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Genealogies of Nothing: Enforced Disappearances, Fable Lives, and Archives in Erasure

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ABSTRACT. This article investigates the political impact of collective story-telling practices in the enforced disappearances from a Foucauldian perspective. I utilize two main theoretical frameworks: on the one hand, that of necropolitics, a kind of power that works on the management of death. On the other hand, that of genealogy as a type of history that mobilizes subjugated knowledges. The first part situates these stories within the framework of genealogy: subjugated knowledges that are buried and disqualified as a part of the work of necropolitics. The second part argues that a Foucauldian genealogical approach to these stories is insufficient: necropolitical archives, when they testify to the work of power, remain incomplete at best and actively erase more often. The third part analyzes these stories as examples of critical fabulation. What is at stake in the insistence of the people searchers to tell their stories, I argue, is the collective emergence of another kind of fable – an act of fabulation in line with what Saidiya Hartman calls “critical fabulation,” which multiplies the possibilities of the present and the past by precisely telling stories of ‘nothing.’

Keywords: Necropolitics, Enforced Disappearance, Archives, Critical Fabulation, Resistance.

INTRODUCTION

The fable, in the proper sense of the term, is that which deserves to be told.

Michel Foucault, “*Lives of Infamous Men.*”

Soacha is a suburb of Bogotá, Colombia. Between 2002 and 2008, the bodies of many young men from Soacha were regularly found thousands of miles away from the suburb, bruised with marks of torture and combat, armed with weapons, and dressed in uniforms belonging

to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).¹ According to reports, each person was killed in combat with the Colombian military. The families of over 3000 identified bodies, however, claim that guerrilla activity is not a unifying category among the deceased. Human rights organizations name these bodies from Soacha *Falso Positivos* (“False Positives;”) people who were kidnapped, murdered, and reported as ‘combat kills’ by the Colombian Army forces in order to boost the body counts in Colombia’s War on Terror.² While the number of “false positives” is estimated to be around 10,000, the exact number is unknown, and an official record of orders to boost body counts is missing.³

This absence of official numbers and records is not unique to the Colombian *Falso Positivos*. Indeed, much of the enforced disappearances are unrecorded, with estimates of the number of the disappeared ranging between 15,000-83,000 people in Colombia, 3,000 to 12,000 in Peru, 10,000 to 120,000 in Chile, and 4,000 to 45,000 in Mexico.⁴ The high margins between estimates speaks to the difficulty in establishing a “fact” out of approximations. Despite such difficulty in figuring out what exactly happened, many of the organizations consisting of the relatives of the disappeared say that they will not be silenced and will not stop searching. For example, the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo, the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, who have been meeting every Sunday for the last 30 years, say that they will not stop meeting as long as they live, for they meet in order to tell the stories of their loved ones. In Turkey, the Saturday Mothers have been holding up the photographs of their disappeared loved ones, each week telling a story of one.⁵

The disappeared and their bodies, however, are harder to find than the stories of the loved ones. Indeed, much of the high margins in the count of the disappeared is due not only to the absence of records but also the absence of bodies. Lot 29 in the General Cemetery of Santiago, Chile, was originally used to dispose of the bodies of the disappeared, where initially over 300 bodies were buried each day between 1973-1979. However, in 1979 the “Operation Television Withdrawal” involved the excavation of Lot 29 and other such official mass burial sites, where the bodies were removed and airdropped over mountainous regions and the ocean.⁶ Doña Nena González, the caretaker of Lot 29, says she would tell the stories, but there are no longer any bodies. In the absence of records and bodies, there is nothing. As Saidiya Hartman asks in the face of archival erasure, how do you tell a story of nothing?⁷ The goal of this article is to take seriously the demand of the relatives of the disappeared, or the remnants, as they call themselves, to tell their stories: instead of explaining the ‘why’ of

¹ For further details, see “On Their Watch Evidence of Senior Army Officers’ Responsibility for False Positive Killings in Colombia,” HRW.com, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/24/their-watch/evidence-senior-army-officers-responsibility-false-positive-killings> (accessed May 17, 2023).

² “Extra Judicial Executions,” *Colombiareports.com* <https://colombiareports.com/false-positives/> (Accessed May 17, 2023).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Mária Fernanda Perez Solla, *Enforced Disappearances in International Human Rights* (2006).

⁵ Bozkurt, Hatice and Özlem Kaya, *Holding Up The Photograph: Experiences of the Women Whose Husbands Were Forcibly Disappeared* (2014).

⁶ Peter Read and Marivic Wyndham, *Narrow But Endlessly Deep: The Struggle for Memorialization in Chile Since the Transition to Democracy* (2016).

⁷ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2008), 128.

this insistence, my goal is to analyze the ‘how’ of it, in the sense of asking what this insistence ‘does.’ In doing so, I focus on two main theoretical frameworks: on the one hand, that of necropolitics, thus discussing the role of this insistence from the perspective of a kind of power that works on the production and maximization of death. On the other hand, that of genealogy, questioning what this story telling involves from the perspective of a history that aims to mobilize subjugated knowledges. The article is divided into three main sections. The first part focuses on the role of archival erasure in the context of necropolitics. Here, I will argue that the work of necropolitics occurs as a certain kind of fabulation where erasure of the archive functions to erase the distinction between the real and the fictional. The second part of the paper turns to the possibilities of telling other kinds of stories by focusing on Foucault’s analysis of archival genealogies. Enforced disappearances and the knowledge thereof, I argue, constitute examples of fables that play into the dramaturgy of the real. A genealogical approach to these stories, however, poses problems: necropolitics works through erasures and fabulations, and thus archives, when they testify to the work of power, remain incomplete at best and more often actively erase. Thus, the last part questions what kind of an archival approach is necessary by asking what such stories do, and it analyzes the actors, events, and time of these stories. In the insistence of the searchers in telling their stories, I argue, what is at stake is the collective emergence of another kind of fable; an act of fabulation in line with what Saidiya Hartman calls “critical fabulation,” which multiplies the possibilities of the present and the past by precisely telling stories of nothing.

