

Translated excerpt

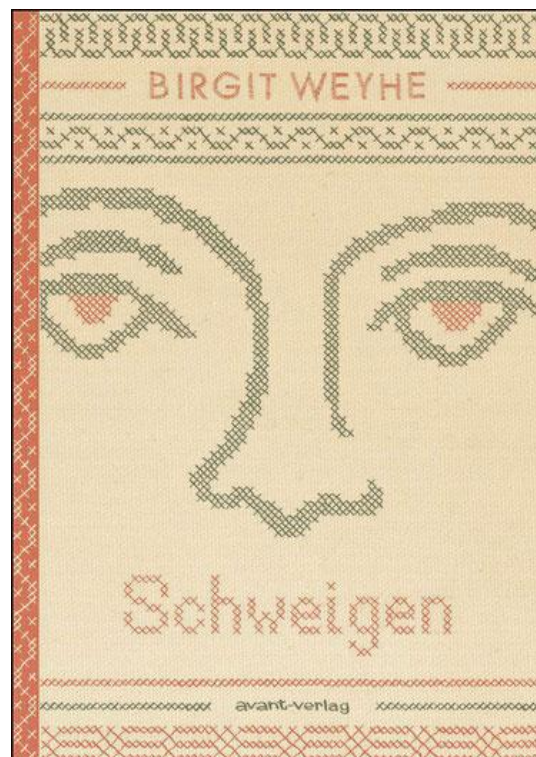
Birgit Weyhe
Schweigen

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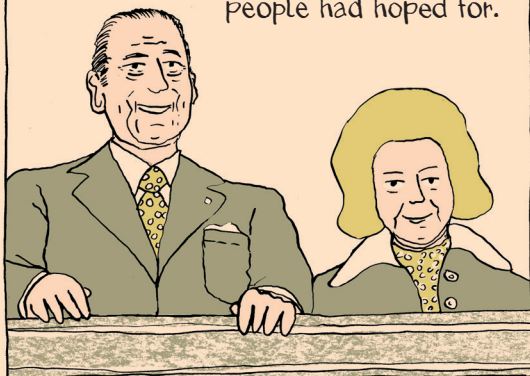
pp. 207-216

Birgit Weyhe
Staying silent

Translated by John Reddick



Peron's return in 1972 had not brought the economic and political stability that people had hoped for.



Following his death in July 1974 he was succeeded in office by Isabel Perón, his third wife.



Her tenure was characterised by economic decline, inflation...



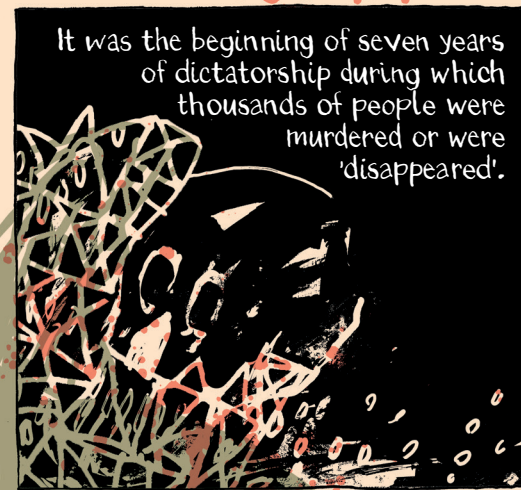
... and the return of violence.



The outcome of this state of affairs was a military putsch on 24 March 1976.



It was the beginning of seven years of dictatorship during which thousands of people were murdered or were 'disappeared'.



Leonor Gertrudis Marx was one of them.



Despite her tireless searches Ellen could find out nothing at all about what had happened to her daughter.

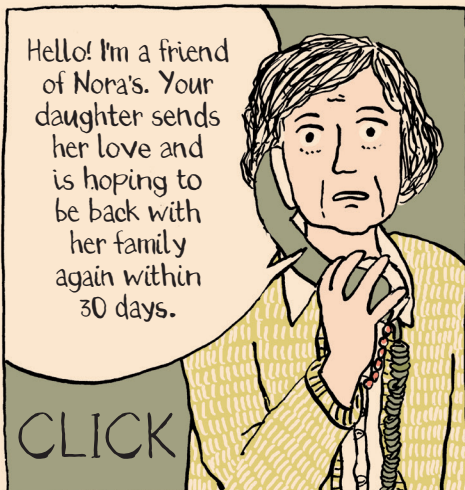


Hello?



Hello! I'm a friend of Nora's. Your daughter sends her love and is hoping to be back with her family again within 30 days.

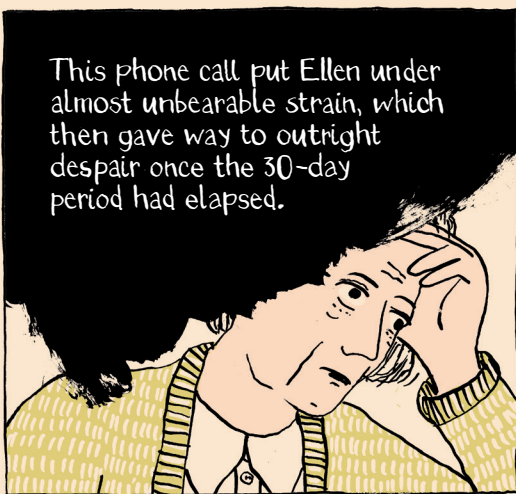
CLICK



Thirty days' jail was the usual penalty for taking part in an illegal assembly.



