Jurkiewicz, Monika

Illusions of Choice : Examining the Consequences of Social Pressure, Religious Fanaticism and Legislative Overreach in Claudia Piñeiro's Catedrales

In:

Kerstin-Anja Münderlein (Ed.), Crime Fiction, Femininities and Masculinities : Proceedings of the Eighth Captivating Criminality Conference, Bamberg : University of Bamberg Press, 15p.. 2024. DOI: 10.20378/irb-92502

Bookpart - Published Version

DOI of the Article: 10.20378/irb-94621

Date of Publication: 15.04.2024

Illusions of Choice: Examining the Consequences of Social Pressure, Religious Fanaticism and Legislative Overreach in Claudia Piñeiro's *Catedrales*

Monika Jurkiewicz, University of Galway 0000-0003-2217-8881

Abstract

The following paper examines the theme of institutional violence in contemporary Argentine crime fiction by focusing on the analyses of fictional individual instances of violence in Claudia Piñeiro's 2020 novel *Catedrales*. Set against a contrasting backdrop of post-dictatorship (1976-1983) and present-day Argentina, the novel spans a thirty-year period, centring around the death and dismemberment of an adolescent, Ana. As the story unfolds, we discover Ana's death to be a direct result of a clandestine abortion, and her mutilation being an attempt at its concealment. Through Ana's experience, Piñeiro demonstrates how restrictive laws and enforced social norms around abortion, sex, and family structure, which in the case of the novel are propagated by religious fanaticism, can drive individuals to engage in unregulated illegal activities and unimaginable acts of violence. The purpose of this chapter is to examine Piñeiro's portrayal of past instances of violence, arising as a direct consequence of restrictions imposed on individuals by the state, religion, and society. Consequently, the paper focuses on exploring these three elements by addressing the issues of illegal abortion and legislative overreach, social pressure as well as religious fanaticism. Moreover, the lingering effects of the Argentine 1976-1983 military dictatorship are addressed due to their influence on the fictional instances of violence. In this context, the paper aims to illustrate the ongoing institutional violence in contemporary Argentina while simultaneously highlighting the legacy of the military regime.

Keywords

Violence, abortion, Argentina, Claudia Piñeiro

Institutional violence has become one of the most widely scrutinized topics in contemporary crime fiction, particularly in the Latin American *novela negra*. Critics such as Amelia S. Simpson explain that the *novela negra* alters the traditional representation of crime as a disruption of an orderly society by portraying it "as a symptom of a disordered society and as part of a system that fosters criminal activity" (46). The Argentine bestselling novelist Claudia Piñeiro, much like many contemporary crime authors, engages with this topic in her literary work, with her novels frequently addressing the adverse effects of institutional violence through the portrayal of a society which often chooses to engage in illegal activities as a result of governmentally and socially imposed restrictions and norms. Accordingly, the following chapter

aims to examine the crimes committed by individual characters as a symptom of institutional violence in Claudia Piñeiro's 2020 novel *Catedrales*. The novel offers an insight into how governmentally controlled legislation and religiously enforced social norms around abortion, sex, and family structure can push the public to take part in unregulated illegal activities and compel family members to perpetrate unimaginable acts of violence against each other. Subsequently, the main objective of this chapter is to examine how Piñeiro uses the fictional instances of individual violence to reflect on the impact the Catholic Church and Argentine legislation had on the general public. Furthermore, the 1976-1983 dictatorship and its lingering effects will form part of the discussion of the driving forces behind the instances of violence in the novel.

The novel opens in present-day Santiago de Compostela, Spain, one of the world's most iconic pilgrimage destinations and cathedral shrine to Saint James. Contrary to this distinctively Spanish backdrop, the plot of *Catedrales* fundamentally centres around Argentina and the death of adolescent Ana, whose dismembered corpse was discovered in a quiet neighbourhood in the province of Buenos Aires thirty years ago. Prior to her death, Ana unwittingly became entangled in a deathly love triangle involving a young seminary student, Julián, and her oldest sister Carmen. Julián and Carmen both felt an attraction towards each other but due to their mutual devotion to the Catholic Church denied themselves the experience of love. Meanwhile, Ana fell in love with Julián and managed to seduce him while attending a Catholic youth camp. However, her feelings were not reciprocated and instead, the resemblance she bore to her sister was exploited by Julián, who used her body to satisfy his own sexual desires denied to him by his calling. When Julián and Carmen eventually give in to their passion and pursue marriage, following his decision to leave the seminary, Ana discovers she is pregnant, which jeopardises the pair's dreams of forming an exemplary Catholic family and poses a threat to their reputation. Desperate to preserve their social image and achieve their goals at all costs, ironically Carmen and Julián relinquish their values by committing a cardinal sin against the teachings of the church through arranging a clandestine abortion for Ana. When she dies following the botched procedure, in order to conceal evidence and avoid social shame, Carmen resorts to dismembering her body and incinerating it in her pottery furnace before discarding her sister's remains in a back alley. While it could be argued that simple human lust and hypocrisy are major factors in manifestations of violence in the novel, this chapter aims to broaden the discussion by examining how Piñeiro uses these brutal acts of violence as a way of portraying the effects of socio-religious influences acting on ordinary individuals, subsequently exposing the intricacies of ongoing institutional violence.

