

e Cinema, 140.
with Meerapfel held on 12

188.

Argentine Cinema, 1983–1993:
Genesis: Woodbridge, 2009.
Tambaro: Teatro 3, 195–217.

en la narrativa de la catás-
trófica Latina y el Caribe 12,

latinoamericano." *Calle14* 4,

(1997): 311–328.
le resistencia en la posdicta-

Women Film-Makers in Con-
tries: In Honour of Edward C.
182. Edinburgh: Department

Limits of History and Ethics.

mond Rosenthal. Repr. New

in, Córdoba: Ediciones Clási-

que argentinos." *Hispanérica*

ans. Donald Levine. Chicago:

CHAPTER 6

Revisiting the AMIA Bombing in Marcos Carnevale's *Anita*

MIRNA VOHNSEN

On 18 July 1994, at 9:53 a.m., the headquarters of the most important Jewish community center in Argentina, the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), located at 633 Pasteur Street in the historic Jewish neighborhood of Once, Buenos Aires, was the target of the deadliest bombing that has ever occurred on Argentine soil.¹ Eighty-five people were killed and three hundred were injured. Although twenty-four years have passed since the attack, no one has been convicted and the case remains unsolved.

This unhealed wound in Argentine history has spawned numerous cultural expressions, among which is the Argentine feature film *Anita* (dir. Marcos Carnevale, 2009). The film revisits the AMIA bombing from the viewpoint of one of the victims, a childlike protagonist who in the aftermath of the bombing is left to wander the streets of Buenos Aires. With a nonprofessional actress in the lead, the film is a telling commentary on the hardships of "a real person" who is searching for her missing mother. In the remainder of this essay, the protagonist, despite being an adult, is referred to as a child because she undertakes a journey that is the reverse of the search for the child (or the truth about the child) in films such as *La amiga* (*The Girlfriend*) (dir. Jeanine Meerapfel, 1988), *Garage Olimpo* (dir. Marco Bechis, 1999) and *La historia oficial* (*The Official Story*) (dir. Luis Puenzo, 1985). There is a metatextual connection between *La historia oficial* and *Anita*: the renowned Argentine actress Norma Aleandro plays the mother in both films. Whereas in the former Aleandro searches for her child's true identity, in the latter the child searches for her mother.

Informed by cultural memory, this essay argues that although *Anita* is a fictionalized memory narrative of the AMIA bombing, the film establishes a dialogue with the search for the disappeared under the last repressive governmental regime in Argentina (1976–1983). To further this argument, two

g in search of her missing
 eared. While the protago-
 1 undertaken by the Moth-
 ers) for their own missing
 diversity, displacement, and
 e victims of both atrocities
 mindful of the image of the
 essay aims to demonstrate
 itine family, the film makes
 timately a constitutive part

f cultural memory in three
 expressions that fashion the
 as commemorations, art ex-
 board displaying the names
 tion formed by relatives and
 hers every Monday in front
 tice).³ Second, in reenacting
 be regarded, in the words of
 memory."⁴ Although Aizen-
 m, both cultural expressions
 : same function, namely, that
 rd, through the theme of the
 aps into the memory of the

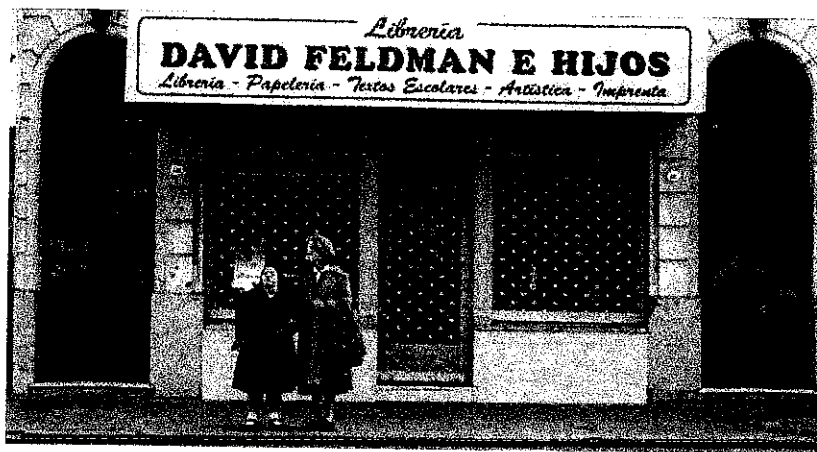
carnevale produced, directed,
 With a viewership of 125,548,
 Anita in 2009.⁶ It was declared
 e Autonomous City of Buenos
 ades at different international
 best film at the International
 09. Moreover, it received pos-
 n critics. *Clarín's* critic Diego
 precia debido a su contención
 campo) y a una protagonista
 length of *Anita* lies in its emo-

tional restraint (the attack is handled off-screen) and in a protagonist who will make a deep impression on viewers].⁷ *La Nación's* Adolfo Martínez, for his part, praises the work of Carnevale with these words: "Con enorme calidez y permanente emoción, el director y coguionista Marcos Carnevale relata esta historia que posee, además, el recuerdo de uno de los hechos más luctuosos ocurridos en la Argentina [This story, which commemorates one of the most tragic events to have occurred in Argentina, is told with enormous warmth and constant emotion by director and co-scriptwriter Marcos Carnevale]." In the same vein, Dave Robson from *Sound on Sight* remarks that "*Anita* is a lovely film with an unorthodox—and resultantly refreshing—look at tragedy."

