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Manifiesto

Colectivo Historias Desobedientes (author)

Philippa Page (translator)

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Manifiesto

Colectivo Historias Desobedientes¹

In May 2017, following the Supreme Court ruling known as the “2-for-1,”² many of us started to look for a way to raise our voice. We understood that the incumbent government was actively regressing in matters concerning human rights. Thanks to articles that were published in the press, we each realised that we were not the only ones with these worries and we began meeting one another. This is how *Historias desobedientes: familiares de genocidas por la memoria, la verdad y la justicia*, or “Disobedient (her/hi)stories: family members of the perpetrators of genocide for memory, truth and justice”, was born.³

As we got to know one another, started telling each other our stories, about our occupations, professions, activism, and artistic activities, we discovered that the majority of us were keen to express ourselves in words (written or spoken), or indeed already doing so, as a means both of personal quest and a tool to build communities of action, defying the silence that they⁴ had tried to impose upon us since we were children.

Like the greater part of Argentine society, we know that our family members, who are responsible for crimes against humanity, have never regretted what they did; they have never spoken about it and we are certain that they hold information that could bring justice. The criminal silence that they maintain is evidence of their lack of remorse, of their inability to take responsibility for the damage that they inflicted on our entire society and, ultimately, of their lack of love.

We had much to share, and wrote with differing degrees of exposure. To begin with, this happened among ourselves. But, over time, we considered that it was time to speak out in public and show some of these accounts, because we believe that, beyond any personal meaning or feeling, they can open up spaces to find other people who consider themselves to be disobedient or would like to become so.

Some of us had already published books or were writing on social media. Others had scattered writings, stories, novels saved on personal computers. We decided to organise this volume on the basis of these texts—fragments of intimate stories that, at the same time, create a group

¹ Colectivo Historias Desobedientes, “*Manifiesto*.” In *Escritos desobedientes. Historias de hijas, hijos y familiares de genocidas por la memoria, la verdad y la justicia*, edited by Colectivo Historias Desobedientes, 9-14. Buenos Aires: Editorial Marea. Permissions for this published translation granted by the authors.

² The so-called “2-for-1” law (officially inscribed as 24,390) was not a new law, but its activation in certain circumstances enabled the potential reduction of sentence and early release of prisoners convicted of crimes against humanity. The precedent was set in the case of convicted perpetrator Luis Muiña in 2017, against which there was a massive public outcry and demonstration of opposition that eventually led to this use of the law being dismissed.

³ The original version includes a footnote here that explains the collective decision to use the gender-neutral form in the manifesto. Instead of the feminine “nosotras,” or the masculine “nosotros,” for example, the increasingly popular albeit relatively novel non-binary formulation “nosotres” is used. The term ‘historia’ offers the dual meaning of ‘story’ and ‘history’ in English. Given the specific intention to write this manifesto in gender-neutral language, the term ‘history’ in English also needs addressing. Although a little cumbersome, the translation ‘(her/hi)stories’ is the only way of capturing each of these folds of meaning.

⁴ “They” refers here to the perpetrating family members. It might also allude to those surrounding them, who contributed to the cultivation of a mandate of silence.

narrative. This volume is conceived as an (incomplete) record of our experiences, thoughts and feelings, and as an invitation for many more disobedient stories to come forth to challenge, with the power of words, the mandates of silence and submission, the social taboos, the shackles of a culture of patriarchy and genocide that we know so well from the very nucleus of our family story.

The voice denied by the mandate of silence tends always to find its way through. Writing, at least in our case, has been the most direct form of expression. The anguish, the guilt, the shame and other feelings that we share emerge through the written word, marked by particular and personal inflections.

This volume compiles these writings, some that pre-date the formation of *Historias Desobedientes*, others arising in the heat of the encounter. All those endowed with this voice, one that was previously repressed and that now affirms our position of rejection and condemnation of the acts carried out by our own fathers or family members during the last military, civic and ecclesiastic dictatorship that took place in Argentina between 1976 and 1983, as well as in the years prior to this during which the institutionalised repression perpetrated by the Triple A (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance) operated clandestinely and in the most atrocious manner.