The following chapter approaches the novel through the lens of institutional violence, which according to Ruggiero "is the outcome of violations perpetrated by individuals and groups against their own official principles and philosophies, those principles and philosophies which allow them to hold positions of privilege" (29). Examples of such practices in the novel abound if we take into account the lack of separation of Church and state, illegal abortions carried out by medical practitioners for financial gain, family members renouncing their principles and committing murder for the sake of preserving their image, as well as police corruption obstructing the proper course of justice. However, in order to conceptualise instances of institutional violence in Piñeiro's novel, we must also observe its function within the wider context of structural violence. Structural violence was first coined by Galtung and "is normally taken to mean the harms that are created through preventing people meeting their basic needs" (Cooper and Whyte 210). Turvey et al. expand this view by stating that this type of violence "refers to the way that social structures and social institutions may cause harm to individuals by depriving them of basic needs" (211). As argued by Drymioti,

> [s]tructural violence is generally understood as an arrangement deeply rooted in a system of relationships within a socio-economic and political apparatus that results in the restriction of enjoyment of fundamental rights to the degree that certain social groups are constrained from achieving the quality of life that would have otherwise been possible. (58)

As outlined above, structural violence results from the socio-economic and political apparatus at play. Institutions lie at its core, as suggested by Winter and Leighton, who claim that this type of violence is "embedded in ubiquitous social structures [and] normalized by stable institutions and regular experience" (qtd. in Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 47). Drymioti also argues that "[d]epending on the arrangement found at a structural level, normalization or execution [of violence] usually originates in institutions that have authority over the particular subjects that the arrangement concerns" (60). Taking this approach into consideration, we can closely examine the role of institutions in the novel and see how their ability to naturalise the often harmful reproduction of structural violence through legitimate means contributes to the characters' criminal activity and serves as an overall critique of the issues presented in the novel. Furthermore, the broader application of institutional roles within structural violence, allows us to conceptualise how it impedes the characters from exercising what we would consider, their basic human rights.

Moreover, in order to understand the motives behind the characters' heinous acts, we must also consider how institutional violence operated as part of the particular socio-cultural context presented in the author's work by examining the level of influence of the Catholic Church on both the Argentine government and society over the past century. Since the establishment of the Argentine state in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church has played a key role in the shaping of the nation through education, imposition of social norms and interference in governmental

procedures and legislative changes. As expressed by Esquivel, "[i]n political, social, and cultural terms, the Catholic Church has played a significant role in the construction of the identity of Argentine society and has been a principal source of legitimacy for the political process" (136). Consequently, over the past century, religious institutions formed an integral part of the political system in Argentina, frequently endorsing administrations favouring orthodox ideology, although this relationship was more strained at times under Juan Perón. Nonetheless, the 1976-1983 dictatorship further solidified the Church-State relationship in Argentina. The ruthless regime lasted for almost seven years, claiming many thousands of victims, with an estimated 30,000 disappeared. The military claimed that their chief goal laid in the restoration of law and order and ending of governmental corruption through what they coined as the National Reorganisation Process or *el proceso*. However, the utopian image of an economically prosperous and socially stable nation quickly turned into widespread civil subjugation and repression, focused on re-shaping the society and re-establishment of traditional values the nation supposedly lost due to the foreign influence of liberalism. "According to the authorities, the propagation of foreign ideologies, defined as anything that deviated from the traditional Western Christian canon and traceable back [sic] to the values of the colonial period, challenged the nation not only at the material level but also at the moral level" (Juárez-Dappe 85). This social reorganisation and reconstitution of the supposedly lost orthodox values was carried out through extremely violent means including unlawful imprisonment, torture, and mass murder, on the part of the military government.

Given its strong fundamentalism, the dictatorship proved to be an ideal political opportunity for the Catholic Church to increase its governmental influence and aid the military in the systemic implementation of ideologically driven social norms on gender roles, dress code and more importantly family structure. Under the new regime the new norms around male appearance dictated that "[m]en were to avoid long hair or any clothing that may have cast doubts on their heterosexual orientation" (Sutton 67), while women were encouraged to wear traditionally feminine clothing and embrace the idea of motherhood. In addition to strict aesthetic rules based on the sex of an individual, gender roles were also strictly defined in line with the traditional idea of males being seen as the breadwinners and females as mothers and housewives. The Church strongly supported this orthodox hierarchal family structure favouring the dominant male role while diminishing the female position to the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the Argentine law at the time, which "vested *patria potestad,* or parental power in husbands" (Htun 120), allowed for further reductions of female social and legal status. The same law also "distinguished between children born to married parents and those born to nonmarried parents, granting 'marital' children more rights than 'nonmarital' children" (120). The establishment of these highly prejudicial standards contributed to the stigmatisation of illegitimate children, simultaneously curtailing women's rights by removing their parental claims.

