-signified and negotiated in the course of history and the social processes (Bourdieu 2006, Jelin 2002, Pollak 1989 and 1992, Schwarzstein 2001b). In addition, these authors emphasize that memory constitutes one of the key elements of identification of social groups, because it defines the shared experiences and narratives, giving foundation to and reinforcing feelings of belonging and socio-cultural boundaries.

The study of the Brazilian exiles concentrated on the experiences of those who settled in Mozambique after the independence of the country in 1975, as

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8 It is interesting to note that currently, in both Brazil and Argentina, to claim to be a victim of the dictatorship was converted into social and political capital for militancy in human rights groups that sought to hold the state responsible and penalize the agents implicated in the repression. In addition, anthropologists dedicated to the theme emphasize that the category of victim has been invoked to frame social groups that are the focus of humanitarian policies (whose perverse effect would be to remove the agency from the social subjects), to the degree that they can also be strategically claimed by groups with the intention of legitimating political agendas and struggles for recognition (See, for example Araújo 2007; Agier 2006; Jimeno 2010; Vianna and Farias 2011). In this same sense Avtar Brah (2006) defines as *strategic essentialization* those processes in which social actors and groups contextually appropriate a certain dominant discourse as part of a political strategy.

*international cooperators*.<sup>9</sup> During the first years, the Brazilian residents in the country were limited to a few exiles who lived in the capital, Maputo. They saw themselves and were seen as the “Brazilian group” which, through very close bonds of friendship, was responsible for various political and cultural initiatives. At the time of the study, however, most had returned to Brazil and despite being remembered affectionately as “the group” they maintained more diffuse contacts only with some of the older members of the group - friendships often cultivated at a distance.<sup>10</sup>

The study of the many Argentines exiled in Brazil, focused on those established in the cities of São Paulo and Campinas. They are men and women who, between 1974 and 1981, fled the political repression in Argentina for Brazil where they settled definitively. They had a wide variety of life and political trajectories and were never recognized as a social group. Instead, they formed networks based on professional and friendship ties that were established in their country of origin or during the first years of living in Brazil.<sup>11</sup>

By comparing the memories of these two groups, we can perceive that although they all recount how they were forced to migrate as “exiles” because of the dictatorial repression, we can also see that in the course of the migratory processes various other representations associated to their experiences were constructed: distinct categories were used by the migrant actors to situate themselves and the various collectivities of exiles within this “history of exile”. It is precisely in the light of the plurality of categories invoked to define or be defined by third parties that we analyze how the experience of exile was forged not only in relation to the specific national and migratory contexts, but also amid transnational social fields.

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9 Mozambique began a socialist experience in 1975. After Independence, the settlers abandoned the country en masse, leaving skilled jobs unfilled. The demand for professionals attracted the foreign “cooperators.”

10 During the research, 23 oral histories were conducted with Brazilians who were in Mozambique. The interviews were conducted in the cities of São Paulo, Campinas, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Goiânia and Brasília, from 2007 and 2010. Most of those interviewed were from 60 to 70 years old, middle class and university educated.

11 Between the years 2003 and 2005, 15 life stories were recorded of Argentines living in the cities of Campinas and São Paulo. Most of those interviewed are professionals or university professors, mainly physicists and psychoanalysts.



## Brazilian exiles: the valorization of militant trajectories

In Brazil, exile affected a large and varied set of social actors from the first moments of the 1964 military coup. Nevertheless, only a small number went to Mozambique in the mid 1970s, during the first years of construction of the socialist experience in that country. They had all left Brazil due to having been involved with parties or organized groups in opposition to the dictatorship, passing through one or more countries<sup>12</sup> before reaching Mozambique. They all agreed that in this first period only “militants” went to Mozambique. They gave value to their status as militants contextualizing their experiences in the more general dynamic of the historical processes in Brazil and in the world in the 1960s and 1970s, when *politics* was interpreted as a *social field* divided by conflict between the right and left, two *radical paradigms* (Turner 2008). The paradigm of the left refers not only to the social relations developed, but also constitutes a *regime of truth* (Malkki 1995: 104), evoked to interpret, order and give meaning to the experience and the actions in the past. These common premises led to the mobilization of certain categories and the rejection of others in the elaboration of meanings for their trajectories.

In the statement below, the person interviewed situates his past actions in relation to a shared paradigm, as a social actor in relation to a political field. A former militant of the student movement and the Brazilian Revolutionary Communist Party (PCBR), Bruno presents his “militancy” to us in the following manner:

“I am of the generation that was twenty years old in 68, and was therefore in the university here in Rio de Janeiro and participated in the student movement, which at that time, in 68, was quite strong, There were even [various] movements, above all the student movement, right? It was a movement that questioned the dictatorship very strongly at this time. It was the year of the AI-5, so the youth, at least a good portion of the youth, were aware, right? It was organized, went to the streets, entered the political parties, either existing ones or creating others. In the beginning of the 60s there was a cultural revolution taking place in China, there was Cuba, right? Che Guevara had just died in Bolivia, but had left the legacy of his cause, so Cuba was there next to

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12 Only one person went directly to Mozambique in 1977. The others left Brazil between 1968-1974 through different routes that passed through at least one Latin American country, and then through Europe. Most of the exiles in Mozambique (a limited group that had about 100 families) returned to Brazil after 1979.

the United States, already a socialist country. There was an entire progressive movement in the period of the Cold War, and lets say, the socialist side of this Cold War was the side that was rising.”<sup>13</sup>

The choice of the category “generation”, that appears in various statements, places Bruno within a collective generational experience. He was not alone in his decision to enter the student movement, affirming that “*a good portion of the conscious youth*” was organized, went to the streets and joined political parties. He belonged to a collective experience that included not only the actors who were “*contesting the dictatorship*” but also members of a political movement of international scope, defined as “*progressive*” or even as “*the socialist side of this Cold War*”. Referring to a political conflict that opposed two “sides,” Bruno illuminated the *premises* underlying his interpretation of the past. He emphasized the perception of being inserted in a social field of transnational scope, formed by a body of shared symbolic references (which includes, China, Cultural Revolution, Cuba, Socialism, Che Guevara). These symbols refer to standards of behavior and morality, shaping the paradigm that, in his vision, guided their action, defining him as a “militant” person. In addition he claimed that the choice of the *left* was the option of the “*conscious youth*”, carrying with it the idea that opposing the dictatorship was an imperative attitude in that conjuncture.