I. GENEALOGIES OF NECROPOLITICS

In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault discusses genealogy as a method of interacting with what he calls “subjugated knowledges.”⁸ There are two modes of subjugated knowledges that he talks about here: the first one is the kind where the contents have been actively disguised in relation to political practices, the knowledges that were “buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systematization,” and the second “the kinds of knowledges that have been disqualified from counting as knowledge.”⁹ He thus gives a summative description of genealogy as a history of “the buried and the disguised,” a historical knowledge of “struggles.”¹⁰ Genealogies, he says, are “insurrection of knowledges,” the insurgence of the kinds of knowledges that take place on the local level, the local discursivities, and most importantly, their “desubjugation.”¹¹ This historical knowledge both gives a story of struggles and also struggles with the subjugation of knowledges.¹²

The former of the subjugated knowledges that Foucault discusses, what he calls “the buried,” are the kinds of knowledges where the contents do not match the official or dominant discourse. These are the kinds of knowledges that encounter active dismissal and denial, that

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended, Lectures at Collège de France, 1975-1976*, (1997) 11.

⁹ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² For further discussion on the two types of subjugated knowledges and their relation to genealogy, see Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (2009) 53-54.

are buried deep within in the archive, and that may or may not ever see the light of day afterwards. In many senses, archival disappearance can be seen as an example of this kind of subjugation of knowledge. Of the *Falso Positivos*, for example, about 3000 are identified, with the efforts of Mothers of Soacha, and some of them (though not all) are given burials after that.¹³ The erasing act of enforced disappearance targets the body and the memory of both the archive and the person. In Avery Gordon's words, "a key aspect of state-sponsored disappearance is precisely the elaborate suppression and elimination of what conventionally constitutes the proof of someone's whereabouts. The disappeared have lost all social and political identity: no bureaucratic records, no funerals, no memorials, no bodies, nobody."¹⁴ What is lost and what is disappeared, in the cases of the enforced disappearances, becomes not only the instances of detention, or how and where they were detained or disappeared, but the elimination of all proof that could point to the whereabouts of the disappeared at a given time. The absence of records of detention is mimicked with the erasure of the individuals themselves from the public records. In most of the cases of disappearance, there are no records of the disappeared: no records of death or funeral, but also no records of detention, court orders, and, in many cases, no records of birth. The name of the disappeared may become a forbidden subject where uttering the name in public might put the speaker at risk of detention.¹⁵ As Banu Bargu explains, erasure may involve the eradication of the possibility of remembering, where those who remember can also disappear.¹⁶ In the absence of records, there is no person, no body, and no one to disappear in the first place; in the absence of utterances, there is no loss, nothing to grieve, and nothing to remember. Bargu calls this process "invisibilization," which "renders bodies, history, and violence invisible."¹⁷

Nevertheless, invisibilization is not only an effect of complete deletion but can also take the shape of the proliferation of records – or the displacement of records with the production of new ones. As hard it is to find records of the disappeared, for example, there are records of enemies: 'subversives', 'terrorists', or 'traitors' all appear in the records as figures that have neither person nor name attached to them. These nameless titles of enmity have a long history in the case of enforced disappearances insofar as they mark precisely that shift from the absence of records to the presence of too many records. In and through such proliferation of titles of enmity, the disappeared often cease to be subjects: the possible ties between the subject and the state, or the subject and the community, become invisible together with the histories of violence, thereby disqualifying claims for the kind of juridical subjectivity attached to sovereignty that would interact with the subjects on the basis of rights – on the basis of the

¹³ For further information on the efforts of the Mothers of Soacha, see Paul Angelo, "Colombia: False Reports, Failed Justice," Latin American Bureau, <https://lab.org.uk/colombia-false-positives-failed-justice/> (Accessed May 17, 2023).

¹⁴ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), 80.

¹⁵ Alpkaya, Gökçen. "Kayıplar Sorunu ve Türkiye," *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 50:3 (1995), 48.

¹⁶ The records disappear, and, sometimes, those who remain disappear as well later on. Such is the case of Kemal Birlik, for example: when he was discharged from his sentence of over two years, his two relatives went to pick him up. That was the last time anyone has seen him or his two relatives. Banu Bargu, "Sovereignty as Erasure: Rethinking Enforced Disappearances," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23:1 (2014), 61.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

right to live or the right to die. In the case of the Dirty War of Argentina, for example, where the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo have been continuing one of the longest lasting modes of political action for over five decades now, the entire number of the disappeared is far from known, apart from, once again, the nameless title of the “subversives.”¹⁸ The title points to neither a concrete entity nor a concrete group of people but rather to any and all ideological opposition of the government: Catholicism as well as Judaism, divorce and prostitution, and alcoholism or homosexuality would all be justificatory explanations for the title.¹⁹ In turn, the absence of a coherent definition for who/what counts as subversive would help erase not only those marked as such but also any mode of violence inflicted upon them. As Diana Taylor writes, “Non-human non subjects do not exist in juridical systems,”²⁰ and any acts that befell them also do not exist as such. As General Ramón Camps once said on the issue of the *desaparecidos*: “it was not people that disappeared, but the subversives.”²¹ The absence of records on disappearance is countered by the proliferation of records on the subversives.

This doubling produces what Foucault calls an ‘ensemble’ where the knowledge of the disappeared is buried deep within, precisely in order to enact the task of necropolitics: if there are no people, there is no death; if there is no death, there is nothing to mourn.²² This ensemble has a ‘system of functioning,’ indeed, as an archive, where, as Foucault says, statements become sayable and knowable in accordance with the regularities established by the ensemble: in the archive, there are no people disappeared but only subversives; there is no death, nothing to mourn, and the names of the disappeared or the word ‘disappearance’ may not be sayable.²³ The disappeared perish once again in this system of functioning and become buried by titles of enmity and nonsensical statements.