Ultimately, these restrictions and strong emphasis on family structure led to the disapproving perception of single, unmarried mothers and illegitimate children in a society urged to embrace conservative values. Moreover, by taking absolute control of the education system, the military junta was able to impose a rigid curriculum based heavily on religious ideology which arguably led to a form of social conditioning of children. According to "María Vergara's analysis of the civics curriculum, . . . the authorities relied on an authoritarian discourse in their attempts to create a disciplined and obedient society based on Catholic and nationalist values" (Juárez-Dappe 83). Inevitably, from an early age, Argentinians were forced to act in accordance with the strict religious norms and reject liberal ideologies.

Correspondingly, the end of the dictatorship did not terminate the close-knit relationship between Church and state, as highlighted by Esquivel, who argues that "[t]he return to democracy in the 1980s did not modify the traditional modus operandi of political society in its links with the ecclesiastical establishment" (138). For instance, the requirement for the president and vice president to be Catholic was enforced until constitutional change took place in 1994. As a result of this excessive influence of the Church over the presidential seat, legislative reforms regarding family and reproduction were also severely delayed. Argentina was one of the last countries to legalise divorce in 1987 and "[b]y doing so, [president] Alfonsín angered church leaders who mounted a series of protests and compelled some to align themselves with the antigovernment [sic] opposition" (Burdick 219). Therefore, owing to the growing resistance from the Church, additional changes to both contraception and abortion laws were impeded. The hostility towards the aforementioned legislative reform continued throughout the 1990s as President Menem maintained close ties with the Vatican and held a firm stance on the criminalisation of abortion. "In 1994, Menem proposed that the presidents gathered for the Fourth Ibero-American Summit in Cartagena, Colombia, sign a declaration that explicitly condemned abortion" (Htun 161). Even though the attempt proved unsuccessful, Menem was thanked by the Pope for "[h]is initiatives aimed at promoting family values and defending life" (161). Moreover, "[i]n 1998, Menem issued a presidential decree declaring March 25 the 'Day of the Unborn Child'" (162), a day which explicitly coincided with the Roman Catholic Feast of the Annunciation. As a result, "[p]owerful ideological influences embedded in Argentina's cultural norms and institutions have encouraged women always to embrace motherhood regardless of their own needs and aspirations" (Sutton 97). Consequently, laws on neither contraception nor abortion were implemented until the twenty-first century. The Argentine nation was forced to wait until 2003 to see the passing of a decree which "[g]uarantees free access to contraceptive methods and . . . the right to avoid pregnancies" (Barrancos 138). The implementation of the new law was made possible due to the weakness of the Church at the time. Following a strong public backlash, resulting from the revelation of scandals around the abuse of minors, the institution lost its credibility

giving way to the easing of restrictive laws on reproduction. Moreover, the National Campaign for Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion had submitted demands for the right to safe and regulated abortion systematically since its foundation in 2005. The campaign's "main strategy has been political mobilization and the fight for abortion legalization through the drafting of a bill that was introduced at the National Congress for the first time in 2006, but was not discussed in plenary session until 2018" (Rubial and Anderson 699). Additionally, the eruption of the *green wave* in 2017, a feminist-led movement for safe abortion across Latin American countries, led to major protests in Buenos Aires shortly after in the summer of 2018. This resulted in the aforementioned historic Congress vote on the abortion bill which unfortunately was unsuccessful. However, the growing discontent continued to manifest in the form of a series of mass protests demanding freedom of choice, ultimately culminating in the passing of the law on the legalisation of abortion up to 14 weeks in December 2020.

The strong institutional influence of the Catholic Church and its systemic social conditioning is chiefly represented in the novel through Carmen's religious fanaticism. She is the embodiment of religious extremism given her unconditional devotion to the church and unrelenting desire to form the perfect Catholic family, especially as a way of compensating for Julián's renunciation of the priesthood. She portrays this by stating: "'We would marry, we would raise a family, we would be such good Catholics together that we would make up for any guilt he could feel for not having realised his calling'" (295).[1] Her radicalism is further expressed through her adherence to orthodox social norms and preservation of appearances. Fearing the judgement of others, she forbids Julian from paying her a visit in her neighbourhood prior to the announcement of their engagement. She explains: "'I just don't want you showing up in Adrogué until we can announce our engagement. . . . It wouldn't look good if we were to announce our courtship shortly after you leave the seminary'" (261).[2] Her fundamentalist views coupled with her fear of social shame, ultimately drive Carmen to resort to violent acts towards Ana through organising her illegal abortion, resulting in her death. Desperate to preserve their social standing, secure her future with Julián and supposedly spare her family from humiliation, Carmen obtains the details of a clandestine abortion clinic while Julián arranges the procedure. Julián recounts: "'Carmen also obtained the details of the place where you can have an abortion. I took care of calling them, asking for instructions and

[1] Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Spanish to English are my own; "'Nos casaríamos, formaríamos una familia, seríamos tan buenos católicos juntos que repararíamos cualquier culpa que él pudiera sentir por no haber cumplido con el llamado'" (295).