If the *paradigm of the left* was conceived as a shared set of symbols, values and orientations for social action, capable of producing a sense of social belonging, Bruno’s statement calls attention to the fact that this paradigm overlapped the map of nationalities, informing actions in the various arenas in which the political conflict of the Cold War was expressed. This led to opportunities for alliances and disputes among the Brazilian political organizations engaged in the struggle against the dictatorship with “*leftist*” groups from other countries. These relations were nourished in many ways. For this reason, once in exile, the militants of the Brazilian organizations contacted these organizations, giving new meaning to their emigration. The Chile of Allende, one of the main destinations of Brazilian militants and those from various other countries, was to many of those interviewed the first experience in this sense:

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13 Interview with Bruno conducted on July 5, 2007 in Rio de Janeiro.

“Here [in Brazil] I was linked to the POC [Communist Workers Party] (...) The people who were linked to the IV International. The Trotskyites (...) and there [Chile] I looked for these people, right? And they were there. It was really tribal. Those who here were from organization X, if there that organization was not established, functioning, they would look for the Chileans who would correspond, who in the case were the IV Trotskyites. (...) I asked “who here is a Trotskyite?” (...) It was the people from MIR, the Revolutionary Leftist Movement. And there was the Trotskyite wing, within the MIR there was a Trotskyite group. All this was very...later I would see that it reached a religious level, its like a religious order, you are Franciscan, Dominican, you are Chinese, Trotskyite, whatever.”<sup>14</sup>

“Later they had other organizations and political nuclei, organizations who joined together to do common work in exile, But at the same time the political discussion continued, the political debate, the differences continued, right? And in Chile there was a sympathy...each organization was linked in Chile to sister organizations, so the communists were linked to the communists, the AP [Popular Action] with the MAPO of Chile, there was an entire sympathy among those who had political affinity.”<sup>15</sup>

The people interviewed described passages, during which they created social fields that crossed national borders (Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1995). These fields connected Brazilians, but also subjects of different nationalities dispersed through the world, based on a belonging to the “left”: social networks capable of moving ideas, people and objects. Nevertheless, it is important to consider, as Glick-Schiller (2007) proposes, the distinction between the insertion of the actors in the transnational field and feelings of belonging to this field.

This caution is important, because the cultivation of the paradigm or the insertion in the transnational left does not necessarily mean an exclusion of national modes of belonging. As Balibar suggests (2004), it involves social subjects who do not escape from an understanding that they belong to a national political community, which involves cultural and social as well as political aspects. In this way, the very *paradigm*, upon having its symbols signified in the course of the conflicts and processes that unfold in political arenas, which are very often national arenas, constitutes both transnational

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14 Interview with Nelson conducted on March 12, 2010 in São Paulo.

15 Interview with Bruno conducted on July 5, 2007 in Rio de Janeiro.

as well as national perspectives, generating feelings of political belonging related to both dimensions.

Considering these two forms of belonging, exile was mentioned in the narratives of the Brazilian exiles not only in terms of continuity, in keeping with Bourdieu's (2006) idea of the *biographic illusion*, or only as disruption, as suggested by the *ideal type* of refugee to which Malkki (1995) refers. There are two simultaneous and not contradictory forms of reading their trajectories: on one hand, the Brazilians describe their migrations as breaks in their trajectories, when they relate them mainly to two questions: the transformation in the character of a militancy imposed by exile, understood, not only as departure (territorial) from Brazil, but as "defeat" (of the political project) in Brazil; and to the identification of a social and cultural belonging to a Brazilian national community. On the other hand, their migrations are also described as continuities, when related to two other points: a cosmopolitan sentiment of belonging to the social and symbolic field of the left; the perception of living in a situation of *liminality* (Turner 2008) ever since leaving Brazil. These different perceptions are present in the narratives, as are also other categories used to define oneself and the group. These are categories that are signified positively or negatively, accepted or rejected, according to the way that these ruptures and continuities are valued in each conjuncture.

In Brazil, the narrative of the dictatorship sought to exclude its enemies from the national community, stigmatizing them precisely for their connection with the international left, which was seen as an exogenous threat. Once abroad, they became, in relation to the societies of asylum, "exiles", "refugees", "migrants", or "foreigners" - categories that equally symbolize situations of structural instability, of *liminality* (Turner 2005). On the other hand, Said (2003) attributes to exile a dual dimension, as drama and possibility, while Agamben (1996) sees ambiguity with the exile simultaneously placed inside and outside the legal order. This, he claims, leads the exile to "*frequent both the luminous realm of rights as well as the shadowy repertoire of prison sentences, and oscillates between one and the other*" (Agamben 1996: 47). These theoretical perspectives, to the degree to which they point to what is imponderable in the situation created by exile, can be found in certain characteristics of the interviews, notably the diversity of views that each interviewee was capable of presenting. Exile is thus often understood as a polysemic phenomenon. As Diogo affirms:

“Exile... being in exile... generated in people...very different reactions, you know Desirée? For me in particular, I always felt very good in exile, I never...the Brazilians in general...you find many people who were sad, you know? Of course there was a basic sadness that the revolutionary project had failed, but at the same time so many new things, so many horizons...I liked to study very much! I always liked to study! I was always very studious! So that was a time that seemed to me very interesting to have an immense amount of time and to restore a sense of freedom, without fear of being arrested at any time, this was also a relief. In such a way that I would say to you that I adapted very quickly...there in Paris and took from that, I think, all that was good that it could give me.”<sup>16</sup>

The perspective of continuity frequently comes from the notion of “internationalism”, a category that more strongly denoted the transnational belonging that, in contrast to the idea of social isolation that exile caused at the beginning, could offer additional insight for understanding this experience. Marcos, who left Brazil for Bulgaria and from there went to Mozambique, suggested that his militancy, and the projects and references that it inspired, were capable of transforming what could be experienced as something “*melancholic*”:

“I saw it very positively, because to go to a socialist country was an aspiration for me. Given that I had to leave Brazil, the circumstances determined that (...) to know a socialist experience was for me... was part of my project. I was interested, I had let's say illusions, expectations, hopes that were within this framework, this scenario. (...) From a personal perspective yes, it is melancholic, because you are in a country that is not yours. (...) you will always be a stranger, however much they try to make you feel comfortable, someone will always remember that you are not from there(...) It wasn't the Bulgarian state policy, let's say, that the Bulgarian state policy is that of so-called international solidarity, proletarian internationalism, this was the confession of faith of the Bulgarian state and the government policy also pointed in this direction, but in daily life you confronted these situations.”<sup>17</sup>

*Although forced to migrate, Marcos also recognized that it offered positive opportunities, because he considered that to know a socialist country*

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16 Interview with Diogo conducted on July 7, 2009 in Rio de Janeiro

17 Interview with Marcos conducted on February 27, 2010 in Campinas

was part of his “project”. From this perspective, the migration accommodates to the militant trajectory, despite the violence that motivated him to leave and the disruption that the situation of being a foreigner came to represent. Others interviewed, like Jairo (who was in the USSR and Mozambique) and Igor (who left directly for the latter country) attributed to “internationalism” the routes opened to a migration that, in their vision, allowed them to continue their personal and militant trajectories, which had been cut off in Brazil. Their continued militancy allowed them even to reject the category of “exile”:

“I was never someone in exile. I did not have my passport for some time. I was not able to return for a good while, but I never felt like someone in exile, no.”<sup>18</sup>  
“No, no, no! I no way! At no time! It seemed like I was Mozambican! In no way! I lived that [situation] there intensely, always on the political side. At this time I am radical, always for the political side, right (...) I was always very radical. But, I never felt exiled there, because I did not leave here as an exile, but as someone who was not able to work here in their profession and I wanted to work in my profession.”<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting that Igor translates his feeling of integration through claiming, almost, a new nationality. He was not an exile, nor did he feel like a foreigner, “it seemed like I was Mozambican”. Nevertheless, he explained that he could feel this way by “*living the political side intensely*”. Belonging to the transnational field of the left allowed them to maintain their political activities and contacts, even returning to Brazil as “militants”. The case of those who were banished<sup>20</sup> is illuminating as Diogo reports:

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18 Interview with Jairo conducted on July 2, 2009 in Rio de Janeiro. Jairo is the son of a disappeared politician, whose dream was to have a child educated in the USSR. His entire family was arrested one week before he left, but his father was still able to send him to the USSR through connections between the PCB (of which he was a director) and the PCURSS.

19 Interview with Igor conducted on July 15, 2009 in Rio de Janeiro. Despite the affirmation that he did not leave Brazil as an exile but because he was not able to work, Igor, who was a civil aviation pilot, explained that the lack of work was because his name was included in a secret decree that prevented the renewal of his flight license for professionals who were militants in political organizations, in his case the PCB, or who were members of a union until 1964.

20 One of the best known actions of the Brazilian armed struggle took place in 1969, the kidnapping of the U.S. ambassador, who was exchanged for the release of 15 political prisoners who were sent into exile. In the next two years, three other actions of this type were realized, totaling nearly 130 freed prisoners. At the time of the first kidnapping, the dictatorship issued the AI-13, a legal instrument that allowed banishing Brazilian citizens, representing in the most literal manner that which Agamben (2007) would call the *supreme power and exception*. All the prisoners “exchanged” were banned by decree, and were not

“And this [militancy] wound up taking me to prison in early 1970. I left Brazil in an exchange for the German ambassador in 1970, I went to Algiers, from there to Cuba (...), trying to return to Brazil through Chile, which was the Chile of Salvador Allende, and we were surprised by the dismantling of our organization.”<sup>21</sup>

Diogo also did not understand all this moving around as “being in exile”, but only the period after the Chilean coup. The entire route, between his exchange for the ambassador and the coup in Chile, between 1970 and 1973, was summarized in the passage above, where the interviewee attributed centrality to militancy and the armed struggle as an option. His identification as a “militant of the left” is essential for the attribution of a meaning to the path, planned and realized as a function of the political affinities that the exercise of militancy created and according to the networks that permeated the field in which he was inserted. His expectation, in relation to living abroad had a military and political aims, as did the possibilities of making contacts to reorganize his return to Brazil. Being abroad was a route between prison – which had excluded him from the struggle – and the liberty that would reinsert him in the struggle.

Various others interviewed had the same vision, in which departure from Brasil did not represent a break in their political trajectories: they left for encounters with other militants, to conduct military training and many other activities. These objectives were unexpectedly altered during the journey. The support and solidarity, established in the recognition of the common objectives and presumptions, go beyond borders and relativize the limits imposed by nation states. The multiple and mobile networks among militants, which linked people from different cities of Brazil and others, for example, in Santiago, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Algiers or Paris, allowed for continuous flows of material and immaterial goods.

Locating their trajectories in relation to this *field*, the subjects ended up using other criteria, in addition to crossing borders, to define not only the moment in which they began their experience in exile, but also what exactly exile meant to them. It would thus be possible to say that these movements promoted *translocalities* to the degree to which the connections established between cities and locations overlapped the cartographies of the states,

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granted their documents, and were considered non-patriots by Brazil, but not by international law, which did not recognize this category. Among those interviewed, 4 were banished.

21 Interview with Diogo granted to Denise Rollemberg, Rio de Janeiro, November 9, 1996 (Arquivo Edgar Leuenroth, Fundo Militância e luta armada no Brasil).

but also because these militants ended up establishing, in relation to these spatial horizons, “*distinct registers of affiliation*” (APPADURAI 1997: 38). Their narratives about exile are, therefore, also narratives about belonging to cosmopolitan groups and networks.