Anita narrates the story of Anita Feldman, a young Jewish woman with Down syndrome, who lives in Once with her mother, Dora.⁸ Anita and her mother run a stationery store located in the same building where they reside. On the morning of 18 July 1994, Dora leaves Anita alone in the store while she goes to the headquarters of the AMIA, situated nearby. On that day, the AMIA is blown up. As a consequence of the blast, Dora perishes and their store is completely destroyed, but Anita survives the explosion with minor injuries. Amid the confusion, Anita starts roaming the streets of Buenos Aires in search of her mother, but she gets lost. Anita's meanderings lead her to encounters with several strangers. In the meantime, Anita is the subject of a search by her brother, Ariel, who finally finds her.

There are three issues around the character Anita that deserve further attention: her Jewishness, her understanding of what she has experienced, and the actress's performance. The ethnicity of Anita and her family is downplayed to such an extent that we see only a smattering of Jewish objects in the family's dwelling. Additionally, the family does not take part in any communal or religious activity. The few cues that disclose that this is indeed a Jewish family are, first, the Yiddish words *mayn feygele* (my little bird), a term Anita's mother uses to awake her daughter; second, the surname, Feldman, written on the sign of their stationery store; third, the Star of David and the Hebrew characters carved on the gravestone of Anita's father; finally, the mention of the AMIA in a conversation Dora has with Ariel. Metaphorically speaking, Anita's Jewish identity is given by the family setting and, once this setting vanishes, her Jewishness is attenuated, too.

Concerning Anita's experience of the attack, it should be highlighted that she cannot understand what has happened. When asked the reason for her bruises and blood-stained clothes, she replies that she has fallen off a ladder in the stationery store. Despite being a victim of the attack, Anita does not realize it. Therefore, what the film plays out is the limited comprehension



Anita (Alejandra Manzo) and Dora (Norma Aleandro) in front of the stationery store. *Anita* (2006), directed by Marcos Carnevale.

that Anita has of traumatic events, thus signaling that there is no room for such an atrocity in her memory.

The film does not explain the tragedy by dissecting its causes. Instead, it focuses on the consequences of the attack as experienced by the central character, played by Alejandra Manzo, an adult with Down syndrome. Manzo delivers a believable performance thanks to her guileless appearance, and there lies the key to the success of the film. As Karen Lury argues, "audiences are less likely to be manipulated if they believe that the child actor is genuine or (a) natural."⁹ Manzo's interpretation of Anita is indeed genuine and natural. Despite being an adult, Manzo is able to show her character exhibiting characteristics related to childhood: namely innocence, vulnerability, and a dependence on adults, as well as behaving and dressing in a childish fashion. In this regard, it is illustrative to note that Anita's innocence, vulnerability, and dependence highlight the cruelty of the attack, leading the audience to empathize with her. Carnevale has deftly crafted the film as a child-centered narrative through which he compares and contrasts Anita's life before and after the AMIA bombing.

Life before the AMIA Bombing

The explosion, which becomes the turning point in Anita's life, splits the story into two parts. The first part reveals the highly ritualized life of Anita

and Dora in a seemingly lishing shot of a dormant I traying the family's daily and unity, it also unveils A ance and their ritualized fa room scenes, played out in t era captures mother and d her hair, she instructs Anita takes a bath, and Dora, whil her child each body part she which are based on a trustfi makes in the second bathro to mention that Anita has t: daste las orejas, ma [You fo: ment shows that these actio ner at every bathtime, which they are performed and even

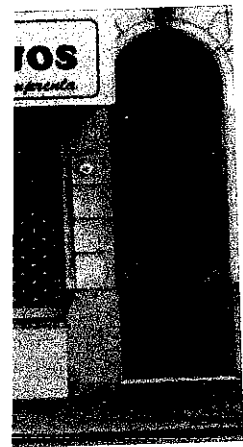
A preference for shooting shadows the portrayal of the 1 The neighborhood of Once 1 with people but scarred by t raphy of Jewish Argentine dii man's untitled short in the a which depicts the neighborho attack runs deep through all it lic, Carnevale does not give th His preference for showcasing scores two motivations of the her mother and Anita's estrang of the film we see Anita outsid namely, when she and her mot father is buried. Whilst the don world represents an unbounde cemetery eloquently displays th

Once in the cemetery, Dora, grave, looks around but cannot whereabouts, Dora looks for An Play is normally associated with Amanda Holmes, "as an activity lows participants to push past ti

and Dora in a seemingly safe environment. The film opens with an establishing shot of a dormant Buenos Aires, followed by a sequence of shots portraying the family's daily routine. Whereas this portrayal exudes harmony and unity, it also unveils Anita's complete reliance on her mother. Her reliance and their ritualized family life are further emphasized in the two bathroom scenes, played out in the first segments of the film. In the first, the camera captures mother and daughter in the bathroom and, while Dora does her hair, she instructs Anita on how to brush her teeth. In the second, Anita takes a bath, and Dora, while sitting nearby looking over some invoices, tells her child each body part she should wash. The ritualization of these actions, which are based on a trustful relationship, is conveyed by a comment Anita makes in the second bathroom scene. Busy with the invoices, Dora forgets to mention that Anita has to wash her ears, to which Anita says, "Te olvidaste las orejas, ma [You forgot to mention my ears, mom]." Anita's comment shows that these actions are conducted routinely in the same manner at every bathtime, which permits the child to predict the order in which they are performed and eventually to do them independently.

