

# STEALING BABIES, IN FRANCO'S SPAIN AND THE JUNTA'S ARGENTINA

The stories exposing how Franco's government and the Catholic Church sold babies has gotten a lot of well-deserved attention.

The scale of the baby trafficking was unknown until this year, when two men – Antonio Barroso and Juan Luis Moreno, childhood friends from a seaside town near Barcelona – discovered that they had been bought from a nun. Their parents weren't their real parents, and their life had been built on a lie.

Juan Luis Moreno discovered the truth when the man he had been brought to call "father" was on his deathbed.

[snip]

After months of requests from the BBC, the Spanish government finally put forward Angel Nunez from the justice ministry to talk to me about Spain's stolen children.

Asked if babies were stolen, Mr Nunez replied: "Without a doubt".

"How many?" I asked.

"I don't dare to come up with figures," he answered carefully. "But from the volume of official investigations I dare to say there were many."

Lawyers believe that up to 300,000 babies were taken.

But this story—detailing how the Argentine Victoria Montenegro was raised by a Colonel who boasted of his heroism torturing and killing subversives, only to find out the man who raised her had tortured and killed her own parents—is

equally shocking. But has gotten little attention.

In 1992, when she was 15, Colonel Tetzlaff was detained briefly on suspicion of baby stealing. Five years later, a court informed Ms. Montenegro that she was not the biological child of Colonel Tetzlaff and his wife, she said.

"I was still convinced it was all a lie," she said.

By 2000, Ms. Montenegro still believed her mission was to keep Colonel Tetzlaff out of prison. But she relented and gave a DNA sample. A judge then delivered jarring news: the test confirmed that she was the biological child of Hilda and Roque Montenegro, who had been active in the resistance. She learned that she and the Montenegros had been kidnapped when she was 13 days old.

At a restaurant over dinner, Colonel Tetzlaff confessed to Ms. Montenegro and her husband: He had headed the operation in which the Montenegros were tortured and killed, and had taken her in May 1976, when she was 4 months old.

The stories, by themselves, are stunning. But they both share the complicit role of the Catholic Church, aiding dictators with a perverse notion of family to fight "subversives."

Good thing we don't live in a country where churches try to align with the government to combat "subversives" within the country, huh?