[2] "'Solo no quiero que aparezcas por Adrogué hasta que podamos anunciar nuestro compromiso. . . . No estaría bien visto que anunciemos un noviazgo al poco tiempo de que dejes el seminario'" (261).

gathering the necessary funds'" (267).[3] Moreover, Carmen urges him to influence Ana in the decision to abort by stating: "'Don't leave it up to her erratic adolescent thinking. Guide her, lead her without her realising, nudge her to the point where she's about to make the decision'" (267).[4] Carmen rationalises her behaviour based on the assumption that had she not acted in this way, her little sister would otherwise humiliate her family and become a social outcast. She argues:

> "My mother would have been stricken with grief upon learning that her youngest daughter – still a little girl – had lost her virginity in a casual relationship that lacked commitment, a sexual exchange without true love. And mom, who was also very sensitive to the judgment of others, would have had to endure the criticism of the neighbours, friends, our relatives, shocked by Ana's actions, who in turn would have been tarnished forever as a single mother, a girl who needed to have a premature and irresponsible sex life". (282)[5]

Carmen's actions therefore demonstrate how institutionally imposed conditioning offers individuals a framework within which to rationalise and justify their actions as if they were responding to a higher moral power, thus illustrating Ruggiero's point on the violence which occurs when individuals renounce their own principles. Furthermore, strict social norms originating from legitimate religious institutions reflect the wider issue of structural violence in the form of an imposition of orthodox ideology which curtailed individuals' rights to freedom of thought.

Besides the overt manipulation on the couple's part, it is also the lack of education on the topic both in school and at home which preclude Ana from making an informed decision, consequently leading to her death. This issue of the lack of information on abortion is portrayed in the novel through Ana's friend who explains that: "'No schoolteacher ever mentioned it. If we had asked, they would have told us that it was a sin and without any further explanation, they would have sent us off to the principal or to say a few Our Fathers'" (140).[6] Similarly, Ana's father, upon learning the truth about his daughter thirty years later, expresses that perhaps if abortion and sex were not stigmatised, it could have prevented her premature death:

---

[3] "'Carmen consiguió también el dato de un sitio donde poder hacer un aborto. Yo me ocupé de llamar, de pedir las instrucciones y de juntar el dinero necesario'" (267).

[4] "'No la dejes librada a su pensamiento errático de adolescente. Conducila, llevala sin que lo note, guiala hasta el punto inmediato anterior a tomar la decisión'" (267).

[5] "'Mi madre se habría enfermado por la pena, al enterarse de que su hija menor – una niña aún – había perdido la virginidad en una relación casual, sin ningún compromiso, un intercambio sexual donde no había habido amor verdadero. Y mamá, que además era muy sensible a la mirada de los otros, tendría que haber soportado los cometarios de los vecinos, de sus amigas, de nuestros parientes, azorados por los actos de Ana, que habría quedado manchada para siempre como una madre soltera, una chica que necesitó tener vida sexual prematura e irresponsable'" (282).

[6] "'Jamás la mencionó una profesora en el colegio. Si hubiéramos preguntado, nos habrían dicho que era pecado y, sin muchas más explicaciones, nos habrían mandado a la dirección o a rezar padrenuestros'" (140).

> "We never talked about it . . . . Abortion wasn't just a dirty word in our family, it was forbidden. . . . I should have been a more reliable father to Ana, I should have taught her to believe in herself and trust her own judgement, I should have educated her so that she wouldn't feel ashamed for not agreeing with everything the religion we instilled in her preaches. . . . Because I didn't do what I should have done, I, her father, am responsible for Ana's death". (324)[7]

It is interesting to note that even though social norms around family had been primarily implemented by patriarchal institutions, the exercising of these standards within the household unit comes from the female characters in the novel. At home, it is Ana's mother who is mostly opposed to the discussion on abortions, as explained by her father who states: "'And if somebody mentioned it, I went along in silence with your mother's expression of horror'" (324).[8] Her avid religiousness and opposition to the freedom of choice is further exemplified by the father who expresses that:

> "I feel like a hypocrite, because clearly, if I had known what was happening to Ana, I would have helped her to terminate the pregnancy. I would have done so in spite of her mother's opposition, who would have been forced by Catholicism to choose between her obedience to God and her daughter, and I know which she would have chosen". (324)[9]