The functional titles of enmity are inseparable from an act of defense done in the name of the health and well-being of the rest of the population; an act of defense that Foucault names biopolitical racism. For Foucault, biopower, unlike sovereignty, which works primarily through the threat to ‘take life or let live’ and therefore the public ritualization of death, is concerned with life. In doing so, biopolitics deploys methods such as statistical recording, data collection on birth and death rates, as well as disciplinary methods such as surveillance: surveillance, observation, and data collection are some of the primary methods of biopolitics in making life dependent on the work of power.²⁴ The prioritization of life as the main object of power, however, does not mean that death leaves the political sphere but rather that it becomes a secondary object. Racism is the ‘death function’ of biopolitics, where the latter turns into thanatopolitics, such that mass slaughter becomes justified through vital ends: racism provides a “life insurance connected to a death command,” and the logic of power turns into

¹⁸ Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s Dirty War* (1997), 148.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 150.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Quoted in *Disappearing Acts*, 148.

²² Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8:4(1984): 777-795.

²³ Michel Foucault, “Historical A Priori and the Archive” [1969], in *Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1972), 130.

²⁴ For further discussion on politics of data collection and its intersections with biopolitical regulation, see Colin Koopman, *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person* (2019).

“the more you kill, the more you will live.”²⁵ The kind of racism that Foucault discusses is not necessarily ethnic racism but, as Erlenbusch-Anderson helpfully explains, “a ‘principle of exclusion and segregation’ deployed to protect the health of the population from abnormal elements within.”²⁶ In this sense, the nameless titles of enmity, such as the ‘subversives,’ point precisely to that “justificatory operation of racism” that is deployed in the name of the defense of society.²⁷

Nevertheless, the archival disappearance of the disappeared is a question not only of the regulation of the life and well-being of the population but of the regulation of death or what happens to the dead. Achille Mbembe defines necropolitics as the kind of power that is operative in the contemporary world and accounts for the regulation and management of death and the dead. Dovetailing biopolitics, that is, existing distinctly but together with biopolitics, what we see in necropolitics is a kind of power that, “under the name of war, or terror, makes the destruction of its enemy its primary objective.”²⁸ Unlike Foucauldian thanatopolitics that kills in the name of life, necropolitics works primarily on death.²⁹ Consequently, necropolitics denotes the deployment of weapons “in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*.”³⁰ Within death worlds, the organization of space and time are aimed at managing the death and the dead: an entire population becomes defined through their relation to death, such that the status of the ‘living dead’ makes death itself the normal condition of the space.³¹ One can think of the mountainous zones and the oceans where the bodies are airdropped, or the suburbs where people disappear in order to re-emerge as dead enemies, as such topographies of violence or death worlds: the condition of life has an underlying affinity with death, and this kind of an affinity with death carries over from spaces to archives, while people whose lives and deaths disappear in topographies of violence also disappear from the lines of the archive.

Thus, if the archive is, as Foucault says, the “general system of the formation and transformation of statements,” a necropolitical archive is one where what is sayable and knowable reflects an affinity with death: within this affinity, people, events, or entire populations are

²⁵ Racism for Foucault is where biopolitics has access to the sovereign power to kill. See Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*: “What is in fact racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (254).

²⁶ Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire* (2018), 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15:1 (2003), 12.

²⁹ Penelope Deutscher’s analysis is particularly helpful in distinguishing Mbembe’s account of necropolitics from the notion of ‘thanatopolitics’: thanatopolitics describes direct and indirect killing that takes place in biopolitics in the service of health, well-being, or reproduction of life (and specific forms of life), and, as such, it still takes life as its object and objective. Necropolitics, however, takes death as its object and objective; as such, death does not take place as a by-product of the work of administration, securitization, or policing of life but is rather the key element of an entire economy of relations of power in and of itself. For more on this, see Penelope Deutscher, *Foucault’s Futures: A Critique of Reproductive Reason* (2017), 103.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

³¹ In this sense, the work of necropolitics is distinct from traditional forms of sovereignty that Foucault talks about as well: unlike in the case of sovereignty, where power is individualized or centralized, and where death is ritualized, in necropolitics, the work of power is decentralized, and death is devoid of ritual.

situated on the verge of disappearance.³² Such an archive is constituted not by testimonies to lives and deaths but rather a bundle of statements that are constituted by irregular, and at times phantasmic statements. Thus, even though the necropolitical archive fails in providing testimony to lives and deaths, there is a sense in which it is not exactly nothing that becomes apparent in it. There are no records of death, for example, nor are there records of life. And yet, the archive still exists on its own. In the case of Colombia, there are no records of the number of people who were buried in order to boost the body count of murdered guerrillas. However, there are records of the number of weapons that were held by the Colombian Military on a monthly basis, and gaps in the records suggest the amount of weapons that the dead were dressed in to be buried with.³³ As the records and bodies are erased, what remains is a fabulation of sorts in necropolitics: the story of the killing of an enemy; the story of the death of a terrorist. Indeed, to think that there is nothing would be to overlook the story of power itself or, as Mbembe says, to overlook the fact that “the work of power also involves a process of ‘enchantment’ in order to produce ‘fables.’”³⁴ Gaps in the archive do not amount to nothing but form a fable together – an enchantment. Thus, the intensive criminalization that the disappeared face posthumously can be seen as an example of such fables of power: the fables of power produce modes of rationalization and evidencing that, in and of themselves, do not make a coherent whole but are nevertheless necessary for their work as a functional ensemble.

As Mbembe says, “there can be no ‘fable’ without its own particular array of clichés and verbal conventions notable for their extravagance and self-regard, the purpose of which is to dress up silliness in the mantle of nobility and majesty.”³⁵ The purpose of the fable is not that of creating a rational whole. Rather, fables in necropolitics produce nothing but ‘silliness’: silences, pieces of information that do not fit, apart from the fact that they are present, said, and done. The insistence of the ‘remnants,’ as they call themselves, of the Mothers of Soacha, the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo, or the Saturday mothers on ‘telling their story,’ telling the stories of their loved ones, their lives, deaths, detentions, or daily habits, becomes especially relevant to consider in the context of the fabulations of necropolitics in an attempt to think about the different possibilities of fables or different ways of thinking about histories. The world of necropolitics, conversely, is filled with fables: fables of enmity, fables of terror, fables with clichés and verbal conventions of various sorts. The stories that the relatives of the disappeared insist on telling do not “fill up” emptiness as much as talk over the fabulations of necropolitics.