This phone call put Ellen under almost unbearable strain, which then gave way to outright despair once the 30-day period had elapsed.



As in the case
of all other
German Jews,
the nazis
had stripped
Ellen of her
citizenship.

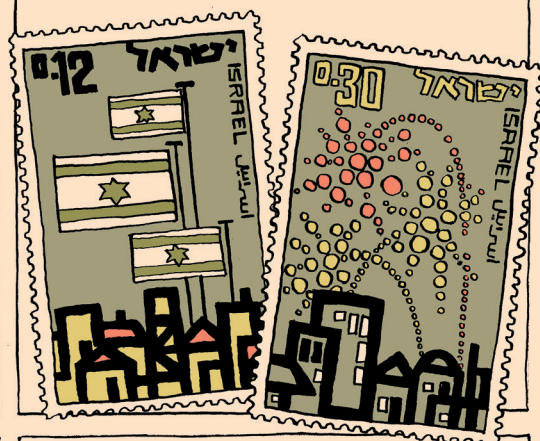


In 1964 she had applied for her
citizenship to be restored.



But it wasn't easy
for her children to feel
any loyalty towards a country
that had murdered their grand-
parents and driven out their parents.

Miriam and Daniel emigrated to Israel.



Nora regarded
herself as
Argentinian.



Rubén was
still too
young.



Legally speaking, therefore, Nora was not a German citizen when she disappeared.



Nonetheless, Ellen turned to the German embassy for help.



Jörg Kastl, the German ambassador at the time, played tennis with Emilio Massera on his days off.



Massera was a senior member of the junta and head of the navy.



He is regarded as one of those chiefly responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the dictatorship's regime of terror.



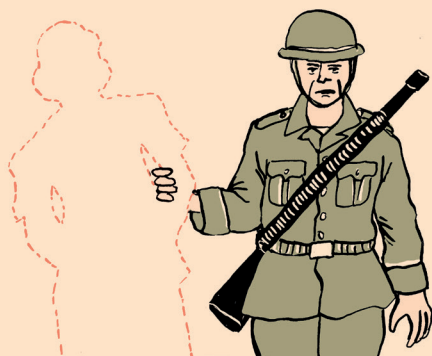
The two men both shared the view that Argentina was vulnerable to left-wing terrorism and that the military putsch was necessary for the salvation of the country.



In 1977 the German Foreign Office declared in an International Review that 'Argentina's real security problems lie in the domain of domestic politics, in the fight against subversion and political extremism. This fight is its key priority. Great advances have been achieved since the inception of the military government.'



The attitude of the official German side was therefore uncritical of the Argentinian junta.



The embassy offered the families of the disappeared the services of an army officer by the name of 'Major Peirano'.

I'll see what I can do for you!



Instead of helping them, he eavesdropped on the families inside the German embassy and passed on whatever information he gleaned.



Ellen maintained her contact with the embassy, even though it soon became clear to her that she could expect no help from that quarter.

The families of the disappeared suffered from the severe disadvantage that people assumed that any arrests must have taken place for a good reason.

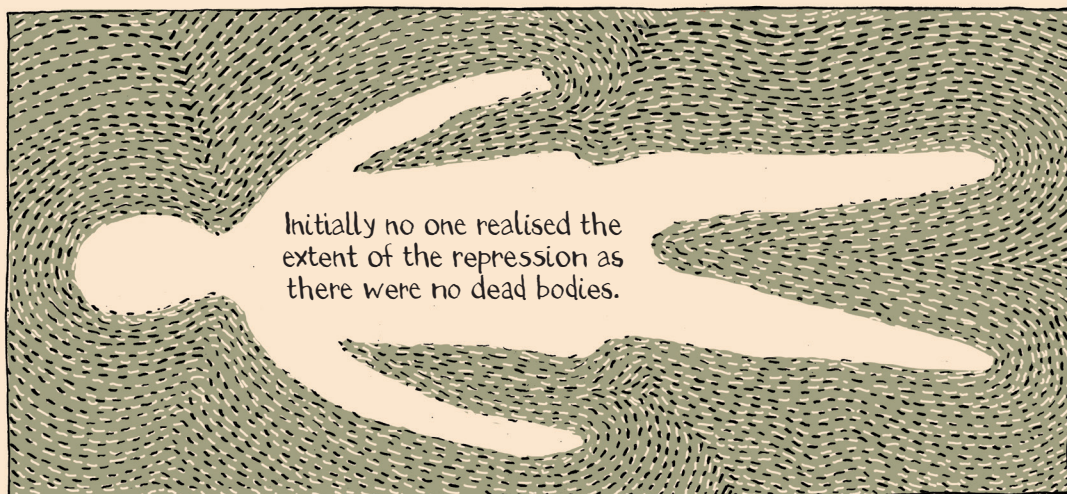
Por algo será!