Nevertheless, these narratives are not only composed of continuities. We take as example Selma’s account of her experience. After discussing her entire itinerary, which took her to Germany as a “refugee” in 1974, she weaves considerations about how she understood her trajectory at that time, indicating that she felt “exiled” for the first time:

“Just in Europe, Just in Europe, when we were still trying to return. I did something crazy! I was in Germany. I got some money there from the organizations, a false document. I returned to Argentina to try to return here. There was no one left here, so I went back there again. And I thought that it was at that time, on my trip back, when I became clandestine [...] from Germany with a false document and here, when I arrived, not here, in Buenos Aires, I learned that “It’s over. Over. No more. Go back!” I think that’s when it registered. But never... I think that the very...after the trip to Mozambique the whole time was very much a ...I did not have an interiorization of exile, I thought that I was preparing myself to return [...] as a preparation, as a process, still as a militant, because I never regretted absolutely anything that I did, right?”<sup>22</sup>

Declaring that she did not “*interiorize the exile*” by behaving as “*still a militant*”, Selma contrasts “exile” and “militancy” as opposing terms. This opposition, which appears to be present in most of the statements, links the term “exile” to a rupture or a transformation in their trajectory as militants. Faced with the conjuncture that began after the coup in Chile and her trip to Europe, Selma began to consider that she had entered a new phase, which required a transformation of political action, marked by a distancing from the immediate perspective, stimulated until that time, of “making revolution”. And this is how she explains her political decision to go to Mozambique:

“We wanted to make the revolution and not in the bars of Paris. That wasn’t our turf, that thing there. In 75, there was the Revolution of the Carnations, right? That fantastic process and that tie to the colonies. Then among the

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22 Interview with Selma realized on May 31, 2010 in Brasília.



group the news began to appear that it was possible. Because at first, we had already seen that the return here was not anything that simple, that the resistance here wasn't like that... that we did not have the ability to be reabsorbed here in the underground. We were being sought. So, there was no way, the return was not a possible route at that time. But we also did not want to stay in Paris, so Mozambique arose lets says as a good alternative, so we continued to believe in socialism, in the revolution, in a lot of things.”<sup>23</sup>

The category “exile”, in this and in other narratives, appears to be used to indicate or refer to situations in which the Brazilians we interviewed experienced feelings of exteriority and alienation. Thus, referring both to time periods and to social spaces, “exile” signifies either a social situation where revolutionary militancy would not be possible (“*it wasn't in the bars of Paris*”), or a time of revisions and adaptations among the communities of exiles of what was understood by militancy (“*I don't regret absolutely anything that I did*”). The understanding that there is a break at a moment of their trajectories is not, therefore, necessarily identified with the departure from Brazilian territory.

We can thus see that for some being in exile involved accepting an adaptation of political action and of their own conduct, since it became impossible to act politically in Brazil. Later, when they settled in Western European countries, they had to become legalized as “refugees”. To request asylum and accept oneself as a refugee involved recognizing that the immediate option to return was no longer in sight. They also had to modify their militancy in order to be able to remain in the new countries. As a result, the “political struggle” became the denunciation of the dictatorship, participating in campaigns for political prisoners, for human rights, and later, for amnesty. Whether or not they admitted “defeat”, convinced of and stimulated by new opportunities for militancy, all those interviewed were critical of these changes, hoping to maintain their political activism. This is what they sought to achieve in Mozambique.

### **Argentine Exiles: submerging in Brazil**

The most often cited Argentine exile communities during the 1970s are those that took shape in countries like Spain, France, Mexico, Venezuela, Sweden

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23 Interview with Selma conducted on May 31, 2010 in Brasília.

and Italy. The transnational networks constituted among these exiles and the human rights movement in the Argentine were recognized for the essential role that they played in coordinating international denunciations of the violations committed by the military dictatorship. In contrast, there are few references to Argentines who fled to Brazil. Their presence in Brazil was marked, in general, by invisibility and ambiguity: they never became defined as a collectivity of exiles, refugees or migrants.

The strongest memory that former exiles from Argentina have of the 1970s, was the degree of political repression and disappearance of family members, friends, work companions and fellow militants. The politics of repression of the *National Reorganization Process*, as the dictatorial government was called by the military coup leaders, was aimed at annihilating political militancy and dissident thinking in the country.<sup>24</sup> The narratives of these Argentines include memories of a period in which the possibility of becoming victims of repression and the sense of terror from the massive disappearances were part of their daily lives. This threat was aggravated by the fact that the repression was aimed not only at those who were part of armed organizations or who were active in political parties or trades unions, but also at sympathizers, friends, colleagues and family members of those identified as “*enemies of the nation/delinquent subversives*”.

“Tucumán was really terrible. At that time, I had a brother-in-law who disappeared. [...] We had no kind of peace. You did not know if you would stay alive. [...] The college was highly politicized. [...] My brother-in-law disappeared at this time. My sister had two small children, one who was two years old and the other who was eight months. So it was a dramatic situation in my family. He never appeared again. Never! We looked everywhere [...] Tucumán was a large center. The guerrilla movement was strong and the repression was very strong. Tucumán, Córdoba, were very strong places. [...] When I left the airport, my husband had a beard. At that time many people had

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24 The Argentine dictatorship has been explained in different analyses by the terms *State Terrorism* (Duhalde 1999), the forced disappearance as a political systematic and understood as a *practice of social genocide* (Feierstein 2007), to the degree that the existence of hundreds of clandestine detention camps is analyzed as a *concentrating power* (Calveiro 2005 e 2008), which acted as a key element of political repression, serving as a metaphor for the operational mechanism applied to society as a whole. These analyses, which sought to emphasize the political nature of the dictatorial repression and of the extermination policy perpetrated, are triggered through *Memory* in the militancy of the members of the organizations of family members of the political disappeared and survivors of the clandestine centers.

beards. And for this he was considered suspect. [...] For example, my parents hid all the works of Freud. They hid everything because the military entered their home. Freud was subversive. It was terrible and you did not know what would happen.”<sup>25</sup>

The experience of political violence was therefore strongly associated to the way they were identified by the agents of repression in Argentina. According to their statements, the political identity that they embodied linked them to political dissidence, transforming them into a target of physical or symbolic reprisals, or extermination. Their identities were thus constructed with reference to a universe of values associated to the “left”, to libertarian and socialist movements.

“I studied psychology and worked in a company and did...did other things, but not militancy. I was not involved in militancy at the time when I came to São Paulo. But I had been. Everyone around me were ex-militants or militants.”<sup>26</sup>

Amongst the exiles, those who had actively militated against the dictatorship were distinguished from those who only expressed affinity for the ideas of the *left*. In addition, other distinctions are made on the basis of militant activities, such as having participated or not in armed organizations. These cleavages reveal a set of values associated to those experiences understood as belonging to the *social field of the left* and to the universe of *Seventies* militancy. The importance of politics and of the memory of how *politics* was experienced show how this experience was the basis for defining individual and group identities whether in Argentina itself or in exile.