Inasmuch as they do not fill up the voids of necropolitics, the stories of the remnants resemble more the second kind of subjugated knowledges that Foucault talks about: not the ‘buried’ but “the disqualified”. These are the kinds of knowledges that are “singular, local knowledges, the noncommonsensical knowledges that people have, and which have been in

³² Foucault, “Historical A Priori and the Archive,” 131.

³³ See Joe Parkin Daniels, “Colombian army killed thousands more civilians than thought, study claims,” *theguardian.com*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/08/colombia-false-positives-scandal-casualties-higher-thought-study> (accessed May 17, 2023).

³⁴ Achille Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62:1 (1992), 15.

³⁵ Mbembe, “Provisional Notes,” 15-16.

a way left to lie fallow, or even kept in margins.”³⁶ Indeed, the stories are drastically different from all other modes of records that surround enforced disappearances: against absences, they are filled with presences, against clichés, there are memories, against titles of enmities, there are dreams and nightmares. For Foucault, genealogies emerge from coupling together the buried and the disqualified, from the mobilization of these kinds of knowledges against unitary or centralizing attempts of power effects on knowledge: genealogies are “insurrections of knowledges,” as Foucault says: a genealogical approach to the stories of the remnants would precisely be aimed at mobilizing these stories.³⁷

The question, however, is about the relation between these stories and the archive: what does it mean to approach these stories as an archive, and what kind of an archive do they form? As Foucault’s account of genealogy emphasizes the archive as a domain of discursive regularities, of statements that are sayable, that fit within a general ensemble of discourse, and that are or could be supported by other statements and records, the consideration of these stories would necessitate another approach. What kind of a genealogical engagement would be at stake when the archive at hand is not an ensemble of statements that match and fit within each other but rather contains stories that are neither sayable nor enunciable – stories that amount to nothings of the archive? What would it mean to mobilize these archives? Against what centralizing power effects are they mobilized? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to interrogate the possibilities of non-written archives and interrogate what these archives do from the perspective of genealogy.

II. INFAMOUS DISAPPEARANCES

In “Lives of Infamous Men,” Foucault talks about his engagement with the archive as an attempt to find lives that are about to disappear into the archive. The few lines that mark these lives give them an existence that is on its way to disappearance even as they are being written; an existence, nevertheless, that has a shifting place in what is real and not fictional. These lives, he says, are very much real existences and not literary fictions or imaginary lives: one should be able to “ascribe a place and date to them” that exist in one point and place in history.³⁸ One way to think about the lives that emerge in the stories of the remnants is this: a glimpse of existences that are on their way to disappearance; a way of talking about brief lives that one would have to be lucky to encounter in the archives.

The lives that Foucault talks about are ‘infamous’ or ‘obscure’ lives. Rather than famous existences that take up pages of history, these people do not exist beyond a couple of lines, if there are any lines about them at all: it is important, he says, to consider that “nothing prepared them for any notoriety” and that “they would not have been endowed with any of the established and recognized nobilities.” They are not marked by nobility, beauty, heroism, genius, or any other classification that would distinguish these lives from all

³⁶ *Society Must Be Defended*, 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Michel Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men” [1977], in *Power*, ed. James Faubion (1994), 160.

others or make them subjects of history.³⁹ In short, “the existence of these men and women comes down to exactly what was said about them: nothing subsists of what they were or what they did, other than what is found in a few sentences.”⁴⁰ The bodies in Lot 29,” or the “false positives,” or those who exist in the stories of Saturday Mothers can be seen as such ‘infamous’ existences: existences that are not marked by any element of notoriety or nobility; not wealth, birth, nor any other form of celebrity. Inasmuch as these lives are very much real, rather than imaginary, there is a certain way in which the distinctions between the real and the imaginary gets blurred in their existences, precisely because their existence comes down to what is said about them, and that, insofar as the archive is concerned, they may as well not have existed.

Marking these lives, however, following Foucault, does not simply bear testimony to them: even though these are people who lived and died, “with their meannesses, sufferings, vociferations, and jealousies,” one does not see any of these in the few lines that remain from them.⁴¹ Rather, the “beam of light that illuminates them” is nothing but the work of power.⁴² In the cases of Foucault’s examples, the records of detention, asylum, and police reports are the only things that mark these existences. Thus, Foucault talks about these as “lives that are as though they hadn’t been, that survive only from the clash with a power that wished only to annihilate them or at least to obliterate them.”⁴³ The very work of power, in this sense, makes them emerge, as Lynne Huffer says, “out of the anonymous murmur of beings who pass without a trace.”⁴⁴ In telling their stories, thus, Foucault says, “the dream would have been to restore their intensity in an analysis,” or at least to “assemble a few rudiments for a legend of obscure men, out of the discourses that, in sorrow or in rage, they exchanged with power.”⁴⁵ Doing so would primarily mean providing a witness for that flash of power that struck them, witnessing their annihilation, or obliteration, forming a legend not of who they are or were but rather of that moment in each of these lives where they “came up against power” one way or another and struggled with it.⁴⁶ Thus, the work of power for Foucault makes existences that otherwise would have passed without a trace stand out in the archive, leave a trace, however minor, in the functional ensemble of the archive.

In Foucault’s archives, power marks its own presence through the archive: there are detention records, medical records, records of arrest and confinement, records of release, birth dates, and dates of death; records that, if nothing else, testify that there was a person there who lived and died, and, even if their encounter with power was only for a split

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men,” 162.

⁴¹ “Lives of Infamous Men,” 160

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Lives of Infamous Men,” 165

⁴⁴ Lynne Huffer, “Foucault’s Fossils: Life Itself and the Return to Nature in Feminist Philosophy,” *Foucault Studies* 20 (2015), 139.

⁴⁵ “Lives of Infamous Men,” 158 and 162.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

second, that encounter was written down somewhere. Considering the work of biopolitics that Foucault analyzes, which consists precisely in the proliferation of records, this makes sense insofar as biopower already consists in the work of collecting data, in recording, in massifying information. However, when it comes to the work of necropolitics, this poses a problem, for necropolitics works not through collecting records but rather their erasure, invisibilization, and fabulation. In the cases such as enforced disappearances or “false positives,” witnessing the power that flashes on them is precisely the problem at hand: there are no records of their ‘clash with power’ inasmuch as the very technique of power is that of annihilation and obliteration not only of existences but also the records. That kind of testimony in written records is not afforded to many whose encounter with power precisely works in the obliteration of records.