Furthermore, it is Carmen who brutally mutilates her sister's body in order to preserve the family image and abide by the social norms in place. She is the enforcer, she arranges the abortion, and it is she who takes action to conceal Ana's 'crime'. This represents the influence of the institutions on the society as a whole even further. Seemingly, the patriarchal systems in place led to the growth of similarly restrictive matriarchal structures at a domestic level. While the school system prohibited any conversations on the topic of contraception or abortion, the domestic environment did very little to remedy the issue. As seen in the novel, the matriarchal domestic spheres supported the restrictive nature of the patriarchal laws in place and thus exacerbated the issue, which is exemplified by Ana's tragic demise. The propagation of these institutionally imposed restrictions in the domestic sphere once again reflects the problem of structural violence given that orthodox patriarchal ideology was widely accepted as the norm, it was legitimised by both education and

[7] "'Nunca hablamos de este tema . . . . Aborto no era una mala palabra en nuestra familia, era prohibida. . . . Yo debí haber sido un padre confiable para Ana, debí haberle ensenado que creyera en ella y en su propio criterio, debí haberla educado para que no sintiera vergüenza por no estar de acuerdo con todo lo que pregona la religión que le inculcamos. Por lo que debí haber hecho y no hice, yo, su padre, soy responsable de la muerte de Ana'" (324).

[8] "'Y acompañe con mi silencio el espanto de su madre, si alguien la pronunciaba'" (324).

[9] "'Me siento un hipócrita, porque por supuesto yo, de haber sabido lo que le pasaba a Ana, la habría ayudado a interrumpir ese embarazo. Lo habría hecho aún con la oposición de su madre, a quien el catolicismo la habría obligado a elegir entre su obediencia a Dios y su hija, y sé que habría elegido'" (324).

family institutions and ultimately deprived women of their right to freedom of choice.

Ana's innocence and unfamiliarity with the intricacies of abortion procedures, as a result of both educational shortfalls and abortion being a taboo in the domestic sphere, is demonstrated yet again in a conversation with her closest friend and confidant, Marcela, who asks: "'And how do you get an abortion, Ana?' I asked her. 'He's going to find out the details, he's going to explain it to me and he's going to give me the money, I don't have that much. He let me decide for myself, he doesn't want to decide for me'" (140).[10] Furthermore, Carmen and Julián consistently deny their involvement in Ana's decision to abort claiming it to be her choice. Julián explains: "'I did not force Ana to have an abortion. . . . I did as planned, I let her come to the conclusion that the best thing for everyone – including her parents, but mainly for her – was to get rid of that pregnancy'" (268).[11] Similarly, Carmen argues: "'I did not tell her to abort, I did not make the decision for her; I didn't even talk about it with my sister: she didn't tell me, and I didn't tell her'" (279).[12] She continues her excuses by claiming: "'If I hadn't given her the address, I don't think it would have made a difference. And Ana would still have died because it was God's will'" (280).[13] However, in reality and as indicated above, Ana did not have a say in the matter per se given her obliviousness to what the procedure entailed, her complete lack of education on the topic and her lack of direct participation in the organisation of the clandestine abortion. Moreover, due to the restrictive social norms, Ana felt compelled to save Julián's reputation considering his position as a clergy member in training and was thus pressured to engage in an unregulated, illegal act rather than making an educated decision. As demonstrated, Piñeiro, through Ana's lack of choice in the matter, draws attention to the adverse effects of social restrictions, and illustrates the lengths religious fanaticism will push people to, even if it results in violent acts which go against the teaching of the church.

Ana's tragic demise resulting from strict social rules also translates to a broader issue of institutional violence in the form of legally imposed constraints on female reproductive rights at the time, thus illustrating the structural control over individuals' lives. In spite of their criminalisation, clandestine abortions were extremely common as according to Sutton, it was "estimated that up to 522,000 abortions take

[10] "'¿Y cómo se hace para abortar, Ana?', le pregunté. 'Él va a averiguar en detalle, me va a explicar y me va a dar la plata, yo no tengo tanta. Igual me dejó libertad de decisión, no quiere decidir por mí'" (140).

[11] "'No obligué a Ana a abortar . . . Hice lo planeado, la dejé llegar sola a la conclusión de que lo mejor para todos – incluidos sus padres, pero principalmente para ella – era deshacerse de ese embarazo'" (268).

[12] "'No le dije que abortara, no tomé la decisión por ella; ni siquiera hablé del asunto con mi hermana: ella no me contó, y yo no le dije'" (279).