A preference for shooting interiors in the first segments of the film overshadows the portrayal of the neighborhood where mother and daughter live. The neighborhood of Once has been widely portrayed as a place bustling with people but scarred by the AMIA bombing, especially in the filmography of Jewish Argentine director Daniel Burman. A case in point is Burman's untitled short in the anthology film *18-J* (dir. Burman et al. 2004), which depicts the neighborhood of Once as a place where the memory of the attack runs deep through all its spaces. Privileging the private over the public, Carnevale does not give the same prominence to Once as Burman does. His preference for showcasing the domestic sphere in the narrative underscores two motivations of the film: the link that exists between Anita and her mother and Anita's estrangement from the outer world. In the first part of the film we see Anita outside the domestic sphere only on one occasion, namely, when she and her mother go to the Jewish cemetery where Anita's father is buried. Whilst the domestic sphere is highly ritualized, the outside world represents an unbounded, unpredictable space, and the scene in the cemetery eloquently displays this unpredictability.

Once in the cemetery, Dora, who has been busy tending her husband's grave, looks around but cannot see Anita. Concerned about her daughter's whereabouts, Dora looks for Anita and finds her playing with some stones. Play is normally associated with freedom and autonomy, and according to Amanda Holmes, "as an activity, play incites the exploration of ideas; it allows participants to push past the structured boundaries that define their



front of the stationery

at there is no room for
 g its causes. Instead, it
 ed by the central char-
 wn syndrome. Manzo
 less appearance, and
 en Lury argues, "audi-
 e that the child actor is
 nita is indeed genuine
 show her character ex-
 innocence, vulnerabil-
 and dressing in a child-
 that Anita's innocence,
 y of the attack, leading
 lefty crafted the film as
 es and contrasts Anita's

in Anita's life, splits the
 y ritualized life of Anita

day-to-day identities."¹⁰ Indeed, Anita's unsupervised contact with the outer world is marked by exploration through play and stands in stark contrast to her ritualized life in the domestic sphere. This first diegetic detachment from her mother and her surveying of an unfamiliar space foreshadow the imminent change that surfaces after the explosion, namely the destruction of her family and her consequent orphanhood, two events that entail the charting of unknown territory. In sum, the first part of the film seeks to reconstruct the memory of a "happy childhood" that the bomb disrupts.

The Explosion: Destruction, Death, and Destitution

The key motif of loss pervades the scene of the explosion, in which Anita loses not only her mother but also her familial milieu. Prior to the bombing, from the moment Anita is awoken by her mother, she is never left alone. The shots are framed in such a way that Anita is flanked by her mother at all times. Nevertheless, on 18 July 1994, Anita's life suffers the impact of terrorism and undergoes a dramatic transformation. Because Dora has to run an errand to the AMIA building, she makes the decision to leave Anita alone in their stationery store. Insofar as this is the first time that Dora leaves Anita, the plot builds up an expectation of change in Anita's life. To put it differently, Dora's departure from Anita's side prefigures the fact that the child will eventually lose the person who is closest and dearest to her.

The scene of the explosion explicitly portrays Anita's loss of her familial milieu. From the moment Dora leaves Anita, the audience shares Anita's point of view in that we only have access to what takes place inside the store. Carnevale sutures the audience's viewpoint into this traumatic moment in Anita's life. The camera follows Anita's feet and the bottom of the ladder she is pushing, a synecdoche that may represent Anita on her way to autonomy. Before leaving, Dora tells Anita not to climb the ladder, but Anita is determined to challenge her mother. The cut to a close-up of Anita's hands picking up a box of pencil cases confirms her determination to put the pencil cases on one of the top shelves of the store. Next is a close-up focusing on Anita's feet going up the steps of the ladder, which symbolizes her movement toward a different stage in her life. The following shot is a close-up of the hands of the wall clock moving to 9:53, a reminder to the viewer of what would take place a few seconds later. A long shot next captures the tidiness of the shop, and Anita, who is a part of that order, is seen from behind on top of the ladder. The *mise en scène* positions Anita as the central element of a well-known, protective world. Even the colors of her clothes match the surroundings, which enhances a sense of belonging.

This is the last shot in the film, and the last instant of the last glimpse of this prior moment forming the foreground of the sort of chiaroscuro where the content of this shot is to direct the viewer to the exterior of the store. The shot ends with a black frame that even that Anita could have

Expelled from her home, the first steps are unknown. The first steps are conspicuous grey ash and dust, and accompanied by a confusion and inability to contact. This mode of filming conveys a sense of confusion and inability to contact. In fact, not only Anita but also the representation of the Jewish community but at the same time of solidarity are juxtaposed with images worth recalling Aizenberg's solidarity so often elusive through shared suffering.¹¹ one of the ideologies of the time stand together and help each other experienced there. This, in turn, which the AMIA bombing of solidarity confirms the atavistic Jewish problem.