Erasure from records poses a problem about what can be known and what can be told of these lives. Saidiya Hartman says, “the archive dictates what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told about the persons cataloged, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios.”⁴⁷ The few lines that mark the existences of Foucault’s infamous existences, the kinds of lines that testify to the work of power, are impossible lines when it comes to enforced disappearances. Moreover, inasmuch as the clash of power on the lives of the forcibly disappeared is very difficult to bear testimony to, what makes them infamous is not their lives but their deaths; or, the impossibility of accounting for their deaths as much as their lives: they are infamous because no one knows what happened to them, whether they are living or dead, or how they died. Despite this impossibility, the tales of each disappearance are very acutely told by remnants. Mothers of Soacha, Plaza Del Mayo, and Saturday Mothers recount the day that their loved ones disappeared: the color of the pajamas that they were wearing, the exact time of their detention, the sound of the knocks of the door, the daily activities that they were performing at that moment, the last words that they heard them say. There are no lines of the archive yet there are stories: stories of disappearance, stories of violence, stories that refurbish one moment in time, a glimpse of a moment that existed and went away as quickly as that.

Interestingly, when Foucault talks about how he chooses the archival material to engage, he notes that memories or stories that appear like those of the Mothers of the Disappeared are precisely the kinds of archives that he avoided. The reason he gives is “their relation to reality” or the way in which they take up a role in the battlefield of reality. Thus, he says:

I likewise ruled out all the texts that might be memoirs, recollections, tableaux, all those recounting a slice of reality but keeping a distance of observation, of memory, of curiosity, or of amusement. *I was determined that these texts always be in relation, or, rather, in greatest possible number of relations with reality: not only they refer to it, but they be operative within it, that they form a part of the dramaturgy of the real: that they constitute the instrument of a retaliation, the weapon of a hatred, an episode in the battle, the gesticulation*

⁴⁷ Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 24

of despair or jealousy, an entreaty or an order. I didn't try to bring together texts that would be more faithful to reality than others.⁴⁸

Avoiding the stories that have tellers attached to them, for Foucault, thus, is necessary not because how real they are, or whether they are more real than others, but because of the specific relations that they build with reality: they play into the 'battlefield' of reality and constitute instruments, thus they can be instrumentalized and played along.

Indeed, there are many ways in which the telling of a story, or the telling of a memory, plays into the 'dramaturgy of the real' for the remnants. In Lot 29, for example, when the first round of exhumation was completed and the first set of bones sent to the relatives, reading the bones, telling the story of the deceased through reading the bones, became a way of claiming legal support as well as state retribution. As Peter Read and Marivic Wyndham discuss, once the relatives acquired the bones, each carefully read and explained, in painstaking, excruciating detail, every sign of torture, every trace of injury that remains: 'This is the trajectory where the bullet entered and exited his brain,'⁴⁹ "This is how many pieces the hand was fractured."⁵⁰ The narrative of horror in its most cruel and gruesome details becomes a way of attaching the body to its clash with power; a way of witnessing the work of power on the body beyond the lines of the written archive. Moreover, this narrative recounting has legal and political implications in the dramaturgy of the real for the remnants: for example, once the person is no longer 'disappeared' but 'executed,' the relatives become, as Read and Wyndham say, a part of the "the 'normal' community of mourners."⁵¹ The wife of the disappeared becomes the widow of the deceased and qualifies for pension and life insurance, the legal route of investigation becomes investigation for homicide, and the relatives can decide on a burial place where they visit the bones and bring flowers on holidays. Stories, specifically in the form of memories, play into the 'dramaturgy of the real' in this sense, particularly because they change the order of things in the real.

There are, however, limitations into what does and does not change in the dramaturgy of the real through speech. After all, it is important to avoid the teleology of resurrection when it comes to speech: speech does not bring the past alive, nor does it make the dead live again. As Foucault says, the function of archival work is not "bringing the past back to life."⁵² "They think I am the silly one," says one of the Saturday Mothers who has been going to Istiklal Street since the disappearance of her husband in 1996. "They tell me I am the silly one; as if I don't know that he is dead by now."⁵³ Many of the Saturday Mothers say that they know that their loved ones will more than likely not appear, just as they say that they will not stop grieving upon finding the bodies either. That the archive is shaped

⁴⁸ "Lives of Infamous Men," 160, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Read and Wyndham, *Narrow But Endlessly Deep*, 54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Foucault, *Speech Begins after Death, In conversation with Claude Bonnefoy* [1968] (2011), 44.

⁵³ Göral, Özgür Sevgi, Ayhan Işık, and Özlem Kaya, *Unspoken Truth: Enforced Disappearances* (2013).

by necropolitical fabrications means precisely that there is no “miraculous closure” that can be attained by telling their stories; that telling their stories will not bring about such recuperation. This is of particular interest when it comes to the decades old demand of Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo: *Aparición Con Vida*, “Bring Them Back Alive.” In the demand, the inability of speech in bringing back alive becomes clear: the Mothers do not claim to be doing the work of resurrecting through telling the stories, and the demand stands as precisely a demand that is posited.

Nevertheless, following Foucault’s approach to the archive, and thereby avoiding stories that play into the dramaturgy of the real, proves difficult when discussing stories that emerge in necropolitics. Just as necropolitics differs in its operation in not collecting but rather obliterating the records, the dramaturgy of the real within the context of necropolitics also works through different rules. It does not follow any supposed linear patterns between archive and reality, nor can the narratives of the remnants hold onto the stakes into reality that they claim. In the case of the first round of exhumations in Lot 29, many of the remnants who received a set of bones in bags learned later on that the bones belonged most likely not to their relatives: the traces that they read in those remains, the fractured bones, the bullet holes, and the pulled teeth, belonged to yet another anonymously buried one, told the story of another one, another deceased, another disappeared. Inasmuch as Neña Gonzales, the caretaker of the lot, was unable to identify the deceased from the photographs, so the state was unable to take names out of the contorted bodies found. Inasmuch as the stories themselves play into the battlefield of the real, such reality, the remnants got to learn, was shaped in and through fabrications, with narratives of torture attached to ‘wrong’ sets of bones, where the remains disappear once again, and disappearances once again find themselves in fables of anonymous skeletons and horrors of unknown corpses.