“You do not need to have any type of conscious political position. But if you said “ah, this is unjust in the face of the established system,” you were considered subversive, even if you were not. In your mind, that was something unfair and that’s all. But there was one, I do not remember who, if he was a minister or what, he said: “We have three categories: the sympathizers of the dictatorship, the indifferent and the subversives. The indifferent must choose, they cannot remain indifferent. Either you are subversive or support the government.” You cannot remain indifferent. Simply, the fact that you were in some way politicized. Think of the 1960s, the 1970s. It was impossible to be

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25 Interview with María, psychoanalyst, resident in São Paulo since 1976, conducted on March 17, 2005.

26 Interview with Tatiana, psychoanalyst, resident in São Paulo since 1978, conducted on April 13, 2005.

absolutely innocent. Then you spoke about the world [...] Made some criticism, whether it was substantiated or not.”<sup>27</sup>

According to the reports of the protagonists of this history, the phenomenon of individualization of the experience of Argentine exiles in Brazil is explained by concerns about the geographical proximity of the Argentine dictatorship and the presence of its agents in Brazilian territory. This concern with the danger of establishing ties with other Argentines, and in avoiding the organization of a collectivity of exiles in Brazil or in maintaining any form of political activity, so present in the memories about the first years in the migratory process, was not unsubstantiated. At that time, rumors had been circulating about the existence of *Operation Condor*. Moreover, a dictatorship was in full force in Brazil.

Therefore, this issue presents a paradox: for what reason did Latin Americans “of the left” seek Brazil as a place of refuge if that country also had a military dictatorship that persecuted political opponents? Upon recalling that they left behind family members and friends who were assassinated and or disappeared and a brutal regime of repression, these Argentines contrasted the representations that they constructed about the Brazilian dictatorship (understood as a less radical regime) to the memories of the political violence experienced in their country of origin.<sup>28</sup>

“In some way, I was revived, reborn with the move to Brazil. I saw a troubled Brazil, with political problems and a military regime. At the end of the military regime, but still a military regime, absolutely. But when I arrived here I was surprised by the freedom of speech, by the freedom of all kinds, it appeared to me. It made me afraid because I left an Argentina that was scary. You did not trust anyone to say anything that was not absolutely conventional. Not even in the family! I arrived here and was afraid to see what could be thought, said, read, found in bookstores. The national news seemed to me something subversive because of the things I saw there. To give you an idea of how it was!”<sup>29</sup>

27 Interview with Mariana, translator, resident of São Paulo since 1976, conducted on March 17, 2005.

28 It is important to remember that the Argentines left a country at the peak of the repression and arrived to Brazil that had begun a “slow, gradual and safe” opening process. In 1975, São Paulo had the first public demonstration against the military regime since 1968: an ecumenical service in memory of Vladimir Herzog, a journalist killed after being tortured by the Army, which gathered 8,000 people at the Cathedral da Sé. Gradually, after 1977, student and union movements held large demonstrations, but still confronted considerable brutality and resistance from the regime.

29 Interview with David, physicist, resident in Campinas since 1981, conducted on June 6, 2003.

In addition to the fear of Argentine repression, our interlocutors also mentioned economic issues. This makes it difficult to describe the flux of Argentines to Brazil as a strictly political migration, as Schwarzstein (2001a) has pointed out. While violence characterized the period, it also gave rise to economic problems, particularly when the repression directly affected professional activity.

“Then they would get someone who had your phone in their book, pronto! That was enough for you to enter the list of those sought, disappeared or whatever! It was very...Nevertheless life went on normally, and later I asked what we did to continue living. We would meet in the morning and say: ‘My God! There were five, six, seven. No! There were only four. I heard three bombs!’ Then, the next morning: ‘Who died, who didn’t die. Who disappeared, who didn’t disappear.’ Among friends, we made a chain of identification. We called each other to know if everything was ok. If someone did not call, we signaled an alert. It was very, very hard. But, however, we continued to live normally, made believe, ate, cooked. Work, right, because everyone was already out of college. Everyone was desperately looking for something to do. No one was rich, of course!”<sup>30</sup>

Given that Brazil was an alternative destination to the more traditional routes of Argentine emigration of the time, the growth of the migratory flow of Argentines to Brazil during the 1970s, can therefore only be understood by taking into account the conditions of violence and professional exclusion experienced in Argentina, and at the same time, by the professional opportunities that Brazil offered. In addition, Brazil’s proximity made it an economically more accessible option for migration, especially for those with less money or who were married with children.

The arrival of Argentines to Brazil at this time is also due in part to a relative easing in the issuing of visas to Brazil. In fact, after 1976, the peak of the Argentine diaspora, many of those who sought to leave the country legally found much greater restrictions in Europe and other Latin America countries. Nevertheless, visas were only more easily obtained in Brazil by those who had professional qualifications and who were able to secure a formal work contract, and not by those who left Argentina clandestinely and without documents.

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30 Interview with Paula, translator, resident in São Paulo since 1978, conducted on March 10, 2005.

The Brazilian state never recognized the refugee status of these Latin Americans, given that the migratory legislation of the time only granted the right to asylum to individuals of European origin.<sup>31</sup> Brazil's legislation on migration at that time treated migrants as potential enemies. For this reason, various humanitarian entities (even some religious agencies) became important agents in receiving, sheltering and providing assistance to Latin American exiles in Brazil. It is worth emphasizing that during the 1980s, Caritas, for example, worked intensely in the struggle for recognition of political refugees from neighboring countries, and even sought to protect those who did not obtain official recognition from UNHCR, which was frequently the case.

