**TIEMPO SUSPENDIDO /** *TIME SUSPENDED*

México, 2015 / DCP, Color / Documental 64 min.  
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**ABOUT THE PROJECT**

I was thirty-five years old when I came across an autobiography titled “Laura Bonaparte. A Mother of Plaza de Mayo Against Oblivion.” She was my grandmother and I knew her deeply, but that didn’t stop me from reading it. That is how I met another Laura, a different woman.

It seems to me that the book is divided in two parts: the first is about her childhood and told entirely as if it were a novel, a life that my grandma never told me about. From her childhood, she only talked about the Paraná river, the river where she learned how to swim.

The second part of the book begins with the disappearance of her children and ex-husband, in other words, the Laura I knew: psychologist, social activist, member of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.

By the time I read the book, she had been developing senile dementia for the past few years, and I felt that her memory was also fragmented.

In 2000, I filmed the documentary thesis with which I graduated from Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica. It is a documentary about the search for my father. I interviewed the members of my family who had been close to him before his forced disappearance during the last military dictatorship in Argentina. Among the interviewees, there was my grandma: my father’s mother. In that moment, I thought it was important to make a documentary about her and all her social and political works until that time, but it was an idea that somehow got left behind.

In 2011, I had a chance to watch the documentary “A Voice Among Many” by Humberto Ríos. It features a long interview with my grandmother, an interview that renewed my motivation and my belief in the importance of retelling the life and work of Laura, my grandmother. By that time, however, she had been diagnosed with senile dementia.

Laura Bonaparte was a very important figure in the field of universal Human Rights and in the development of some of psychology’s reflections, but what is particularly remarkable are her tireless efforts towards ensuring that society –societies– will not forget about the murders, thefts, kidnappings, and forced disappearances carried out by the military forces of the different countries she became involved with. However, I did not want to make a biography about her, and instead, I focused on memory, on what is important to remember and what isn’t, and what it is that we take with us when we are closest to death.

I wanted to make a documentary about life’s paradoxes: how could a woman who spent thirty-five years of her life devoted to the preservation of a country’s memory, to preventing the forgetfulness that is frequent condition in the history of societies, suffer from an ailment such as the loss of memory? Was it fair for Laura to suffer from such a disease?

It seemed to me like one of fate’s ironies, so I decided to make a documentary about memory and this particular paradox.

**ABOUT THE FILMING PROCESS**

Around mid-2011, I was able to travel to Argentina and visit my grandmother Laura. It had been four years since last I saw her and I knew that she wasn’t doing too well. She was eighty-five years old and she was suffering from senile dementia. It was very shocking to find her in a nursing home because she had always been a strong and independent woman. Seeing her there was particularly shocking because she did recognize me. I had simply been erased from her memory, so even after I explained who I was, she didn’t have enough information to be able to connect her memories to the fact that I was the daughter of one of her disappeared sons. She looked without seeing, she was completely lost.

That first visit was very painful and I was not able to stay there for longer than half and hour. A couple of days later I came back to the nursing home and I think that she was doing a little better because, even if she didn’t know who I was, she was able to recognize some familiarity in me and said: “You are someone from my family, aren’t you?”

I felt a little closer to her then. We spent the afternoon together and I took out the small camera I had brought with me. Her memory came and went, her sanity was making her a bit dizzy. I feel that she never recognized me.

It was nice, however, to see that Laura’s essence was still there, not her lucidity, but rather the mischievousness and cleverness I had gotten to know so well, hiding her lapses in memory to stay afloat in every situation, and also the poise and beauty that had always captured my attention.

I was finally able to relax and have fun, I was able to visit her one more time. We spent an afternoon together, talking about anything.

As I was coming out of the nursing home, I ran into my friend and producer Abril Schmucler. I told her I wanted to make a documentary about my grandmother, and she told me that we should do it together. That’s how this film was born.

Everything started coming together: we suddenly found people, tales, and archive material, almost as if fate had determined that this documentary should be made. A friend of the family gave me a copy of an interview he had conducted with her twenty years earlier, where she made a detailed description of what had happened to every member of her family who had been disappeared.

As I pored over this material, I felt that she had had a need to record the full extent of her thirty-year-long investigation, as if she knew she would eventually lose her memory.

A few days later, I went back to Mexico with all the material we had gathered until then. It consisted of three interviews that she had given in the past. One from ’79, another from ’93, and an interview I had conducted myself in 2000, along with all the written material she had collected, including her writings, essays, newspaper articles, psychology papers, analysis, etc., as well as her family photos. I was then able to start drafting the project.

In November 2011, I went back to Argentina with a film crew: friends who supported me during the filming and who shared my enthusiasm to tell this story. I wanted to film my grandmother as much as possible. They were ten taxing days of going there every day and spending time with her. It was a race against time, her disease was gaining ground and there were more and more holes in her memories. I wanted to be with her in her daily life so that my film would show the contrast between the archive material, which was her memory, and the present, which was forgetfulness.

Spending time in a nursing home is something that most of us find ourselves rejecting. It is difficult for us to be close to old age, I think it has something to do with facing the idea of inevitable death. But being there day after day changes everything, it’s like being in a nursery. Old people behave like children: they get angry, cry, talk endlessly, laugh, it’s difficult for them to be self-sufficient, and they always say what they think.