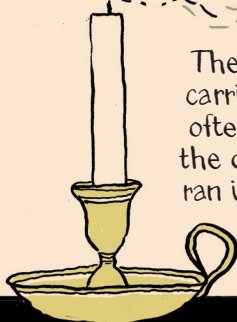
They sought to justify the actions of the military authorities by laying the blame on the victims instead.



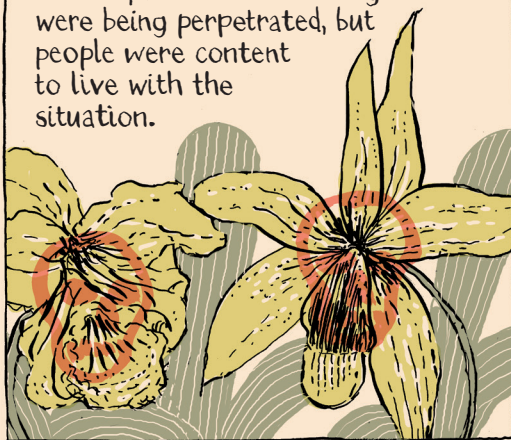
Initially no one realised the extent of the repression as there were no dead bodies.



The abductions were carried out discreetly, often at night. During the daytime everything ran its orderly course.



It was quite clear that illegal acts were being perpetrated, but people were content to live with the situation.



The behaviour of the Marx family was determined from this point onwards by fear and caution.



Ellen's sense of caution was so pervasive that she didn't even dare to let her two children in Israel know what had happened to their sister.



Everything's fine here ...

Their telephone calls might be tapped, and their ID was recorded whenever they sent a telegram.



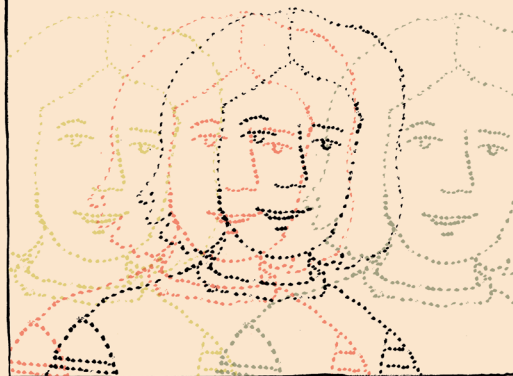
It was accordingly only many weeks later that they first learnt of their sister's disappearance from visitors to Jerusalem.



Even later on, Ellen and Erich never spoke to them about what had happened to Nora.



Her disappearance became a taboo topic within the family.



It is thus all the more astonishing that in public Ellen was vociferous in her demands for information about the whereabouts of her daughter.



One Thursday in April 1977 a group of women set out for the government palace on the Plaza de Mayo.



Once there they demanded answers to the question: 'What has happened to our sons and daughters?'



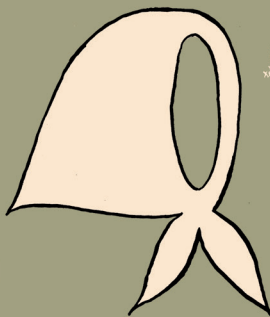
The government gave no reply, so they returned again the following week.



Before long they began tying old cotton nappies around their heads on which they had embroidered the names of their missing children.



This white headscarf born of grief and protest became the well-known symbol of their resistance and struggle.



Asociación
Madres
de Plaza
de Mayo

At 3.30 every Thursday afternoon from then on they walked around the square in silence, as static protests were forbidden.



They were known throughout the entire world as the "Madres de Plaza Mayo".



Ellen's work as Secretary of the Jewish community centre "Lamroth Hakol" ...



... meant that she couldn't regularly attend all of the weekly protests on the Plaza de Mayo.



But whenever a special date was due to be commemorated she took time off in order to take part.



Because the authorities couldn't disperse the mothers they started harassing them and mocking them in the press.



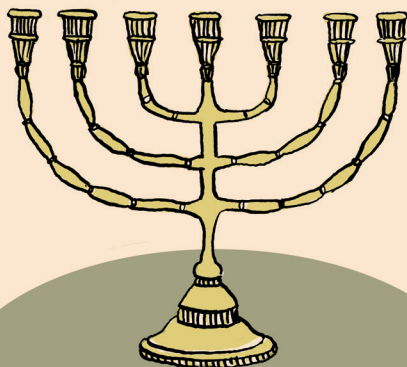
The situation didn't stay that way, however: some of the mothers were themselves abducted and duly 'disappeared', such as Azucena Villaflor, for example, one of the founders of the protest movement.



But the "Madres" still didn't let themselves be broken up, indeed more and more came and joined them.



Prior to Nora's disappearance Ellen had spent her life exclusively within the Jewish community.



But now she joined forces with women she would otherwise never have come to know.