For this reason, even though they left the country of origin because of political violence, many of these Argentines remained in Brazil as undocumented tourists (until they could legalize their situation through amnesty programs, for example) or received the status of immigrants, by obtaining a work contract, marrying or having a Brazilian child. Others had their stay in the country conditioned on the presence of UNHCR, *which since 1977 had an office in Rio de Janeiro, which made efforts to resettle these refugees in other countries. Brazil therefore acted as a place of transit for many Latin American exiles.*

In this scenario, and according to the memories of our interlocutors, remaining in Brazil was more attractive than being repatriated by the United Nations to a more distant destination. Although Europe offered better material conditions than Brazil, to be resettled in a country like Sweden symbolized an even deeper disruption. For this reason, many Argentines (who may or may not have had an opportunity for resettlement through the UNHCR) decided to stay in Brazil, even if often without documents. To stay in Brazil meant to remain close to Argentina, to maintain some degree of connection with their political and social context of origin, but above all, it meant remaining within Latin America. This final question involved a political positioning. Nevertheless, unlike exiles who passed through countries where they could reconstitute their militancy, through insertion in the *transnational field*

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31 At first, a refugee was defined as an individual of European origin who was persecuted because of events that took place before January 1951. This definition was linked to an immediate concern for Europeans who were expelled from their countries during or at the end of World War II. To revert this Eurocentric clause, in 1967, in a new Convention, the geographic and temporal restrictions were removed. Even if Brazil had adhered to a new document, it chose to maintain the "geographic reserve," refusing asylum to Latin Americans.

of the left, these Argentines felt they would have to abandon their political militancy in order to stay in dictatorial Brazil; they needed to *submerge*.

“The story is that they did not leave us to stay. That is, Brazil was a country of transit. To be able to stay, either don’t go through UNHCR, since it was very dangerous to cross the border. Or go through UNHCR. But it took so much time [...] what happened is that some people submerged, that’s what we used to say. Families came from Argentina with children who would go to a small city and would stay and live there. That is, they protected their security and that of their family, but submerged. There were some Argentines in Belem [...] And there wasn’t democracy in Brazil either. And we were as persecuted as we were in Argentina, except that in Brazil they did not know us. We dressed like Brazilians, walked like them, we got tans to not be so white if you were blonde [...] It was a clandestine existence. [...] Because even many political refugees were denied entrance. This was not my case because I had been in jail, because I had been disappeared. But you arrived and were already fleeing. The first UNHCR was in Rio de Janeiro. [...] With Armenia Nercessian it was a terrible struggle, with public charges and everything. Because a person arrived to seek refugee status and the woman wanted to say things that were not relevant. [...] After all these run arounds, circles, this woman said they didn’t recognize us as refugees. This meant that these colleagues automatically had to leave Brazil. But they didn’t go. They went underground [...] The thing was to take them off the radar, put them in a quiet place, in a peaceful village where they could conduct their life without anyone asking.”<sup>32</sup>

In the memories of these Argentines, the distinction between those identified as refugees or exiles and those identified as immigrants emerged as a question. With political activity being a central element for the construction of the category of exile, those who were not active militants in Argentina – even if they were just as threatened and excluded from the country of origin

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32 Statement of María Socorro Alonso, militant of Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos por Razones Políticas [Families of the Detained and Disappeared for Political Reasons]. A survivor of a clandestine detention camp, Maria lived in Rio de Janeiro in 1982 waiting for her definitive resettlement in Canada, by means of a measure of the UNHCR. The interview was conducted in Sept. 24, 2009, in Buenos Aires. It should be emphasized that Maria was not part of the group of people interviewed to which the ethnography mentioned here refers, since she went on to Canada and later returned to Argentina (her statement was taken as part of another research project). Nevertheless, her statement was considered to be pertinent to the reflections made in this article.

by their framing in the negative identity of “*subversive enemy*” – were not defined as exiles. As Jensen (2005) has rightly argued, they did not have the right to consider themselves exiles because they did not have a recognized name, a tragic history or a heroic militancy.

“Many people left here because, as I already told you, it was these people that were...They did not have asylum. They were hiding! The asylum papers were handled here and who did the negotiating was not Brazil. It was Holland, Sweden and everyone went there with the UN asylum documents. But not us. We had a passport, everything. We are emigrants and not exiles. We created roots. When I got here, everyone, but everyone [...] because everyone was together, Chileans and Uruguayans, right. Everyone. They hadn’t moved here. They didn’t move. They were passing through to return as soon as they could. Later they left as exiles, with a UN passport, these things.”<sup>33</sup>

The idea of transitoriness attributed to the figure of the exile is another element of distinction between those considered as exiles and others as immigrants. Paula, for example, never considered herself an exile, because in addition to the fact that she was not a political activist in Argentina, she never accepted a transitory condition in Brazil. Unlike the Brazilians, who, as we have seen, associated more prolonged settlement in a foreign country to the idea of “feeling like exiles for the first time”, for Paula, “creating roots”, and settling definitively in Brazil marked her difference in relation to those who were found in the condition of exiles. In contrast, Tatiana, who left Argentina after the disappearance of her son and ex-husband, for many years considered herself to be a refugee, even if she never received legal recognition as such. Her residency in Brazil was legalized under common immigrant status, and she pointed to the condition of transitoriness to which she was submitted.

“For me (Brazil) was a place of refuge at that time. It was not the place where I wanted to be at first. It took a while until I wanted to be in Brazil. I think it was long after the Alfonsín government, when I decided to stay in Brazil. It was a situation in which I had no option. When I returned, I think that I had this thing that I wanted to choose. But in fact it took a long time for me to be more relaxed about the fact that this was my place, that I had made roots here. But

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33 Interview with Paula, translator, resident in São Paulo since 1978, conducted on March 10, 2005.



each time that I returned to Argentina it touched me. It seemed that I should be there, but I was here.”<sup>34</sup>

Referring to the representations constructed about the experience in exile, the actors of the diaspora recall how the “option” to leave Argentina was stigmatized by many of the militants. The burden of “choice” for exile often implied having to live with the stigma of being seen as a *traitor*, *individualist* or even a *deserter*, an interpretation that was common both in the imaginary of the agents of the repression and in an important sector of the political opposition. In a context in which the political dispute became central, exile often meant assuming “defeat”.