Cultural memory, then, is processed in two distinct ways. First, the traumatic event but also its devastation, death, and destitution are experienced by the victims, the figure of the individual. Through the individual's process of Once from a neighborhood commercial activities agreeable means of living crushed. Second, the traumatic episodes in Argentine history ultimately a constitutive part of the explosion is reenacted in the

contact with the outer
 nds in stark contrast
 diegetic detachment
 space foreshadow the
 imely the destruction
 events that entail the
 of the film seeks to re-
 bomb disrupts.

stitution

osion, in which Anita
 u. Prior to the bomb-
 she is never left alone.
 ed by her mother at all
 s the impact of terror-
 ise Dora has to run an
 to leave Anita alone in
 hat Dora leaves Anita,
 t's life. To put it differ-
 the fact that the child
 rest to her.
 ita's loss of her famil-
 audience shares Anita's
 s place inside the store.
 s traumatic moment in
 ottom of the ladder she
 n her way to autonomy.
 lder, but Anita is deter-
 p of Anita's hands pick-
 ation to put the pencil
 a close-up focusing on
 symbolizes her move-
 ing shot is a close-up of
 ler to the viewer of what
 xt captures the tidiness
 is seen from behind on
 a as the central element
 of her clothes match the

This is the last shot in which Anita is an integral part of a safe environ-
 ment, and the last instant before her world is, quite literally, shattered. The
 last glimpse of this prior existence is a medium shot of Anita's happy face
 forming the foreground of an overexposed background, which produces a
 sort of chiaroscuro where all colors have practically vanished. Hence the in-
 tent of this shot is to direct the audience's attention from the interior to the
 exterior of the store. The silence of the scene is broken by a terrible blast,
 Anita falls off the ladder, and a cloud of ash covers everything. The scene
 ends with a black frame that signifies that a major shift has taken place and
 even that Anita could have suffered a blackout.

Expelled from her home by the explosion, Anita ventures out into the
 unknown. The first steps she takes unveil an alien environment covered by
 conspicuous grey ash and peopled by the injured, a scene shot in slow mo-
 tion and accompanied by a buzzing sound as well as monotonous music.
 This mode of filming conveys Anita's mental state, which is one of total con-
 fusion and inability to comprehend the ghastly situation she is faced with.
 In fact, not only Anita but also Once itself has fallen victim to a terrorist at-
 tack. The representation of Once evokes a locus of suffering and destruction
 but at the same time of solidarity, as images of people helping each other
 are juxtaposed with images of Anita's bewilderment. In this respect, it is
 worth recalling Aizenberg's words on the attack: "Ironically, the pluralistic
 solidarity so often elusive in Argentine society has partially been achieved
 through shared suffering."¹¹ The solidarity displayed on the street reinforces
 one of the ideologies of the film: Once is a district where Jews and non-Jews
 stand together and help each other in the most traumatic situation ever ex-
 perienceed there. This, in turn, evokes the contentious issue of the extent to
 which the AMIA bombing is a problem affecting all Argentines: the motif
 of solidarity confirms the attack as a shared national event and not as an en-
 tirely Jewish problem.

Cultural memory, then, is articulated in the reenactment of the explo-
 sion in two distinct ways. First, Carnevale memorializes not only the trau-
 matic event but also its devastating impact on Once. Insofar as destruction,
 death, and destitution are experienced not only by Anita but also by the rest
 of the victims, the figure of the child becomes a metonymy for wider suffer-
 ing. Through the individual story of Anita, the film echoes the metamor-
 phosis of Once from a neighborhood where people lived and developed their
 commercial activities agreeably to a place where people are killed and their
 means of living crushed. Second, the film mediates one of the most trau-
 matic episodes in Argentine history by making it a national experience and
 ultimately a constitutive part of the nation's cultural memory. Because the
 explosion is reenacted in the film, it becomes part of the public arena, thus

creating a sense of shared participation in the victimhood of the bombing. So, while cultural memory is evoked in the representation of the bombing in the first part of the film, in the second part, it is constructed through the depiction of the search for the disappeared.

The Search for the Disappeared

The search for disappeared family members is a theme utilized in films dealing with the traumatic events of the Dirty War. With its thirty thousand disappeared, the Dirty War left such a profound impact on Argentine society that it continues to haunt the Argentine psyche. Although its influence is particularly tangible in stories produced in the aftermath of the repressive governmental regime, *Anita* echoes the trauma of the period by establishing a dialogue with the search undertaken by the Mothers for their missing offspring. Focusing on the search for two females, *Anita* reimagines the search for the disappeared through a double voice.

The AMIA explosion tore families, a neighborhood, and by extension, a nation apart, and it affects the narrative structure of the film by dividing the story into two juxtaposing narrative strands: one hinges on Anita's search for her mother, and the other engages with Ariel's search for his sister. Their search is analogous to the situation experienced by the Mothers, who persistently sought (and still seek) information about their kidnapped family members. This is skillfully represented in *Garage Olimpo*, when María's mother first sells her house and then loses her own life in the effort to obtain information about her disappeared daughter. At the same time, *Garage Olimpo*, like *Anita*, depicts the child's futile search for her mother when María, who is unaware of her mother's death, repeatedly phones her, but to no avail. It is the contention of this essay that by turning the camera on the search undertaken by Anita and Ariel, Carnevale intends to build bridges between the AMIA bombing and the Dirty War. Accordingly, by incorporating the theme of the search for missing family members, *Anita* protects the memory of the disappeared during the Dirty War against the corrosive action of time. Hence, the film constructs cultural memory by drawing on the memory of another traumatic event in the history of Argentina.

After the explosion, the outer world displaces the inner world represented in the first part of the film, and what emerges is a hostile and decadent Buenos Aires, where hurried passers-by, graffiti-covered walls, and closed stores form the backdrop to Anita's wandering. This cityscape undoubtedly mirrors Anita's own hardships, but it also signals the legacy of an inefficient state.