These stories, therefore, are not “faithful to the reality,” insofar as they do not represent a knowable or objective reality that exists outside of the fabrications of necropolitics. Nevertheless, they have real stakes both in terms of causing changes in the lives of those who remain and in the lives and deaths of those who are gone. Foucault, in *Speech After Death*, talks about “speaking over the corpse of others, to the extent that they are dead” in dealing with archives: when they testify, archives testify to the impossibility of attaching death to disappearance, to the very impossibility of “postulating their death,” and to the very impossibility of dealing with the death of others “to the extent that they’re already dead.”⁵⁴ Perhaps more importantly, there is the question of the possibility of putting the disappeared to death. Foucault, for example, suggests that while speech cannot bring the past back alive, this was never the point anyway; it was, rather, the “realization that the past is dead.”⁵⁵ Perhaps the stories, or the emphasis of the remnants in telling those stories, the stories of the lives of their relatives, the last time they saw them, or the stories that they read from their bones as to what happened to them, can be thought of in relation to such

⁵⁴ Foucault, *Speech Begins after Death*, 40.

⁵⁵ *Speech Begins after Death*, 44.

a realization: given that many of the cases of enforced disappearances have been going on for decades at this point, and given that what the remnants of the False Positives have at hand are precisely bodies that are dead, the question may be less of bringing them back to life through telling their stories and more of postulating their death; of precisely that realization that Foucault speaks of, that the “past is dead,” such that there can be some form of speech once again.

As Mbembe says, it is no easy feat to “seize from the world and put to death what has previously been decreed to be nothing.”⁵⁶ That archival temptation, to provide closure where there is none, “to create a space for mourning where it is prohibited,” neither produces a dead body where there is none nor mourns a dead body where there are too many.⁵⁷ Saturday Mothers call the act of officially declaring their disappeared dead “handing off their death,” as in giving away their death to the State: often times, this means that the relatives can claim their pension. Much too often, that task of “handing off their death” is precisely what the relatives avoid, even when this death plays into the necropolitical dramaturgy of the real. Such restraint in decreeing the loved one dead is important in accounting for the impossibility of ‘undoing’ the work of necropolitics through words or stories. Providing a new story neither ‘brings back’ the disappeared nor undoes the mountains of unburied bodies. As much as necropolitics fabulates in order to create limbos, the remnants do not create closures for such limbo either.

Foucault’s discussion of the archives and speech is thus helpful in that it describes a method of mobilizing subjugated knowledges by paying attention to the obscure lives of the archive: the archive provides a glimpse of lives that are about to disappear. However, much of the methodology that Foucault describes assumes that the written archive makes otherwise obscure lives stand out from the anonymous murmur of beings: written records of their clash with power beams a light on them, and speech allows them to be put to death. Both of these assumptions prove to be limited when it comes to the archives of necropolitics. Finding a witness to the work of power in written records proves impossible for necropolitics since it erases and fabulates rather than records. This very impossibility is inseparable from the necropolitical ‘dramaturgy of the real’ that is wrapped up in fabrications of sorts. As a result, speech does not put the disappeared into death either.

The stories of the remnants remain on the other side of making either life or death possible: the disappeared neither come back nor die, in the proper sense of the term. Thus, insofar as genealogy is an attempt at mobilizing subjugated knowledges, when it comes to the work of necropolitics that consists in making death disappear, this attempt cannot rely on written archives, nor can it rely on the general order of discourse that makes statements sayable. Rather, it must pay attention precisely to the stories that go beyond the limits of archives; stories that refuse to be determined by the limits of the archive. The question is what is mobilized in these stories. If they do not fill up gaps, bring the

⁵⁶ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (2001), 172.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

disappeared back, provide testimony to life, death, or work of power, then what is the function of fable and, in particular, fables of disappearance?

III. WHAT IS IN A STORY?

In voicing their demands to tell their stories, the remnants use different words seemingly interchangeably. They say, for example, that “they will not be silenced” in the same way that they announce that they will “share their stories,” or, as one of the Mothers of Soacha says, that theirs is a “tale (*cuento*)” that needs to be told, and Saturday Mothers say that they will continue “speaking.” In Spanish, such telling of *historia* refers both to giving an account of “history” and “story” at once, while many of the remnants still refer to such demand as that of telling a tale (*cuento*). In Turkish, the relatives refer almost exclusively to telling their story in telling a tale (*hikâye*) and in telling what came upon them (*basimiza gelenler*). Foucault says a “fable, in the proper sense of the term, refers to that which deserves to be told.”⁵⁸ In exchanging the stories and histories, the demand of the remnants lies on this: that whatever happened deserves to be told, and that there is a necessity in the stories that requires such telling.

The story at hand is not of a fairytale or a literary tale. Instead, they refer to loved ones that have disappeared, the events of the day that they disappeared, often the few days after the disappearance, and any interactions with the remains, if there were any: when the bones were found, when they received the bones, when they were told of their existence, what they ‘read’ of those remains (the torture, the fracturing, the lost limbs), if the bones were taken back (as in the case of Lot 29), when and how that happened, when they met other remnants, their activities from then on, and so on. When describing fables, Hartman says: “‘Fabula’ denotes the basic elements of story, the building blocks of the narrative,” or, as she cites Mieke Bal, “a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors. An event is a transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions. To act is to cause or experience an event.”⁵⁹ The events of the fable appear connected to each other on certain transformations. For example, many of the relatives of the disappeared refer to time in the stories in relation to their states: “that is when my father was still alive,” or “I was a pregnant woman then,” or “I was a young bride then.” The event itself prescribes a certain transformation in the states of the remnants, as when they went from being a pregnant woman to a single mother, for example, or from a young bride to the wife of the disappeared, and, always, to the state of being a ‘remnant’ or a ‘searcher.’ This transformation underlies the narrative of the story as well: in telling their stories, they refer to their current status exclusively as a ‘remnant’ or a searcher; a relative of the disappeared. If the fable transcribes a transformation, the fable of disappearance primarily transcribes the event through which the person changed status from being an ‘ordinary person’ of an obscure life to that of a searcher, an actor and an agent that exists in relation to necroverign assemblages, that plays into the web of power relationships that constitute necropolitics.

