

THE MANFIL CASE

Introduction:

In August 1992, after fifteen years of silence and anguish, Karina (20), Graciela (25) and Cristian (16) Manfil learned what had happened to their parents.

One morning in January 1991, Karina Manfil, came with her husband to the door of Sector 134, at the cemetery of Avellaneda, where EAAF has been excavating mass graves containing several hundred skeletal remains of people who disappeared in last Argentine military government (1976-1983). She said she had just turned 18 and was old enough to start searching for her disappeared relatives. Somebody had told her that her parents and her 9 year old brother were buried in some of the mass graves at the Avellaneda Cemetery.

Sector 134:

Since January 1988, EAAF has been working in Sector 134 of the Municipal Cemetery of Avellaneda, located 30 minutes south of Buenos Aires city.

This is the largest case EAAF has worked on Argentina. EAAF members work daily on the case, while also responding the international requests.

Sector 134 is a rectangular area (12 by 24 meters), located at the back of the cemetery. On one side, sector 134 is separated from the rest of the cemetery by a brick wall and a gate; on the other side, the area has a big gate that communicates with the street.

During the first two years of the dictatorship, while hundreds of people disappeared each month, the neighbors across the street observed military trucks and police and military personnel entering sector 134 through this lateral gate. They came at different times of day

and night, carrying bodies of young people that would be buried in mass graves in sector 134. Although this activity was suspected by many people, it wasn't until 1984, when democracy returned to Argentina that places like this could be investigated.

When EAAF arrived at the site, there was a small abandoned morgue adjacent to the graves. We repaired the structure and it serves now as the laboratory where the remains exhumed from the graves are examined and deposited. The grave site was covered by vegetation which we removed carefully so as not to change the shape of the underlying soil.

The work in sector 134 is divided into three steps 1) the preliminary investigation; 2) the archaeological work and 3) the laboratory work.

1) The preliminary investigation includes two types of data: the historical and pre-mortem.

Historical investigation: The investigation of administrative documents related to the site- cemetery records and death certificates- showed that, despite all the secrecy surrounding the repression, at least 220 people were entered in the cemetery registers as being buried in sector 134. From this total, 160 were non-identified young individuals, who had been killed by gunfire and brought to the cemetery by the local police or the military personnel based nearby. The cemetery records indicated that sector 134 was not a single mass grave but at least 19 mass graves, and several individual ones, containing from 1 to 30 bodies each.

According to those records, Sector 134 was only used from the beginning of 1976 until the end of 1978. These were the three first years of the military government, when the majority

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of the 10.000 people who disappeared in Argentina were kidnapped by security forces.

In order to identify the remains, EAAF has tried to establish patterns of *modus operandi* of the different security forces acting in the repression in that area of the province of Buenos Aires. In order to accomplish this step, EAAF is continually investigating 18 clandestine detention centers (CDC) which were functioning near the cemetery during the dictatorship: establishing relations between those CDCs and the various nearby cemeteries, including Avellaneda documents; movements of prisoners through CDCs; interviewing and examining several hundred testimonies from survivors who provided lists of people seen alive in those CDCs, as well as military, police and judiciary files that give information about the discovery of bodies, shoot outs- faked or not- between the security forces and guerrilla groups, etc. We also collect information about union and political groups active during those years, who were primary targets.

Collection of pre-mortem data: the collection of physical information about the victims when they were alive: race, stature, age, sex, laterality, old fractures, diseases, dental information, X-rays, pathologies, etc. The information is gathered through several interviews with relatives, medical doctors and odontologists of the victims.

The historical investigation helps to establish which ones are the possible families that need to be interviewed.

The preliminary investigation about sector 134 continues up to today.

2) The archaeological excavation of the site finished in March 1992. Three hundred and twenty four skeletons were recovered; around 50% more than expected.