In an article on the key Argentine films, Carnevale "share a sense of disillu they are set."¹² In *Anita* with Buenos Aires; alth immediately after the atta vironment that displac tile cityscape alludes to whether they are minor: links *Anita* to *La amiga* only inefficient in aiding

Anita, motherless an city. *Anita* is treated at th fering of the survivors c AMIA, the Hospital de C of the attack in 1994, so tions as a remembrance

After leaving the hosj dering. Carnevale portra high-angle shots in whic snared in the immensity by passers-by who take the film lapses into a nau hension of the traumatic dered state resonates wit almost twenty-four years a heinous attack. In this that has failed its own pe ple and find those respor its citizens.

Anita's journey throug als who, albeit not readih clothing. In light of this, act as her surrogate famil lix, a drunken photograp from her aimless walking ken suddenly by the voic next to her. On hearing approaches the phone bu ward, Félix, who wants to ex-wife and Anita exclaim

In an article on the image of Buenos Aires as a threatening city in nine key Argentine films, Catherine Leen concludes that the films she discusses "share a sense of disillusionment and even despair with the city in which they are set."¹² In *Anita*, too, there is a sense of disillusionment and despair with Buenos Aires; although the film captures instances of solidarity immediately after the attack, these are contested by images of an urban environment that displaces the central character. More important, the hostile cityscape alludes to the inability of the state to protect its own citizens, whether they are minors or adults, and ensure a safe society, a critique that links *Anita* to *La amiga* and *Garage Olimpo*, films in which the state is not only inefficient in aiding its citizens but also the perpetrator of violence.

Anita, motherless and homeless, is left to fend for herself in an estranged city. Anita is treated at the Hospital de Clínicas, where she witnesses the suffering of the survivors of the blast. Situated two hundred meters from the AMIA, the Hospital de Clínicas played a pivotal role in assisting the victims of the attack in 1994, so the inclusion of the hospital in the narrative functions as a remembrance of collective suffering.

After leaving the hospital unnoticed, Anita embarks on her urban wandering. Carnevale portrays Anita's fruitless quest and disorientation through high-angle shots in which she appears almost to be an invisible person ensnared in the immensity of the city. Her invisibility is further accentuated by passers-by who take no notice of her presence. During the city scenes, the film lapses into a narrative standstill which suggests Anita's incomprehension of the traumatic events that have taken place in her life. Her bewildered state resonates with that of the survivors of the AMIA bombing, who almost twenty-four years later cannot grasp why they were the target of such a heinous attack. In this sense, the film constitutes a critique of a society that has failed its own people. Because it has been unable to protect its people and find those responsible for the bombing, the state still owes a debt to its citizens.

Anita's journey through the city entails the meeting of various individuals who, albeit not readily, come to her aid by offering her shelter, food, and clothing. In light of this, it can be argued that the strangers she encounters act as her surrogate family. The first person Anita makes contact with is Félix, a drunken photographer who gives her shelter for two nights. Worn out from her aimless walking, Anita falls asleep in a decrepit hallway but is awoken suddenly by the voice of a boy talking to his mother on a public phone next to her. On hearing him utter the word "mamá" several times, Anita approaches the phone but the boy hangs up and leaves. Immediately afterward, Félix, who wants to make a phone call, lifts the receiver to talk to his ex-wife and Anita exclaims "mami" while pointing to the phone. This is the

first time that Anita makes an explicit reference to the fact that she is looking for her mother.

Heedless of Anita's presence, however, Félix engages in a heated argument with his ex-wife over their son, whom he is not allowed to see. Félix's conversation reflects the disintegration of the family in Argentine society, a theme that has pervaded Argentine cinema since the 1980s as a result of the impact of the most recent military dictatorship and the implementation of neoliberal practices in the 1990s.¹³ Enraged by the argument, Félix breaks the receiver by hitting it repeatedly against the phone. Suddenly realizing that Anita is standing next to him, Félix excuses himself and asks her if she has to call someone, to which Anita nods. Félix offers to take her to a bar nearby where there is also a phone, but neither that one nor the one in his home works. As if the phone constitutes the only means through which Anita may contact her mother, the broken phones symbolize the severing of the bond between mother and daughter and the impossibility of restoring this bond given that Dora has been killed. The symbol of the phone hints at the unanswered phone calls that María makes in *Garage Olimpo*. María, unlike Anita, has access to phones but cannot be reunited with her mother, because her mother, like Dora, is dead.

Despite his personal problems, Félix tries to help Anita: he takes her to his home and asks Anita for her personal details. Anita, however, cannot give him a satisfactory answer, or at least an answer that may prompt a reconnection with her family. Not knowing what to do, Félix decides to let Anita stay overnight in his messy apartment and promises her that they will find a solution the following day. In spite of all his defects, Félix acts as a surrogate father through his role as provider of shelter and food (Félix cooks dinner for Anita). The house of an alcoholic father is the setting in which Anita spends her first night outside her home, but she does not seem to mind. The fact that Anita accepts this person who is so alien and different from her family can be qualified as remarkable. Her unprejudiced reaction helps her to meld into whatever milieu she is in, and this is vividly portrayed in the dinner scene, in which Anita and Félix share not only the same space but also their experiences of the day. This cinematic device invites viewers to draw a parallel between Anita's family life before and after the AMIA bombing.