[13] "'No creo que, de no haberle dado la dirección, habría cambiado el hecho de que Ana muriera. Porque eso, su Muerte, fue voluntad de Dios'" (280).

place annually in Argentina" (27), making it the leading cause of maternal mortality. The high death rates were often linked to the poor sanitary conditions of illegal clinics in which abortions took place. Piñeiro captures this through her portrayal of the environment in which Ana's surgery occurred: "The clinic was not a clinic, just a poorly maintained cabin with overgrown grass and peeling paint. . . . There was only a narrow table, with an oilcloth on top. And a pink sheet, folded, on the headboard, next to a small pillow. There was a small table beside an improvised stretcher containing elements of medical equipment" (146-47).[14]

Through this harrowing depiction Piñeiro sheds light on the detrimental effects of legislative overreach which deprived women of regulated medical attention, subsequently contributing to the increase of maternal deaths. Additionally, the staggering number of illegal abortions alone demonstrates that restrictive laws around female reproductive rights did not prevent women from choosing to terminate. Unsurprisingly, illegal abortions became a profitable business as physicians charged fees in exchange for breaching the law. In her study on the experiences of nurses attending to pre- and post-abortion patients in two regions in Argentina, Sjöstrand highlights the profitability of the business by stating that "the physicians that did not provide abortions for free within the public health care system . . . profited on the necessity [sic] of the women by performing abortions in other settings and charging the women" (21). This is reflected in the novel firstly through Julián's responsibility for gathering the necessary funds for the procedure, and secondly by the female physician carrying out Ana's abortion who asks her for money in advance. Ana is asked to hand over the money prior to the procedure, suggesting it to be a common and frequent practice: "'But first, give me the money sweetheart,' . . . The woman looked at me, I've never forgotten her face: she was serious, with an expression conveying no other message than the one she had just uttered; one more step in the procedure she performed frequently" (147).[15]

In addition to abortion laws, Ana's experience also highlights the absence of contraceptives at the time. According to Barrancos "[s]ince the return of democracy in 1983 and the reappearance of feminist movements, the demands for legitimate access to birth control methods and techniques and for the legalization of abortion increased" (137). However, in spite of the rise in the demand for legislative change, strict controls persisted until the passing of the 2003 law on access to free contraception. Piñeiro illustrates this through Carmen's explanation of the reason why Ana became

[14] "La clínica no era una clínica, apenas un chalet mal mantenido, con el pasto crecido y la pintura descascarada. . . . Sólo una mesa angosta, con un hule arriba. Y una sábana rosa, doblada, en la cabecera, junto a una pequeña almohada. En una mesita auxiliar, a un costado de la improvisada camilla había elementos de instrumental médico" (146-47).

[15] "'Pero antes, linda, dame la plata, . . . La mujer me miró, no me olvido de su cara: estaba seria, sin un gesto que me trasmitiera ningún mensaje diferente del que acababa de decir; un paso más de un trámite que repetía con frecuencia" (147).

pregnant: "'What crime or sin could be attributed to Julián other than having had sex with Ana? The fact that they had done it without protection? It is very easy to talk about it now, thirty years later, but who used a condom back then?'" (277).[16] What's more, through this statement, Carmen subtly hints at the double standards around male and female social roles. Women are somewhat culpable for their actions while men are spared from the consequences. Evidently, the ramifications caused by the lack of contraceptive methods favoured men and punished women through strict legislation. This illustrates instances of structural violence in the form of imposition of orthodox ideologies, which prevented individuals from achieving basic rights to control over the decisions regarding their own reproductive choices.

The portrayal of institutional violence in the novel is not limited to Ana's abortion. Subsequent to her demise, even in her death, Ana continues to be subjected to violence. Following the botched procedure, Carmen is desperate to disassociate herself and Julián from taking any responsibility for their active participation in the abortion. She attempts to conceal the evidence by dismembering and incinerating her sister's corpse in a pottery furnace before discarding the body in a back alley. The manner in which Ana's mutilation occurred shares an almost disturbing similarity with the treatment of bodies during the era of the 1976-1983 military regime and serves as a reflection of the ongoing shortcomings in the Argentine judicial system and the frequent coverups of institutional violence against civilians since the dictatorship era. Throughout the military regime, the Argentine forces, heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, concentrated their efforts on capturing the so-called 'subversives', defined by their threat to nationalist ideology and more importantly the Argentine Christian identity.

> For the Argentine military, religion upheld a sense of social and political order, and created a historical teleology. Thanks to the persistent and prolonged work of the indoctrinators, the Argentine military took the Catholic religion as the principle for ordering Argentine society. This type of Catholicism therefore became a cultural model. (Ranaletti 150)

Consequently, those who posed a threat to the Christian social norms were routinely captured, tortured, murdered and disappeared. This ensured absolute control over the public and contributed to the wide expansion of clandestine detention centres spread across the city of Buenos Aires. These unlawful prisons, *Centros de Detención Clandestina* or CDCs, were often hidden in plain sight in the basements of prominent institutions such as official government buildings. "The detainment of victims in CDCs followed a sequence of five basic steps: (1) abduction; (2) torture; (3) continued clandestine detention; (4) murder or release; (5) concealment of the remains of those killed" (153). According to Crenzel the bodies of the detainees were "buried