“So it was like a moment when I had to choose the path to take, I don’t know if in the armed struggle, but in the political struggle. Or continue on the side of my personal search. And this is what I did because fundamentally, despite the fact that ideologically I agreed with the struggle, with the ideological postulates, those of existence lets say, I was never in favor of violence. So this was something very difficult for me to face. To pick up a gun, to point it at someone? Regardless of the ideology that you thought right, the ideology of the libertarians, of the socialists, but...of course I was against the dictatorship, against the difficult things that were happening. I choose to leave Argentina.”<sup>35</sup>

It is worth noting that during the years of the fiercest repression in Argentina, political discourse largely linked the honor of its “combatants” to the fact of gloriously remaining until the end of the struggle, even if the end meant death. The interviews reveal ambivalent sentiments: of relief for having escaped death; and guilt for having left ideals, friends and families behind (many of whom became victims of repression). These are still found in the painful memories generated by separations, and by the abandonment of militancy and exclusion from political life.

“When I returned to Argentina, at that time of stronger repression, I felt considerable hostility from people with whom I had gone out and had good relations., With family, with people with whom I spoke in the street, I always spoke with everyone, I love to talk. A hidden hostility, not open, for someone who had left the country. Because it was as if we had abandoned them in the

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34 Interview with Tatiana, psychoanalyst, resident in São Paulo since 1978, conducted on April 13, 2005.

35 Interview with Gabriela, psychoanalyst, resident in São Paulo since 1978, conducted on April 7, 2005.

middle of the problem. Like: “take care of yourselves, I am going to find my own way,” a bit selfish, a sensation that we were a bit selfish. And it was not very pleasant because there was the same guilt that everyone had. And its very powerful to have thought that we should have stayed. Should have stayed to die together with the dead? But I couldn’t help feeling bad. And this hostility even revealed itself because they didn’t want to know anything about Brazil. I began to talk about my experience here and people changed the subject and spoke of Argentina, about Argentina, Argentina.”<sup>36</sup>

“I was 23 and felt like an old man [...] And, above all, the guilt of remaining alive while the news of death never ceased, the guilt of having been saved. Elvio explained that he was right, that death was inevitable, to stay wouldn’t have helped a thing and he believed that, but even so he felt like the worst piece of garbage in history. In the streets of São Paulo it was very hot and noisy.”<sup>37</sup>

During the dictatorship, the most conventional channels of political participation were prohibited, but militant activity continued through clandestine channels or through other political commitments. Exile therefore represented the definitive exclusion from the possibility for political participation in the country. Therefore, together with the stigma and ambivalent feelings, exile came to be represented as an abandonment of the political cause and of the companions in militancy. Sayad (1998) emphasized how emigration itself presumed the exclusion from politics to the degree to which the movement of departure of the individual from the country coincided with his departure from the political order in which he participated<sup>38</sup>.

However, Argentine exiles in countries such as Spain, France and Mexico (and as we see, Brazilian exiles in Mozambique also), could, in some way, reconstruct themselves as political actors, continuing with their militancy through participating in the *transnational field of the left* and as representatives of the *resistance* or of the anti-dictatorial struggle abroad. In this way they were able to re-signify their identities and militancy, invoking, for example,

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36 Interview with Gabriela, psychoanalyst, resident in São Paulo since 1978, conducted on April 7, 2005.

37 (Anguita and Caparrós 1998: 187).

38 As Feldman-Bianco (2011) and Glick-Schiller et al (1992) express well, it is worth remembering that with the intensification of the flow of people, signs and capitals in the context of contemporary globalization, migrants have been increasingly incorporated to their nation-states of origin as economic and political actors. This takes place through a growing process of mobilization of the transmigrant communities, conjugated to the formulation of public policies by the nation-states of origin, in the sense of expanding the rights of citizenship of the deterritorialized populations (which include, for example, the right to political participation).

the concept of human rights and partially transforming it into part of the vocabulary of the movement of resistance to the Latin American dictatorships.

In contrast, exile in Brazil was characterized by the proximity with the dictatorial regime from which the Argentines sought to escape, by the talons of the *Operation Condor*, but also by the fact that the country they had come to was also under a dictatorship, which obviously did not offer any support to Latin American refugees. As a consequence, although they recognized themselves as part of the social group that was the target of dictatorial repression, the Argentines who went to Brazil did not define themselves as exiles precisely due to the representations constructed about exile within the *transnational field of the left*: they were not carriers of a recognized history of political militancy; their departure from their country of origin marked a break in their trajectories of political militancy; and they decided to settle definitively in the country of destination.

This process revealed how the experience of Argentine exiles in Brazil was constituted not only in relation to a specific migratory and national context (dictatorial Argentina and Brazil), but also amid the transnational social fields (the universe of the values of *seventies* militancy; the transnational field of the left). They thus became refugees, even if they were not officially recognized as such. They did not see themselves as exiles, even if they had been politically persecuted in their country of origin. And, finally, they thought it better to *submerge*, and become “clandestine” in Brazil than to become refugees resettled in a distant Europe.

“In this situation I was able to leave Argentine and I came to Brazil with a child. I left because it was not possible to be there. From here there were options to go to Europe. But there I decided to go to Brazil because it was closer to Argentina, to my place and my family and because it was Brazil. I felt more within America. I did not classify myself as a refugee. I was clandestine. Because as a refugee here in Brazil I would not be received. So I could not be considered a refugee by the United Nations. There they send you to Sweden, Norway. Since I did not want that, I decided to leave on my own. I left, but I had no documentation. Years later, in one of these amnesties I entered afterwards... I took various procedures until I finally obtained the RNE. The National Foreigners Registration.”<sup>39</sup>

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39 Interview with Estela, owner of a restaurant that served traditional Argentine food, living in São Paulo since 1979, conducted on April 15, 2005.

To sum up, the Argentines arrived in Brazil to escape torture and forced disappearance (their own or of family members, friends and fellow militants), marked by the official or veiled expulsions, by the danger in crossing borders and by the professional retaliations. Through legal or touristic departures (conducted with their own passport or with false documents), they reached Brazilian lands in apparently conventional journeys. They thus needed to *submerge*, to isolate themselves from politics, making invisible the diacritical signs that had made them into targets of repression. They thus reconstructed their identities and their professional trajectories and in this way saved their lives.