⁵⁸ “Lives of Infamous Men,” 168

⁵⁹ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12:2 (2008), 11.

Unlike Foucault's discussion, which focuses on finding the traces of infamous lives, however little these traces may be, in the archive, Hartman works specifically in the limits of archives, the liminal spaces that open up in the archives when the power is not writing but erasing; in the afterlives of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Nevertheless, Hartman says, "every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor."⁶⁰ According to Hartman, in the absence of archival records, critical fabulation enters as a method of mobilizing subjugated knowledges. Critical Fabulation, as a method, takes place not in the accounting of the fable of the event but rather in jeopardizing the status of the event. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Hartman provides an enactment of this work by focusing on the lives of young Black women at the turn of the century. In her account, the city becomes alive, young women move out of "journals of rent collectors; surveys and monographs of sociologists; trial transcripts; slum photographs; reports of vice investigators, social workers, and parole officers; inter-views with psychiatrists and psychologists; and prison case files, all of which represent them as a problem."⁶¹ In Hartman's fabulation, both the actors and the events are transformed. On the one hand, actors that are young women are transformed from problems or "surplus women of no significance, girls deemed unfit for history and destined to be minor figures" to "social visionaries or innovators."⁶² On the other hand, the events prescribed by social workers, parole officers, or slum photographers lose their status as events and leave their place to other events: events of existing otherwise, events of waywardness, or events of "imagining other ways to live."⁶³ Critical Fabulation appears as a method that "elaborates, augments, breaks open" archival documents in order to jeopardize the status of the event, multiply and replace it with many other events.

This kind of jeopardizing of the status of the event that Hartman enacts in *Wayward Lives* is done "by playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view."⁶⁴ Insofar as the event itself refers to the transformation from one state to another, such jeopardizing involves shifting around the building blocks of the narrative in order to displace the center of the narrative from the work of necropolitics to its peripheries. In the stories of the remnants, this kind of jeopardizing is done by mobilizing the everyday life, the mundane moments of living, in order to re-center the narrative. Many of the remnants, for example, when telling the story of when their loved ones disappeared, discuss this precisely in relation to everyday occurrences, situating it in the process of everyday life. "I was making the bed" they say, for example, and "lentils weren't blanched yet," and "I was breastfeeding the kid."⁶⁵ Insofar as "to act is to cause or experience an event," the stories of the searchers consistently shift the focus of the event from the act of disappearance back to their own status as actors that are in relation to and in

⁶⁰ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019), xiv.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11

⁶⁵ Göral et al., *Unspoken Truth*, 31.

response to it: disappearance becomes flesh and bone, the person gone becomes situated in another time, the time of the lentils blanching or the time of the kid being breastfed, unlike the time of disappearance; a time that exists somewhere.⁶⁶

As the time is that of lentils blanching, the stories of the remnants also attest to the 'impossibility' of the event. The event of the lentils blanching, for example, is the time of arrest or detention: "we were very poor, and they turned down all our beds," for example, "they held him by the arms and took him."⁶⁷ Sometimes they are not present in any part of the event: "I was breast-feeding the kid, and the neighbor told me they took him away."⁶⁸ The time of disappearance is an absent time; time that does not exist in the temporality of affairs nor fit within the time of death. One of the Saturday Mothers, who has not been able to locate the remains of her son, says "they say that he died. Did he die? How do I know that he died?"⁶⁹ Much of the stories of disappearance for the relatives move from the quotidian affairs to that of becoming a searcher, often skipping disappearance altogether. While there is a transformation that occurs for the status of the remnants, the event that marks that transformation, that of disappearance, is precisely what is missing in their stories. There is no time of disappearance, no event of disappearance either: time is that of lentils blanching, and the event is of the arrest or the beds being turned down.

Jeopardizing the status of the event does not just shift its focus from the work of power. Jeopardizing functions "to displace the received or authorized account," to open up another kind of account, in order to "imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done."⁷⁰ Indeed, the question of other pasts and other presents is a question that haunts improper burial: what would have happened if they had not opened that door? What would have happened if they had not known that person? What could have happened in disappearance, if not death? In this sense, the task of telling other stories, or putting the 'event' in question, becomes inseparable from the task of writing a history of the present, and yet that of another kind of present, another kind of present where they did not open the door, where the white car did not drive around the cities, or the person was present. Hartman says that writing "a history of the present strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead."⁷¹

Displacing the event from disappearance to that of beds turned down, and the time of the event from absence to that of lentils blanching, marks another kind of intimacy with the lives of the disappeared where their absence is inseparable from the most mundane moments of existence, such as making the beds, breastfeeding the kids, or harvesting the plots. As Mbembe says, for the remainder, "there opens a time after death," insofar as "death, as speech, does not imply silence, even less the end of possible representation of the dead."⁷² The question of what could have happened if they were present is inseparable from what could have

⁶⁶ "Venus in Two Acts," 12

⁶⁷ *Unspoken Truth*, 33.

⁶⁸ *Unspoken Truth*, 33.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ "Venus in Two Acts," 11

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 206.

happened if they were absent: imagining a present in which they are alive becomes in this sense as hard as imagining a present where they are dead, and imagining a present where they are walking around as difficult as one in which they are in a grave. If the representation of the dead does not end with the moment of death, neither does that of disappearance, which does not vanish the disappeared. Instead, it opens up other modes of presents, as well as other kinds of presences.