Echoing the fragmentation of the family in Argentine society, Félix ultimately fails Anita. Breaking his promise to help her, Félix tries to get rid of her the following morning. Anita's resilience persuades him to give her accommodation for a second night, but on the following day he abandons her on a bus. Félix's reluctance to continue helping Anita suggests two readings:

on the one hand of masculinity, families, and h Argentina unde ployment amon Those men whc fulfill their role lix's ex-wife ind body. On the otl ciety that has tu determination, c being heard.

Anita's streng nese family who the child accepts it is not a certain tience that defeat trays Anita's incc ting on some woc speaks of her orp matriarch and he whether they sho her between the t nese family. The j entire family and acted as Anita's st extended family c and a baby. Intere: other allusion to t viders and protect the story gradually

Pursuing the ic of the surrogate m journey, the nurse but a robbery at the sult, she again get more Anita's aliene ble of providing for men, who take her nos Aires. There sh

on the one hand, Félix embodies the destabilization of the traditional type of masculinity, which upholds men as breadwinners, moral leaders of their families, and heads of households. The implementation of neoliberalism in Argentina under the Menem Administration (1989–1999) led to high unemployment among men, a situation that transformed men's traditional roles.¹⁴ Those men who were unable to adapt to the new system proved less able to fulfill their roles as fathers, and that seems to be precisely Félix's case. Félix's ex-wife indeed accuses him of being incapable of taking care of anybody. On the other hand, Félix's behavior mirrors that part of Argentine society that has turned its back on the victims of the AMIA bombing. Anita's determination, conversely, represents the voices of the victims who insist on being heard.

Anita's strength of will emerges once again in her encounter with a Chinese family who run a grocery store. This encounter reinforces the fact that the child accepts her hosts' hospitality openly and without reservations, but it is not a certainty that they will accept the child. It is Anita's relentless patience that defeats their reticence, and this is depicted in the scene that portrays Anita's incorporation into the Chinese family. A long shot of Anita sitting on some wooden boxes across the street from the Chinese grocery store speaks of her orphanhood and exclusion while the shopkeepers—a Chinese matriarch and her daughter—argue in the foreground of the frame about whether they should take her in or not. By highlighting Anita and placing her between the two women, Carnevale anticipates her inclusion in the Chinese family. The next scene, then, shows Anita sitting at the table with the entire family and sharing their dinner, just as she did with Félix. If Félix acted as Anita's surrogate father, the Chinese family represents a surrogate extended family composed of a grandmother, a mother, a son, a daughter, and a baby. Interestingly, there is no father figure in the Chinese family, another allusion to the failure of men's traditional roles in the family as providers and protectors. As if putting together the pieces of a familial puzzle, the story gradually constructs a picture of the multiethnic Argentine family.

Pursuing the idea of the Argentine family, the film delivers the figure of the surrogate mother in the shape of the last person Anita meets on her journey, the nurse Nori. Anita helps the Chinese family at the grocery store, but a robbery at the store frightens her, and she therefore runs away. As a result, she again gets lost and starts sleeping rough. The film captures once more Anita's alienation as a critique of an inefficient state that is not capable of providing for its citizens. Anita falls ill and is picked up by a group of men, who take her to a disadvantaged neighborhood in the suburbs of Buenos Aires. There she is cared for by Nori, a frustrated, middle-aged nurse

who lives alone and seems to have problems with alcohol. Nori cures Anita but is not interested in letting Anita stay with her. Nonetheless, Anita's extraordinary patience and persistence break down Nori's barriers. Consequently, she ends up caring so much for Anita that she treats her as if she were her own child, and thus a mother-daughter relationship is forged between them. Nori, as the rest of the people Anita meets on her journey, is not aware that the child is a victim of the AMIA bombing. One day, however, Nori sees Anita's brother appear on television searching for his sister, and, understanding who Anita is, she contacts Ariel.

Having embarked on a quest to find her mother, Anita comes across an array of people who epitomize the multicultural national family, and she thus becomes the child of this wider family. Accordingly, the child's search for her mother conveys not only her own hardships but also the hardships of an entire society, which has been badly hit for decades by socioeconomic and political issues. In other words, the characters Anita encounters form a metonymy of a society that has been affected by the long-term effects of repression, disappearances, exile, neoliberalism, and financial crises. This has rendered society fragmented, dysfunctional, and at times unable, or not always willing, to protect its most vulnerable citizens. Nevertheless, by taking Anita in, the Argentine family exhibits that there exist remnants of solidarity in Argentine society. Being simultaneously the victim of the AMIA bombing and a disappeared child in search of her missing mother, Anita concurrently embodies the cultural memory of the AMIA bombing and the Dirty War. As Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet correctly observe, the cinematic representation of youth "as the repository of cultural memory and the guardians of hope for the future has become a staple of films seeking to give voice to those who were unjustly murdered, tortured, or disappeared by dictatorial regimes."¹⁵ These words indeed resonate with Anita's case.

Following Nori's call, Ariel goes to her house, where he is finally reunited with his sister. After this reunion and to give closure to the narrative, brother and sister go back to the stationery store, where Anita recalls her past life the moment she enters. The final scene compels the viewer to be participant of this moment of growing realization. Ariel explains to Anita what has happened and informs her that their mother perished in the AMIA bombing. Anita's understanding of the traumatic event that she has experienced is accompanied by soft music and verbalized by her when she raises the question, "¿Por qué explotó la bomba? [Why did the bomb explode?]," to which Ariel answers, "Porque alguien la puso ahí, porque está todo mal, no sé por qué, no sé [Because someone put it there, because everything is wrong, I don't know

why, I don't know]." . . .
ness denounces not c
the event and the fru.

