

**Assessing the Impact of Perpetrator Narratives on the Quest for Justice and Truth:  
A discussion of the book, *The Flight: Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior***

1. **Recommended Level of Instruction:** Designed for a mid-upper level undergraduate course. Lesson can be modified to fit the level of prior exposure to the topic of human rights and transitional justice (see below)
2. **Keywords:** Narratives and human rights, perpetrators, Argentina
3. **Learning Objectives:** Students will be able to identify and assess the various impacts that personal narratives can have on restorative and retributive justice efforts.
4. **Readings / Materials:** Verbitsky (1996) *The Flight: Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior*. Entire book or Chapters 1-3; 15-16. (p1-17, 139-170) depending on the level of prior exposure to the topic. If students have little prior knowledge of human rights in Latin America or the politics of transitional justice, assigning the entire book will provide more context.
5. **Synopsis of Material:** *The Flight* is narrative account of journalist Horacio Verbitsky's personal interviews with Francisco Scilingo, a former Argentine naval officer during the Dirty War. In the book, Scilingo confesses to participating in torture and the infamous "aerial transports," in which sedated political prisoners would be thrown out of airplanes into the Atlantic Ocean. When released in Spanish (as *El Vuelo*), the book became a bestseller in Argentina. In the English edition, chapters 15-16 recount the reaction of Scilingo and the Argentine people to the publishing of *El Vuelo*.
6. **Recommended Background Information:** None is needed, but students will be able to more deeply assess the impact of personal narratives on transitional justice mechanisms if they have some background knowledge of retributive and restorative justice processes. Students with no background knowledge of the Dirty War in Argentina should be assigned the entire book (instead of just selected chapters).
7. **Discussion Questions / Activity**
  - Provide some background information about the context in which *El Vuelo* was released.
  - Discuss the public reaction to the publishing of the book
    - In what ways can personal narratives provide truth and/or justice to victims and families?
  - Ask students to discuss their reactions to reading the narrative. What do they think about Scilingo? Do they find him believable? Why or why not?
  - Discuss recent developments of the case (do not share this information until this point in the class)
    - In 1997, after volunteering to go to Spain to testify against high ranking members of the Argentinean military regime, Scilingo was arrested for the crimes that he confessed to in *El Vuelo*. In 2005, Scilingo was convicted for crimes against humanity and sentenced to 640 years in prison. He was the first officer from the Argentinian military junta to be jailed in a foreign court. During the trial, Scilingo reversed his past statements and claimed that he made up the entire narrative.

- There are many news articles about the case available online: (example: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4460871.stm>)
- Discuss whether their feelings about the narrative have changed. If they have, why?
- Discuss the various ways that narratives can contribute (or complicate) quests for justice.

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