

**HRRRC Salon**  
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### **Challenging impunity for atrocity crimes. Bottom-up lessons from the South**

#### **Abstract:**

When exploring how to deal with atrocities in the case of perpetrators who are dead, absent or protected by impunity laws, the experience of the Argentinean grassroots organizations and their struggle against the atrocities perpetrated during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) offers a broad range of successful strategies.

Notably, the dictatorship involved the systematic use of unlawful imprisonment, torture and forced disappearance. Immediately after the dictatorship, trials took place, but impunity laws and pardons were issued a few years later, obstructing the accountability process. Based on the material collected through fieldwork (interviews with victims, experts, and in-deep archival research) between 2017 and 2023, this presentation will specifically focus on the initiatives developed by Argentine victims-survivors to overcome the impossibility of conducting ordinary trials. These include three main mechanisms: 1. Escraches: Organized by HIJOS, which gathers the children of the victims, these outings consisted of artistic public displays usually in front of the house of the perpetrators aimed at letting the neighbors know that the person lives there and has not yet been judged by the ultimate goal of achieving social rejection. The slogan is "If there is no justice, there is escrache". 2. Truth trials: relatives of victims encouraged criminal judges to host truth trials to learn the truth about the fate and whereabouts of those who have been forced-disappeared, despite the impossibility of conviction. 3. Ethic Trials: Organized by Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of those forced-disappeared, these non-official popular tribunals were aimed at judging those who would rarely be tried in ordinary courts because of legal or political constraints, such as corporations, mainstream media or the judiciary itself.

Overall, the presentation will explore these three mechanisms deployed to confront impunity in Argentina as well as their potential to be applied in other cases when the perpetrators are dead or absent.

#### **Bio:**

Valeria Vegh Weis, LL.M, PhD., is Argentinean and teaches Criminology and Transitional Justice at Buenos Aires University (UBA) and National Quilmes University (Argentina). She is currently a Research Fellow at Universität Konstanz Zukunftskolleg, where she researches on the role of human rights and victims' organizations in the confrontation of state crimes. From 2019 to 2021, Vegh Weis was an Alexander von Humboldt Post-Doctoral Researcher at Freie Universität Berlin, where she still teaches state crime criminology. Her book *Marxism and Criminology: A History of Criminal Selectivity* (BRILL 2017, Haymarket Books 2018) was awarded the Choice Award by the American Library Association and the Outstanding Book Award by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. She is also the co-author of *Bienvenidos al Lawfare* with Raúl Zaffaroni and Cristina Caamaño (in Spanish Capital Intelectual 2020, in Portuguese Tirant Le Blanch 2021, in English Brill 2023) and *Criminalization of Activism* (Routledge

2021), as well as many articles and book chapters in the topics of criminology, transitional justice and criminal law. She has fifteen years of experience working in criminal courts and international organizations, and is the winner of the American Society of Criminology DCCSJ Critical Criminology of the Year Award (2021).