[16] "'¿Qué otro delito o pecado se le podría atribuir a Julián que haber tenido sexo con Ana? ¿La circunstancia de que lo hayan hecho sin protección? ¿Es muy fácil responder que sí ahora, treinta años después, pero ¿quién usaba un condón en aquella época?'" (277).

in unmarked graves, incinerated, or thrown into the sea" while "their property was looted; and their children snatched by members of the repressive forces" (16). Similarly, in the description of various methods of corpse disposals at the time, Ranaletti highlights the incineration of the bodies of the detainees by confirming that:

> this procedure took place in the following CDCs: El Banco (San Justo, Buenos Aires province); the School of Naval Mechanics (Buenos Aires city), in the sports field; 'Pozo de Arana' (La Plata, Buenos Aires province); 'Vesuvius' (La Tablada, Buenos Aires province); and 'Arsenal Miguel de Azcuénaga' (Tucumán province). The crematorium of the largest cemetery in Buenos Aires city was also used to dispose of the corpses of the disappeared detainees. (163)

This last step in the macabre and illegal military procedures in particular resonates with Piñeiro's description of the treatment of Ana's cadaver. Threatened by the consequences of Ana's deviation from Catholic teachings and the exposure of the truth behind her sister's demise, Carmen dismembers Ana's body and, piece by piece, chars her remains in a small pottery furnace. Painting a rather gruesome image, she explains: "'I estimated how much of Ana could fit into my oven. . . . Only three cuts: head, one leg, another leg'" (311).[17] Comparable to the practices of the military just a decade prior, driven by a political ideology, Carmen's actions were also motivated by the adherence to social norms driven by religious extremism. She explains her motives in the following:

> "It was not about dismembering my sister for pleasure, as a psychopath who enjoys every cut might do. Nor was cutting her designed to cover up any crime, as a murderer might speculate. It was, in fact to hide why she died, a death that we had not caused, but which if the motive were to come to light, would only bring more pain". (311)[18]

Carmen's justification for her involvement in the concealment of Ana's abortion allows Piñeiro to draw attention to the impact of the legacy of the widespread institutional violence both during and in the aftermath of the dictatorship era. These brutal acts of violence taking place almost a decade after the regime still bore a striking resemblance to the practices of the Argentine forces and were also motivated by the prevailing need to preserve the traditional, national and Christian ideology at family level.

In addition to Carmen's callousness, the depiction of the mishandling of Ana's murder investigation by the local authorities contributes to the novel's critique of the lingering judicial restrictions in post-dictatorship Argentina, which denied justice to thousands of its citizens. Due to the nature and state of Ana's cadaver, its location

[17] "'Calculé a ojo el pedazo de Ana que podría entrar en mi horno. . . . Solo tres cortes: cabeza, una pierna, otra pierna'" (311).
[18] "'No se trataba de descuartizar a mi hermana por placer, como puede hacer un psicópata que disfruta en cada corte. Ni tampoco se trataba de cortarla para tapar un crimen, como puede especular un asesino. Se trataba, sí, de ocultar por qué murió, una muerte que no habíamos provocado nosotros, pero cuyo motivo, de salir a la luz, sólo traería más dolor'" (311).

and its resemblance to the practices of the military junta, officials ordered the local police to close the case rapidly, ruling it to be a sexually motivated crime. According to the private detective who took an interest in Ana's case at the time, he was not in the least surprised at the push from the higher up officials to hastily terminate the investigation. By stating that "'[w]e were already in the democratic period, but the dictatorship was still there'" (187),[19] the PI is alluding to the prevalence of coverups of violent crimes, as a hangover from the dictatorship era. Consequently, Ana's family never truly achieved justice, something which was highlighted by Ana's father in the statement "'[t]he truth we're denied hurts till the end of times'" (322).[20] The manner in which the case was handled also reflects the systemic effort to eradicate the memory of the dictatorship. In the new democratic era, the state had been guilty of several coverups of crimes by the military designed to deny justice to its victims. At the end of the dictatorship, the junta introduced a self-amnesty law endorsed by the Catholic Church which "proposed a law to forget, *ley de olvido*, as the necessary prerequisite to a law of amnesty" (Burdick 229) which would prompt society, falling in line with Catholic teachings, to move on by forgiving and forgetting these criminal actions. However, after taking office in 1983, the new democratically elected president, Raúl Alfonsín, implemented a series of legislative changes, allowing for the prosecution of the military junta and those responsible for the brutal violence which took place during the dictatorship. Sadly, the prosecution of the perpetrators was short-lived, and upon taking office in 1989, President Menem issued a number of decrees that benefited junta members who were serving time as well as other human rights offenders. Consequently, the silencing of the victims, frequent coverups, and presidentially issued pardons continued for a decade to come. Therefore, the denial of justice for Ana and silencing of the crime committed against her depicts the wider web of institutional violence through the government's attempt to eradicate the memory of the dictatorship. Through this, Piñeiro demonstrates the strong legacy of the regime and its effects on the practices of the judicial systems at the time of Ana's demise. Ultimately, this highlights the broader issue of structural restriction of the fundamental right to justice, implemented through legitimate institutional means.