### **The politics of exile and the exiles from politics**

In general terms, *exile* defines the condition of a subject separated from his or her country of origin due to an adverse situation in which he or she is expelled, runs the risk of or actually suffers persecution. When invoked, the term aims to denote a profile in relation to the more general forms of migration due to its forced, non-voluntary or unwanted nature. The emergence of violence as a distinctive element of this migration appears to favor analyses that linked the forced crossing of national borders to a necessary and irrefutable cultural and identity break in the individual and collective trajectory of the migrants (Rollemberg 1999, Said 2003). In this paper, we argued that the emphasis on this perspective, in addition to leading to the homogenization and universalization of experiences and above all of the feelings of the migrant actors, also leads to an excessively territorialized and nationalized concept of that which they considered to be their culture (Malkki 1995).

The routes taken by the individual and collective memories presented here reveal that *exile*, like other categories mobilized to define social relations or processes, has little meaning when separated from the context in which it is invoked. In both case studies, it was clear that although the Brazilians and Argentines share trajectories of opposition to dictatorships and migratory experiences, as well as a belonging to the same social networks, the way they thought about their lives was radically different. Nevertheless, even if they had their views of the world and politics (of the present and past) transformed by time, their memories reveal certain shared premises, which did not exactly point to identities in the present but to *common readings of the past*

in which the personal trajectory of forced migration and the collective experience of the communities of the exiles stood out in their narratives.

If, on one hand, we have pointed to a more instrumental dimension of memories – recognizing them as an object in dispute and as a constituent part of the conflicts engaged in by different social groups to attribute meanings to the past and to the collective identity,<sup>40</sup> on the other hand, we judge it essential to also consider their symbolic dimension, given that the choice of what is to be narrated and remembered can be revealing of how individuals and groups conceive their own experience of the world. As Pollak (1992) argues, when they talk of the past, people evoke not only events, but also part of the universe of values and of social relations in which the events and personalities of the narrative are inserted, as well as some of the categories, premises and interpretations that are socially constructed and shared in the past.

The memories of the migrant actors reveal to us more than events open to free interpretation and more than collectively relevant themes and categories in the act of confronting the past. They reveal what we chose to call *common premises*, principles that the subjects invoke to give meaning to their trajectory, establishing its coherence and value. Some of these premises involve, even if in a distinct manner, the representations of the Argentine and Brazilian exiles, which allow us to both approximate the processes of political exile that they underwent in Argentina and Brazil, as well as reflect on how different political contexts in the countries of destination involve diverse forms of experiencing exile.

The decision of the Argentines to take exile in Brazil was marked by the Argentine and Brazilian dictatorial repression and thus, by the silencing of their political identities in the migratory context. Even if the choice for Brazil was based on the possibility of living under a dictatorship seen as less oppressive, nevertheless, these Argentines never came to feel completely free. As reported by one of those interviewed, “*in Brazil, we were as persecuted as in Argentina, but in Brazil they did not know us*”. Thus, the calendar of horror continued to be that of the Argentine dictatorship, aggravated by life in the Brazilian dictatorial context. One needs simply to recall the cases of

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40 It is worth emphasizing that it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that interest grew in the development of analyses concerned with investigating the social construction of the past. For a review of the main theoretical lines and approaches found in studies about social memory see Olick and Robbins (1998).

Argentines kidnapped in Brazil (in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and at the border of the Foz do Iguaçu), in the context of Operation Condor, through the 1980s.

For the Argentines who definitively established themselves in São Paulo state, the category *exile* was not much used. Although they recognized themselves as part of the social group that was the target of repression, the condition of exile was attributed only to those who could publically request it as exiles in the migratory context, which gave continuity to the trajectory of militancy, to the carriers of recognized political and party militancy in Argentina or those who were found in a situation in transit in Brazil. If, in this case, the figure of the exile coincided with the political activist, they did not understand their migratory experiences as exile they had been excluded and excluded themselves from *politics*. Because they abandoned active political militancy to “lose themselves” and “submerge” in the context of a dictatorial Brazil, they did not recognize themselves as exiles; but first formed a contingent that, we might call exiles from politics. It is in this sense that the decision for political exile in Brazil was also a political decision, expressed as a break in their trajectories as militants.

The Brazilians who decided to move to the capital of Mozambique, experienced, as did the Argentines who went to Brazil, a moment of rupture in their militant trajectories provoked by the sense of defeat in the field of political struggle. Nevertheless, the anguish and suffering experienced collectively by that “generation” of Brazilians would be counter balanced by the opportunity to “*make revolution*”. This political decision, the fruit of belonging to the *transnational field of the left*, guaranteed new meanings to their trajectories of migration by including them in their life project and political militancy.

In Mozambique, their histories of political persecution in Brazil and of exile could be freely told, and to the degree to which they were heard with admiration, acquired political capital, approximating themselves to the heroes of Mozambican independence. In the country in construction, of “*unlimited*” possibilities as one person interviewed affirmed, they could dedicate themselves with militant fervor, live the socialist utopia that, despite missteps and deceptions during the process, guided them and gave coherence to their lives. In this process, they were exiled, but, above all, they were internationalist leftist militants.

We have shown how our interlocutors did not define exile in terms of the simple crossing of national borders. The case studies presented here show,

for example, how the moments of rupture in individual trajectories are found to be more associated to the political sense of the action of the subjects than to the migratory movement itself, continuing political activism in the case of the Brazilians in Mozambique or giving up militancy to “submerge” in daily life in the case of the Argentines in Brazil. In both cases, in one form or another, their political experience is central: territorial exclusion was associated to the idea of “defeat”, a perception that is directly tied to the field of political dispute and to the universe of values from which they construct their identities (the *left*, the universe of *seventies* militancy). That is, if these Argentine and Brazilian migrants could or could not recognize themselves or be recognized as exiles, this was determined as a function of shared (and disputed) representations in the *field of the transnational left* about what constituted exile or who were exiles: those who gave continuity to the trajectory of political militancy – whether through political participation in other national spaces (the Mozambican revolution) or as activists of campaigns of international denunciations and in defense of human rights – in addition to making political identity a form of public distinction.

It is in this sense that exile is forged transnationally as a category, revealing how the multiple meanings attributed to the experience of exile were constituted not only in relation to specific national and migratory contexts – the Brazilian and Argentine dictatorships, on one hand, the Brazilian dictatorships and the Mozambican socialist revolution on the other – but also amid the transnational social fields (*the transnational field of the left*).

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