As a recollection
"Cuando la aguja larg
long hand of the cloc
call for Dora's return
number 12. The film c
ing at the stopped clo
of their deceased moti
ing on psychoanalysis
matic events may reac
the dead, especially wi
make its reliving a pa
which one remains de
sheds light on Anita ar
flates the siblings' reu
strued as a painful but
bond and seeks to repa

Conclusion

In reenacting trauma
tive, *Anita* may be view
memory of the AMIA l
fictionalized story, it ca
based on a real-life even
shared with others. The
mon culture that has be

Anita is an embodim
ema memorializes. It is
made public and theref
alive the cultural mem
theme of the search for
visit the AMIA bombing
wider social ills of the c
tional family in which th
fies the damage done to e

why, I don't know]." Anita's genuine curiosity coupled with Ariel's helplessness denounces not only the attack but also the lack of justice surrounding the event and the frustration felt by the families of the victims.

As a recollection of what Dora had said to her before leaving the store, "Cuando la aguja larga esté en el número de arriba, mami vuelve [When the long hand of the clock is at the top, mom comes back]," and ultimately as a call for Dora's return, Anita places the long hand of the wall clock on the number 12. The film concludes with a close-up of the siblings' profiles looking at the stopped clock, which is a clear symbol of death and, by extension, of their deceased mother. Writing about the victims of the Shoah and drawing on psychoanalysis, Dominick LaCapra explains how survivors of traumatic events may react in relation to those who perished: "One's bond with the dead, especially with dead intimates, may invest trauma with value, and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound."¹⁶ LaCapra's observation sheds light on Anita and Ariel's reaction. The closing of the film, which conflates the siblings' reunion with the memory of their mother, can be construed as a painful but necessary commemoration that forges their familial bond and seeks to repair the fracturing of their family.

Conclusion

In reenacting trauma and its aftermath through a child-centered narrative, *Anita* may be viewed as one of the memorials that retrieve the cultural memory of the AMIA bombing and the Dirty War. Although the film is a fictionalized story, it cannot be separated from culture at large in that it is based on a real-life event, has been publicly screened, and therefore has been shared with others. The film thus contributes to the construction of a common culture that has been affected by trauma.

Anita is an embodiment of victimhood that justice has forgotten but cinema memorializes. It is in the reenactment of personal memories that are made public and therefore collective experiences that enables film to keep alive the cultural memory of such traumatic events. In addition, the apt theme of the search for the disappeared permits Carnevale not only to revisit the AMIA bombing and the plight of the Mothers but also to survey the wider social ills of the country. Through the creation of a multiethnic national family in which the Jewish female has found her place, the film rectifies the damage done to a whole society by the attack. Ultimately, the ideol-

ogy of the film conveys that Jews and non-Jews are part of the same national family.

Moreover, the casting of a person with Down syndrome in the leading role provides viewers with a new perspective from which to grasp the AMIA bombing. The character of Anita not only is a vulnerable person but also has an intellectual disability, yet she overcomes all the challenges she faces, thereby becoming a role model for the Argentine people. Thus, the portrayal of the child vis-à-vis the Argentine family constitutes a call to a nation that should not remain indifferent to the suffering of its fellow citizens. Belonging to the same genre as *La historia oficial*—the family melodrama—*Anita* shares with *La historia oficial* the combination of emotional manipulation and hard-hitting exposé of harsh realities in Argentine history. Melodramatic but nonetheless gritty, *Anita* brings a message of hope to a society that needs to deal with the traumas of its past.

Notes

The author is grateful to Dr. Catherine Leen for her insightful comments on this paper.

1. The AMIA has its roots in the Chevra Kedusha Ashkenazi (Jewish Mutual Aid and Burial Society), created in 1894 with the purpose of founding a cemetery for the Jewish Argentine community. Between 1910 and 1915, the number of Jews doubled from approximately fifty thousand to one hundred thousand (Feierstein, *Historia*, 117). Due to the increase of the Jewish population, the Chevra Kedusha Ashkenazi gradually expanded and diversified to include philanthropic and educational programs. On the eve of the celebration of its hundredth anniversary, a terrorist attack took place on the headquarters of the AMIA, and the seven-floor building was leveled by the explosion. In 1999 a new building was opened on the same ground, and today the AMIA boasts a range of programs, including social, communal, educational, job placement, and burial services.

2. In the interview provided on the DVD version of the film, Carnevale says that he regards *Anita* as a means of reflecting on the traumatic event, and, moreover, he stresses that with *Anita* he intends to demonstrate that the AMIA bombing is an event that affects all Argentines regardless of their ethnicity.

3. Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires*, 11.

4. Aizenberg, "Argentine Space, Jewish Memory," 112.

5. Carnevale, born in 1963, is a relatively young yet renowned industrial auteur in the Argentine film industry. Aside from *Anita*, Carnevale has directed eight feature films to date. In general, his films have been well received by the Argentine public.