We have decided to also include the writings that were published in different media, on Facebook or on our website during the collective's first year of existence. These pieces began recounting who we were, what we did, how we thought of ourselves, and expressing those thoughts and reflections that had emerged during our meetings. They expressed our condemnation of the regressive human rights policies chosen and enacted under Mauricio Macri's incumbent government.⁵ We also expressed our firm opposition to the repression, the forced disappearances, the censorship, the austerity and the subjugation to external debt that diminishes our political sovereignty in times of "change"⁶ that have brought economic dependence.

We know that there are many more of us. We know that, in the face of attempts to reinstitute impunity, repression as common practice, hunger and "programmed poverty," as Rodolfo Walsh wrote in his open letter in 1977, there need to be many more of us who decide to break from the silencing.

We follow the example of human rights organisations, the Mothers, Grandmothers, the children, the survivors, and the family members. The love and resolve in their search for memory, truth and justice have been our beacon amid so much darkness. This is why we understood that we had to be together, to organise ourselves collectively and participate in an active and committed way. The present moment urges us to overcome the shame and to transcend individuality to become a voice that can say what has hereunto been unspoken in this country: the daughters, sons and family members of the perpetrators of genocide condemn their crimes, their repressive practices, their pacts of silence and impunity. We will not reconcile. We will not forgive. We will not remain silent.

⁵ Mauricio Macri's presidency ran from 2015-2019. He was succeeded by opposition candidate Alberto Fernández (2019-).

⁶ A reference to the name of Macri's coalition "Cambiemos," or "Let's Change".

We decided to make our writings public, without ties or conditions, convinced that they can contribute to the collective memory and the construction of a country that is more just and solidary. We consider precisely that it is a work of joint responsibility, not only from our everyday habits through personal and familial disobedience, which existed before *Historias Desobedientes* was formed, but also via a collective expression that writing makes possible. Indeed, we believe that our narratives can help to figure out and reveal what, for so many others, is still hidden. “Silence never again,” is our collective cry.

Now that we gather and together demonstrate our repudiation, we want to become more numerous, awaken other quieted voices that are subdued as previously our voices were. We know that many still refuse to acknowledge the horrors committed and, for varying reasons, have not been able to free themselves. We are very clear about the fact that the mandate of silence, the disciplining of bodies and identities, the systematic plan of repression, disappearance, murder and the theft of babies was a state-perpetrated genocide that sought to break communal ties and to revert achievements in social struggles and rights. We do not succumb to individualism, a practice that the perpetrators of genocide and their civil, judicial, business and ecclesiastic accomplices sought to impose, and the consequences of which are still very present in our society today.

We are a collective composed of people with life stories that are both similar and different, united in pain and our critical position in relation to our progenitors or family members, united by words, action and the desire to transform ourselves and to transform the society so that never again will the state be responsible for crimes against humanity. The dictatorship will not happen again, at least not in the same form, though we are not naïve. We are watchful of the present because we know that the repressive networks and institutional plots can produce new variants of the horror, as has taken place in recent years with the repression of the Mapuche communities, the forced disappearance of Santiago Maldonado, the murder of Rafael Nahuel, the daily femicides and incidence of gender-based violence, the brutal repression of popular demonstrations against the social security reforms last December, of teachers and women following the 8M women’s march, repeated instances of trigger-happy policing, the disgrace of political prisoners, the infamous imprisonment of Milagro Sala, the International Monetary Fund’s austerity plan, the hunger and poverty that especially afflict our children and old people, the suppression of workers’ rights, among so many other forms of violence, repression and impunity that reappear in a real and insistent way.

This is why we want to:

speak out to defend what is right/just,
condemn so as not to be complicit,
disobey in order to break mandates.

Translated by Philippa Page.