3) The laboratory work started in 1990 and continues up to today . It consists in the washing, labeling, reconstruction of

the fractured bones, determination of race, sex, age, stature, laterality, pathologies and traumas, dental charts, cause of death, and finally, identity.

EAAF compares the information obtained from the skeletal remains with the information coming from the preliminar investigation. Until today, eight people have been identified including the Manfil Family¹ .



Silvana Turner, EAAF member, excavating at Sector 134.

The Manfil Case:

In the early hours of October 27, 1976, a group of security forces, formed by policemen from the Buenos Aires Province and Army personnel, attacked an apartment in a housing project, located on the third floor of Lafuente Street, in the neighboring of Villa Corina, Avellaneda. Inside the apartment were the Manfil family who owned the house: Carlos L. Manfil (30) ; his wife, Angelica Zarate de Manfil (28) and three of their four children: Karina (4), Carlitos (9)

¹ The names of the identified people are: Mercedes Hourquebic de Francese; Luis Adolfo Jaramillo, Lidia Massironi de Perdoni; Maria Adela Garin de De Angelis; Rosario Ramirez, Carlos Laudelino Manfil, his wife , Angelica Zarate de Manfil and his son , Carlitos Alberto Manfil.

and Cristian (6 months). Graciela (12), the older daughter, was sleeping at her grandmother's house that night. Another family was temporally staying with the Manfils: Rosario Ramirez (30) and her husband Jose Vega and their two children: Adolfo (9) and Marcela Vega (11). Carlos Manfil, an employee at the Botanical Garden of Buenos Aires, as well as Jose Vega, were members of the Peronist Party.

All the children were sleeping in the same room. When the attack started, Carlitos leaned out of the window and received a gunshot wound in the forehead. He fell dead over Karina. She moved his body and hid under the beds, together with the other children. She heard her mother screaming, next door: "don't shoot; there are children inside". The next thing they saw were military boots opening the door of their room with a kick and a burst of bullets over them. Karina was wounded in the leg; Adolfo, was wounded in his arm and leg and Marcela, in her chest. Cristian, who was with his mother, was not wounded. The three wounded children were taken by firemen to a Hospital, where they stayed about a month. Adolfo and Marcela went to live with one their aunts; Karina, Graciela and Cristian stayed with their grandparents. The children from the two families never saw each other again.

Karina knew that his brother was killed but she was not sure what happened to her parents. Like many of the relatives of disappeared people, she thought there was some possibility that they might still be alive.

Angelica Zarate was killed inside of the apartment; Jose Vega, Carlos Manfil and Rosario Ramirez tried to escape by climbing down the drainpipes. Only Vega succeed; Manfil and Ramirez fractured their legs on their way down and were killed immediately after. (Vega was kidnapped a year later by security forces and disappeared). The bodies were not returned to the families and their whereabouts were uncertain though they were thought to be at Sector 134.

The Role of EAAF:

After several interviews with different members of the Manfil and Zarate family, pre-mortem forms were completed and EAAF members went to several courts to see if there was any information about the events. EAAF found death certificates of the three adults and the children in the registration office of the area. They were in fact buried in Sector 134.

Among the 324 skeletons from Sector 134, in square B8, EAAF recovered the remains of an approx. 10 year old child, with an entrance gunshot wound in his frontal bone. No other children with this feature was recovered from sector 134. His remains were found together with several other adult skeletons: among them, three adult skeletons were selected as possibly corresponding to Carlos Manfil, Angelica Zarate and Rosario Ramirez. But the pre-mortem information of the four of them was insufficient.

At the end of 1991, we found a file, issued by a military court, where -although parts of the facts were changed or deleted- there were pictures and autopsy reports of the bodies. We compared the wounds described in the autopsy reports with the wounds that we found in the skeletal remains of the four selected skeletons and there was an important degree of consistency. However, we still had some doubts.

The Recovery of Genetic Material from Skeletal Remains:

Due to the doubts mentioned above, EAAF decided to send bone samples of the selected skeletons to the laboratory of Dr. Erika Hagelberg, at Oxford University in England. Dr. Hagelberg was able to recover genetic material from the bones and established that there was a filial relation between two of them.