Inasmuch as critical fabulation is helpful in understanding the stories of the remnants in the displacement of events, there are significant stakes in understanding these stories from a genealogical standpoint as methods of mobilizing subjugated knowledges. The kind of archival engagement that Hartman enacts in *Wayward Lives* is largely informed by its specific connection to the kind of archival disappearance that Hartman works with, which resides specifically “in the wake,” as Christina Sharpe would say, of abyssal histories of Blackness, the kind of archival disappearance that marks the Middle Passage and its afterlives.⁷³ Thus, when describing her method of critical fabulation, Hartman describes it as “a history of an unrecoverable past.”⁷⁴ In the case of the stories of the remnants, however, one of the particular tasks of the story is to play into the dramaturgy of the real, and this is done as a collective act. Many of the remnants, thus, describe their stories not of the past as either recoverable or unapproachable. Instead, they refer to the stories precisely of their present, the stories of them becoming searchers, or the stories of them becoming remnants. For many of the searchers, the stories of the arrests, detentions, or that of finding the remains are inseparable from their stories of hearing about the meetings of the remnants or the stories of meeting each other for the first time. Many of the remnants tell their stories in relation to encountering the stories of others and, specifically, in relation to changing their life courses by such encounters: “I was walking to the gendarmerie station for the second time,” one of the Saturday Mothers says, for example, “when I heard that there are these other women that meet up in Istanbul, so I decided to go to Istanbul to meet them.”⁷⁵ The story of improper burial neither ends with its impossibility nor becomes the story of the disappeared only: just as the event is displaced, so is the subject, where disappearance becomes the search, the disappeared becomes the remnant, and the story of necropolitics becomes that of meeting, that of protesting, and that of organizing. In this sense, in the stories of the remnants, what becomes apparent is not the fabulation of an irrecoverable past but rather a history of the present; a present that is continuously shaped by mobilizing these stories.

For many of the searchers, the process of becoming a searcher entails a shift not only in their status but also in their activities, in the way they speak, the kinds of acts that they perform, and the way they spend their days. Nora Cortiñas, one of the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo, explains that becoming a Mother means getting used to “public life, new relationships, the loss of privacy, travelling a lot, using different forms of speech, preparing themselves to

⁷³ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016).

⁷⁴ “Venus in Two Acts,” 12.

⁷⁵ Bozkurt, Hatice and Özlem Kaya, *Holding Up The Photograph: Experiences of the Women Whose Husbands Were Forcibly Disappeared* (2014).

meet with people in power, speaking to the media, being recognized on the street.”⁷⁶ As Diana Taylor explains, being a “Mother” paradoxically entails letting go of the traditional scripts of motherhood in order to pursue a long durational movement that is shaped by telling stories as a political act.⁷⁷ Saturday Mothers discuss traveling all over the country, meeting others like them, organizing, and becoming politically active.⁷⁸ When the event is a non-event, the death a non-death, there are no actors in those fables either but rather other kinds of activities, other modes of organizations, and relations. Indeed, there opens a time after death, but the time after improper burial is another time filled with other pasts, futures, and presents, not only in imagining what could have been but also in multiplying the possibilities of the presents. In the impossibility of putting the disappeared to death, fables of disappearance neither bring back to life nor put to death what is gone but rather open other presents and other kinds of deaths, precisely by jeopardizing the status of the non-event.

Fables of disappearance, in this sense, are not merely stories to be told, nor do they function as stories told with impossible hopes of bringing back the dead or providing closure where there is none. They enact a specific kind of critical fabulation that plays into the dramaturgy of the real insofar as they function to blur the distinctions between the real and the fictional: in short, they are stories that do things. They shift the time of the event, they disrupt the order of things, and, perhaps most importantly, they introduce actors into necropolitical fabulations by way of conjuring the ghosts. In the demand of the relatives to tell stories, in their insistence to read fables out of their decaying bodies, what is at stake is another kind of acting, doing, and telling which jeopardizes the non-event that marks improper burial. A genealogical approach to such fables, moreover, reveals a different kind of genealogy altogether: a history of the present that moves beyond the limits of written archives in order to mobilize the subjugated knowledges that exist at the limits of archives, revealing a kind of mobilization that works precisely not to reveal the power that strikes but the kinds of memories, movements, and subjects that remain.

NECROPOLITICAL ENCHANTMENTS AND STORIES OF NOTHING

Genealogy, according to Foucault, entails a historical sense that plays into the field of power through its relation to the archive. Specifically, genealogy is the kind of historical engagement that aims to mobilize subjugated knowledges from within the archive: it provides an account for the knowledges that are buried and disqualified in the functional ensemble of the archive, pieces of information that are either hidden into the forgotten lines of dusty records or entire sets of knowledges and disqualified from counting as real or reliable knowledges. When it comes to the necropolitics of enforced disappearances, however, a genealogical approach to the written archive becomes precisely the problem: in enforced disappearance, invisibilization of the disappeared is accompanied by the erasure of records, where what remains in the

⁷⁶ Mabel Bellucci, “Childless Motherhood: Interview with Nora Cortinas, a Mother of the Plaza de Mayo, Argentina,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 7:3 (1999), 87.

⁷⁷ *Disappearing Acts*, 234.

⁷⁸ Bozkurt et al., *Holding Up The Photograph*.

archives testify only to the fabrications of necropolitics: fabrications of enmity and criminality, fabrications of non-existent people and disappeared weapons.

In this context, the stories of the remnants, and their insistence on finding and telling their stories, becomes especially important. These stories do not fill up emptiness as much as counter fabrications. Indeed, the stories of remnants play into the dramaturgy of the real: in this sense, they neither provide closure where there is none, as Hartman says, nor do they bring the past back alive or bring the dead back. Fable, Foucault says, is that which deserves to be told: the stories of the searchers jeopardize precisely the account of what deserves to be told by putting the event in question. The time of the fables of remnants shifts from the time of arrest to the time of everyday events, to the lentils bleaching, to the beds being made. The status of the event shifts from the event of violence to the event of a change in actors, the status of a change to becoming actor in a different kind of event, that of becoming a political actor, that of meeting others, that of organizing. More than anything, the stories of the remnants reveal precisely what is at stake in enforced disappearance: an event that is a non-event, a death that is not death, a present that does not follow from the past.

Death does not imply silence, and neither does disappearance: instead, it is filled with stories. In the insistence of the remnants to read the bones of anonymous remains, in weekly meetings that take place over decades, what takes place is the opening up of another kind of present, multiple presents, attesting to the constant telling and re-telling of stories of nothing in another time. Engaging with these stories reveals another kind of genealogical sense which moves beyond the limits of the written archive in order to mobilize that which deserves to be told.

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