The most beautiful thing about making this film was to spend time with my grandma, and only with my grandma. Discovering her affective memory of me. From the moment she saw me, she never doubted me, never distanced herself from me. I was her point of reference. Those were ten beautiful days because she was there. Between her memory lapses, she was still Laura.

My grandmother always surrounded herself with photographs, she loved to show them to people, brag about her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren, her travels, and seeing all her friends and family all the time. On one of the days of the shoot, I brought with me the photographs she always kept in her house to see how much of them she remembered. They were pictures of her and her family, her childhood, her teenage years, her motherhood, her friends, her children, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, her life in Mexico and in Argentina. She sailed among the unconnected lakes of her memory, finding only fragments of her memories, like floating islands that never meet. But the hardest part was realizing that she didn’t remember being the mother of four children, nor that she had lost three of them.

Coming home from that trip, I had a more definite idea about what kind of film I wanted to make. It was then I reflected on the idea that Laura’s forgetfulness seemed like a decision that was almost deliberate. It seemed ironic to me that someone with her particularly history could somehow forget it. Some psychologists say that when one has a memory related condition, whether because of an accident, old age, or disease, the first memories we lose are those responsible for our deepest traumas. Laura forgot about having children and losing them in an incredibly painful way because they were forcefully disappeared, and it is a pain that will never go away because they can’t ever be buried. The truth is that however lucid or rational one may be, and no matter how much information one is able to gather, one can never get over the disappearance of a family member because there will always remain the fantasy of things turning out differently, even if they never do.

After a few months of trying to find funding for the project, we were able to win a grant for Debut Documentary Feature Film awarded by Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica and FOPROCINE. Three months later, producer Abril Schmucler and cinematographer Mariana Ochoa traveled once again to Argentina for a week so they could film Laura’s daily life at the nursing home. I wasn’t able to travel this time because I was pregnant, but four months later, we were shooting again in Buenos Aires.

The shoot lasted for a month and it was divided into two parts: the first was set in Buenos Aires, where we filmed Laura’s more intimate life: a few activities with her family and some interviews with her son and her grandchildren.

The second part was set in Entre Ríos, where she grew up and lived until she married my grandfather Santiago. My grandma always talked about the river where she learned how to swim, the Paraná river, which is very broad and is the most important in the country due to its size and its course, since it travels across most of the Argentinean territory. Basically, we filmed the river in as many ways as we could: from the banks, from a ship, from above, at ground level. Every standing point I thought at one time might have been hers.

The editing process started once I got back from that last filming stage. It was very difficult to find a middle ground between what I was determined to touch upon and simply tell the story of Laura Bonaparte, a very important social and political figure. It was clear to me that I did not want to make a biography of Laura, despite her life being an astonishing mosaic of remarkable actions in the international political stage (Laura’s labor was not confined to the subject of Argentinean forced disappearances, she also worked with the families of victims of forced disappearance from Mexico and Central America), as well as in social issues such as women’s reproductive rights and equal rights for the LGBT community. Laura also worked in the poorest areas in Buenos Aires, she spent time in Bosnia with the “Women in Black” whose families had been victims of ethnic cleansing policies against Serbs and Croatians. And what is perhaps her most internationally relevant accomplishment: she was one of the forerunners of the international campaign to declare enforced disappearances as a crime against humanity.

Considering the noble and transcendent nature of my grandmother’s life’s work, the easy choice was to make the documentary into a biography. But I did not want to do that because it seemed like it had nothing to do with Laura, it wouldn’t have been consistent with what she had done in her life. She was never a leader of masses, she worked and did what she thought was right. Her path was one of righteousness. She was always true to her convictions, even if she was often left alone in her fight, doing the ant’s work but leaving precedents behind her. It seemed more important to me to show the woman she had been, but even more so the woman that was at present, *and how life can set us on paths that we never thought possible.*

The editing process was long and difficult. My grandmother died during that time and my reflections on her memory, the memory of Argentinean history, the memory of the fight for universal justice, and especially my reflections on my own memory started to put together the pieces inside the film which, with the help of two very committed editors, we had finally finished.

Watching the finished film, I knew that I had managed to make the film I wanted to make. I managed to say through the documentary that my grandmother had a right to forget because Laura had worked tirelessly so that we wouldn’t, that it is our duty as a society to remember the past so that we can put an end to injustice.

We live in a world that kills, denigrates, exploits, hurts, tortures, humiliates, and especially, forgets, which is what allows all of it to happen again. Laura’s forgetfulness is not a betrayal, it’s a relief. It is a break she has allowed herself after a lifetime of unwavering denunciation and fighting for the preservation of memory.

I think that the film managed to envelop everything: the great reflections she made, the pain she lived in and didn’t share, the past where you can see a woman who firmly repeats the same things in three different interviews, like a mantra, so that she wouldn’t forget a single detail about what happened to each member of her family, And towards the end of her life, through her “forgetfulness,” it was my intention to invite the spectator to reflect on how we, as a society, should never forget.