We also sent samples of teeth of the selected skeletons to the laboratory of Dr. Marie Claire King, at the



One of the mass graves at Sector 134.

University of California /Berkeley, together with blood samples of the presumed relatives of the victims. Dr. King extracted mitochondrial DNA from the dental pulp of the teeth . (Mitochondrial DNA is transmitted through the maternal side of the family). Thus, Dr. King compared the Mt. DNA extracted from the teeth of the child and the female skeleton supposed to be Angelica Zarate and compared it with the Mt. DNA present in the blood samples of Karina Manfil (Karina and Carlitos inherited the same Mt. DNA from her mother). Dr. King compared the MT DNA extracted from the male skeleton

supposed to be Carlos Manfil and compared it with the blood sample of his mother (Karina's paternal grandmother).

In August 1992, the results were ready. In all of the three cases, the identifications were positive, confirming that the selection of skeletons done previously was correct.

Fortunately, the Federal Court of Appeal, presided by Dr. Costa, accepted the anthropological and genetic reports, making possible the speedy return of the remains to the family, and creating an important judicial precedent by accepting the evidence of the genetic test.

The remains of the three members of the Manfil family were buried in December, 1992.

This is the first time ever that identifications of skeletal remains have been done through the recovery of genetic material from dental pulp. We express our gratitude to Dr. King and Dr. Hageberg who volunteered their efforts to this project.

The positive results of the genetic techniques advances our work enormously. Many cases could now be solved by applying this new technology. It is a powerful scientific tool with direct and immediate consequences for thousands of families who are fighting for their right to recover the remains of their disappeared loved ones .

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The Case of Colonia Montes de Oca:

The Colonia Montes de Oca is located 100 km. from Buenos Aires city. It is an rural state institution for the mentally retarded. In April 1992, the judicial authorities discovered a series of crimes in which the director of the Colony was supposed to be involved: theft of public money, traffic of human organs and the suspicious death and disappearance of various patients and of one staff medical doctor. The Federal judge of Mercedes, Province of Buenos Aires, Dr. Heredia, asked EAAF to exhume the remains which may have belonged to Marcelo Ortiz, one of the patients of the Mental Institution.

Marcelo Ortiz was severely retarded and could not even walk; he had to crawl. When he was 9 years old, he was admitted to Colonia Montes de Oca. In September, 1988, after 7 years of being interned- Marcelo was already 16 years old- he was moved to the adult room of the colony. That night there was a big fight in the room between two other

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mental retarded patients that wanted to sexually abuse Marcelo. He disappeared that night.

Twenty days later, a decomposed body was found within the area of the colony. The officials assumed it was Marcelo's but due to the degree of decomposition, were not able to recognize him. The dentist from the colony compared Marcelo's dental chart with the dentition of the body. He found several similitudes but two teeth were missing in the body that were in Marcelo's chart. Though the dentist recognized that Marcelo's chart was not updated, he was not sure if it was Marcelo's body. Then, the officials declared it was not his body and buried that corpse as an N.N. (John Doe).

In 1992, EAAF was called by the judge conducting the investigation to exhume and analyze the remains buried as N.N. The conclusions of the analysis of the skeletal remains were consistent with Marcelo's race, age , stature and more important with bone treats which are consistent with a Hurler syndrome, a disease Marcelo was diagnosed when he was a child. No person with these features disappeared in the area during the last 20 years.

We believe there are great possibilities that the skeletal remains that we exhumed belong to Marcelo Ortiz. However, in order to confirm his identification, the only tool that is left is to try to recovery Mithochondrial DNA. Therefore, we sent a blood sample of Marcelo's maternal grandmother along with one of Mr. Ortiz's teeth, to the laboratory of Dr. King, at the University of California/Berkeley . We are presently waiting for the results.