6. DEISICA, *Informe sobre los aspectos económico-culturales*, 20.

7. This and all subsequent translations are my own.

8. The name Anita alludes to one of the survivors of the AMIA bombing, namely

Anita Weinstein, head of the Argentine Jewish community. Weinstein herself pointed this out in an interview.

9. Lury, *The Child in the Film*, 11.

10. Holmes, "Playin' It Safe," 11.

11. Aizenberg, "Argentine Space, Jewish Memory," 112.

12. Leen, "City of Fear," 11.

13. For a thorough analysis of the film, see Feierstein, *Historia*, 117.

14. Rocha, *Masculinidad*, 11.

15. Rocha and Semler, *Latin America*, 16.

16. LaCapra, *Writing the Subject*, 11.

Works Cited

Films

- Bechis, Marco, dir. *Gara que Piñeyro*. SBP. 1995.
 Burman, Daniel, dir. "Un día de cine." AVH. 2009.
 Carnevale, Marcos, dir. *Anita*. 2009.
 Meerapfel, Jeanine, dir. *Anita*. 2009.
 Luppi, Liv Ullmann. *Anita*. 2009.
 Puenzo, Luis, dir. *La historia oficial*. 1986.
 Aleandro, Hugo Aran. *Anita*. 2009.

Articles and Books

- Aizenberg, Edna. "Argentine Space and Disappeared in Buenos Aires." *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: A History of Writing*. Hanover, NH: Deisica, 2009.
 Amado, Ana, and Nora E. Feierstein. *Historia oficial: la memoria de la AMIA*. Buenos Aires: DEISICA (Departamento Cinematográfica Argentina), 2009.
 Feierstein, Ricardo. *Historia oficial: la memoria de la AMIA*. Buenos Aires: DEISICA, 2009.
 Holmes, Amanda. "Playin' It Safe in Latin American Cinema." *Latin American Cinema*. Maryland: Lexington I, 2001.
 LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing the Subject*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Anita Weinstein, head of the Center for Documentation and Information on Argentinean Jewry Marc Turkow, which was based in the AMIA building. Anita Weinstein herself pointed this out in a conversation I had with her.

9. Lury, *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears, and Fairy Tales*, 150.

10. Holmes, "Playing Woman in María Novaro's *Lola*," 70.

11. Aizenberg, "Argentine Space, Jewish Memory," 117.

12. Leen, "City of Fear," 480.

13. For a thorough discussion of the family in Argentina, see Amado and Domínguez, *Lazos de familia*. For an analysis of the role of cinematic men in the family, see Rocha's *Masculinities in Contemporary Argentine Popular Cinema*.

14. Rocha, *Masculinities*, 1–18.

15. Rocha and Seminet, *Representing History, Class, and Gender in Spain and Latin America*, 16.

16. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 22.

Works Cited

Films

Bechis, Marco, dir. *Garage Olimpo*. Perf. Antonella Costa, Carlos Echeverría, Enrique Piñeyro. SBP. 1999.

Burman, Daniel, dir. "Untitled short." 18-J. Distribution Company, 2004.

Carnevale, Marcos, dir. *Anita*. Perf. Alejandra Manzo, Norma Aleandro, Luis Luque. AVH. 2009.

Meerapfel, Jeanine, dir. *La amiga (The Girlfriend)*. Perf. Cipe Lincovsky, Federico Luppi, Liv Ullmann. Neue Visionen. 1988.

Puenzo, Luis, dir. *La historia oficial (The Official Story)*. Perf. Héctor Alterio, Norma Aleandro, Hugo Arana. Arrow Films. 1985.

Articles and Books

Aizenberg, Edna. "Argentine Space, Jewish Memory: Memorials to the Blown Apart and Disappeared in Buenos Aires." *Mortality* 12 (2007): 109–123.

———. *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: Borges, Gerchunoff, and Argentine-Jewish Writing*. Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 2002.

Amado, Ana, and Nora Domínguez, eds. *Lazos de familia: Herencias, cuerpos y ficciones*. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2004.

DEISICA (Departamento de Estudio e Investigación del Sindicato de la Industria Cinematográfica Argentina). *Informe sobre los aspectos económico-culturales*. Buenos Aires: DEISICA, 2009.

Feierstein, Ricardo. *Historia de los judíos argentinos*. Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2006.

Holmes, Amanda. "Playing Woman in María Novaro's *Lola*." In *Screening Minors in Latin American Cinema*, ed. Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet, 69–86. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

- Leen, Catherine. "City of Fear: Reimagining Buenos Aires in Contemporary Argentine Cinema." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 27 (2008): 465-482.
- Lerer, Diego. "'Anita': Perdida en la ciudad." *Clarín*, 27 August 2009. <http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2009/08/27/um/m-01986692.htm> (accessed 9 February 2013).
- Lury, Karen. *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears, and Fairy Tales*. London: Tauris, 2010.
- Martínez, Adolfo. "Una emotiva historia de dolor y soledad." *La Nación*, 27 August 2009. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1167248-una-emotiva-historia-de-dolor-y-soledad> (accessed 9 February 2013).
- Robson, Dave. "Anita a Unique Look at Tragedy." *Sound on Sight*, 9 April 2011. <http://www.soundonsight.org/anita> (accessed 24 March 2015).
- Rocha, Carolina. *Masculinities in Contemporary Argentine Popular Cinema*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Rocha, Carolina, and Georgia Seminet, eds. *Representing History, Class, and Gender in Spain and Latin America: Children and Adolescents in Film*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

PART III

NEW THEMES