This analysis of Piñeiro's novel demonstrates the degree to which the genre serves as a critique of institutional violence in Argentina and its close links to structural violence. By depicting individual brutal acts, the author draws attention to the extensive network of institutional violence endured by the general public. While fictional, Piñeiro's characters represent the experiences of thousands of Argentinians deprived of access to sexual education and birth control and limited in their actions through fear of social shaming and strict legislation. Similarly, by depicting the

[19] "'Ya estábamos en democracia, pero la dictadura estaba ahí nomás'" (187).
[20] "'La verdad que se nos niega duele hasta el último día'" (322).

events which took place thirty years ago, Piñeiro manages to address the ongoing issues faced by a society continuously tormented by its religiously driven dictatorial past. As described above, legislative reform in Argentina was an agonisingly long process. After all, the nation did not see legislative change with regards to contraception until 2003, with abortion being legalised quite recently, in 2020. Therefore, Piñeiro's novel is a prime example of how the genre can be used for socio-institutional critique, demonstrating the importance of contemporary crime fiction more broadly, as a medium for illustrating the ills and injustices of today's societies worldwide.

Works Cited

Barrancos, Dora. "Problematic Modernity: Gender, Sexuality, and Reproduction in Twentieth-Century Argentina." *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 18, no. 2, Summer 2006, pp. 123-50. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/jowh.2006.0033.

Burdick, A. Michael. *For God and the Fatherland: Religion and Politics in Argentina*. New York UP, 1995.

Cooper, Vickie, and David Whyte. "Grenfell, Austerity, and Institutional Violence." *Sociological Research Online*, vol 27, no. 1, 2022, pp. 207-16. *SageJournals*, doi: 10.1177/1360780418800066.

Crenzel, Emilo. "Toward a History of the Memory of Political Violence and the Disappeared in Argentina." *The Struggle for Memory in Latin America. Memory Politics and Transitional Justice*, edited by Eugenia Allier-Montaño and Emilio Crenzel, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 15-33.

Drymioti, Marilena. "The Concept of Violence in (Times of) Crisis: On Structural, Institutional and Anti-Institutional Violence." *Tijdschrift over Cultuur en Criminaliteit*, vol 9, no. 2, 2019, pp. 52-70. Core,
doi: 10.5553/TCC/221195072019009002004.

Esquivel, Juan Cruz. "Religion and Politics in Argentina: Religious Influence on Legislative Decisions on Sexual and Reproductive Rights."*Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2016, pp. 133-43.

Htun, Mala. *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies*. Cambridge UP, 2003.

Juárez-Dappe, Patricia. "Family Canon: The Politics of Family during the Last Civic-Military Dictatorship in Argentina, 1976-83." *Journal of Latin American Studies,* vol. 54, no. 1, February 2022, pp. 79-101. *Cambridge Core,*
doi:10.1017/S0022216X21000778.

Piñeiro, Claudia. *Catedrales*. Penguin Random House, 2020.

Ranalletti, Mario. "When death is not the end: Towards a Typology of the Treatment of Corpses of 'Disappeared Detainees' in Argentina from 1975 to 1983." *Destruction and Human Remains,* edited by Élizabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus,Manchester UP, 2017, pp. 146-80.

Rubial, Alba, and Cora Anderson Fernandez. "Legal Obstacles and Social Change: Strategies of the Abortion Rights Movement in Argentina." *Politics, Groups and Identities,* vol. 8, no. 4, November 2018, pp. 698-713. *Taylor and Francis Online,* doi: 10.1080/21565503.2018.1541418.

Ruggiero, Vincenzo. *Visions of Political Violence*. Routledge, 2020.

Rylko-Bauer, Barbara, and Paul Farmer. "Structural Violence, Poverty, and Social Suffering." *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Poverty*, edited by David Brady and Linda Burton, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 47-74.

Simpson, S. Amelia.*Detective Fiction from Latin America*. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1990.

Sjöstrand, Frida. *Nurses' Experience of Attending Women in Pre-and Post-Abortion Care: A Qualitative Interview Study with Nurses in the Public Health Care Sector in Argentina*. Malmo University, 2015.

Sutton, Barbara.*Bodies in Crisis Culture: Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina*. Rutgers UP, 2010.

Turvey, Brent E., et.al. "Integrated Forensic Assessments: A Psychosocial Approach with the Human Rights Perspective." *Criminal Profiling*, edited by Brent E. Turvey. 5th edition, Academic Press, 2023, pp. 205-34.