

## Censorship and Propaganda

### *Transform the Mind*

The maintenance of order in Paris under the *ancien régime* was highly bureaucratic, not to mention arbitrary and ultimately ineffective. Among those in charge, the Lieutenant of Police served many functions, most notably controlling of the streets, public safety, and the press. During the reign of Louis XVI, those prerogatives had been greatly expanded. Royal enforcers targeted Parisian society by dispersing prohibited meetings, including those of trade guilds that might be involved in “seditious” activity. “The *ancien régime* did not only keep watch over the actions of the people of Paris, it tried to control their thoughts too” (Godechot, 1970: 74). Newspapers and books, especially those critical of the regime, were targets of a vast apparatus of inspectors. Indeed, censorship had emerged as a key mechanism of control. Ironically, the banning of certain books only enhanced their worth. Confiscated works were ordered to be burned; in practice, however, the authorities would perform a fraudulent ritual—or spectacle—by publicly incinerating one or two copies; the rest of the bonfire was made up of old papers and rubbish. Interestingly, many banned books that had avoided the flames were stored in the cellar of the Bastille and over time allowed to drift back into clandestine circulation, where they enjoyed a value of 10 times their original price (Godechot, 1970). Several prominent political and philosophical works entered the black market of the banned, including Voltaire’s *Siecle de Louis XVI* and Rousseau’s *Emile*. Voltaire, and many other authors (e.g., Diderot, Morellet), were arrested and sentenced to prison. “Mirabeau and de Sade were also imprisoned, but not for offenses under the press laws. These arrests provided the *philosophes* with a martyr’s halo” (Godechot, 1970: 77; BnF, 2010).

Along with the Bastille, the Château de Vincennes on the edge of Paris, now a historic site, was well-known for its famous prisoners, who were subjected to the arbitrary punishment of the monarchy. Visitors today are drawn to the chateau’s

Gothic design and invited to enter its former prison, which has been transformed into place for learning and exploring. A brochure titled “Witness to France’s history” explains that “the keep, or donjon, is an architectural feat and the expression of remarkable political determination. . . . Standing 50 metres high, it is the tallest medieval keep in France . . . protected by a wall and a deep moat, . . . You can climb the oldest preserved example an outwork stairway.” Postings provide a history of the institution. “In the second half of the 18th century, Vincennes became, together with the Bastille, a symbol of royal despotism. Some prisoners here were victims of royal *lettre de cachet* (ordering imprisonment without trial). They were imprisoned, like [Denis] Diderot in 1749, for writings deemed subversive.” Original printings of Diderot’s books are displayed in a glass case accompanied by captions that offer more information on censored literature:

Diderot’s *Lettre sur les aveugles à l’usage de ceux voyent* [trans Essay on Blindness], published on 9 June 1749, led to his being imprisoned for two years, accused of spreading materialistic propaganda. . . . This work marks his passage from deism to atheist materialism, displayed for all to read: ‘It is important not to take hemlock for parsley, but in no way believe or not believe in God.’

This chapter sifts through the reliance on political imprisonment for suppressing writings, speeches, and other forms of communication. Censorship and propaganda are twinned phenomena: authoritarian regimes invest heavily in policies and practices for determining what can—and cannot—be seen, heard, and said. In *Escape to Prison* (Welch, 2015) those technologies of power have been examined in South Korea under the Japanese occupation as well as in South Africa during apartheid. Here similar developments are explored in Argentina during the last dictatorship and Northern Ireland amid the Troubles. Setting the stage for a critical look at those repressive measures, we return to the significance of performance, *percepticide*, and spectacle. Censorship and propaganda aim to transform the mind and thereby shape how citizens think. As a counterweight, many former prisons and detention centers, with a new place identity, have been repurposed to enlighten visitors with inspiring messages about the importance of the free flow of ideas in a democratic society.

#### PERFORMANCE, PERCEPTICIDE, SPECTACLE

To reiterate, Taylor’s *Disappearing Acts* considers how the last dictatorship performed power and projected authoritarian control over civil society. The public spectacle emerged as a locus and mechanism that both forged and erased images of national and gender identity. In a very Debordian manner, during the “dirty war,” everyone was performing. “Everyone was trying to look the part that offered them security and relatively invisibility (if they wanted to stay out of the fray)

or access and information (if they were somehow involved)” (D. Taylor, 1997: 109). Much like Kubiak (1987, 1989), Taylor applies performance theory from the perspective of the humanities, comparative literature, and theatrical critique. In a similar vein, the notion of performance enjoys a long tradition in sociology dating back to the work of Kenneth Burke (1945), who inspired Erving Goffman (1959) to develop a multilayered paradigm known as dramaturgical analysis. Such an approach applies the theatre (rather intuitively) as a metaphor for comprehending society, in which members play various roles through the use of stages, scripts, props, and the like. Dramaturgy remains a dynamic vehicle for interpreting the last dictatorship in Argentina, given that the junta went to great lengths to *stage* terror.

With respect to the sociological implications of dramaturgy, Goffman (1959) introduces the simple idea that individuals occupy both a *front stage* (visible to the audience) and a *back stage* (invisible to the audience). While very much conceived as a micro-sociology, dramaturgical analysis is amenable to the macro-performances of groups as well as states. The “dirty war” in Argentina operated on the *front stage* with spectacles of abductions in broad daylight to instill an aura of intimidation. Military personnel also carried out detention, torture, and extermination on the *back stage* at clandestine centers. Through its use of those hidden sites the junta engaged in what Goffman calls *mystification*, in that it concealed lurid details from the general population as well as international human rights monitors. From the standpoint of dramaturgical sociology, mystification stems from a related phenomenon, namely secrecy. Goffman (1959) identified many forms of secrecy maintained by individuals and groups. *Dark secrets*, as the term implies, contain damaging information about performers that might otherwise contradict their public image. The Argentine dictatorship, indeed, held many dark secrets surrounding crimes against humanity and genocide.

The military, through the use of specialized teams, also relied on *strategic secrets* that were intended to control the audience, such as by prompting civilians to realize they were under surveillance. *Inside secrets* were shared only with certain military teammates who could be trusted with sensitive information, thus enhancing a degree of bonding that protected those secrets. Even today, when former military officers are facing prosecution, many refuse to divulge knowledge that could be used to convict their colleagues. Occasionally, the former military also disclosed *open secrets* by claiming that their acts—however repressive—were justified to protect the nation from “subversion.” Goffman (1959) also distinguishes between different *roles* people acquire to manage and manipulate information. During the last dictatorship, task groups would recruit certain detainees to serve as informers and spotters, who might even accompany the team during abductions. Some of those cooperative detainees were viewed by the military as having the potential to “recover” from their subversive ideology and ultimately be released from



FIGURE 17. “Abduction.” A poster at memorial sites in Buenos Aires features a famous photograph (by Pablo Lasansky) capturing a moment of abduction. © retrowelch 2022.

confinement. Others, however, were exploited for their inside information and subsequently murdered (Park, 2014; Timmerman, [1981]1998)).

As described in the previous chapter, psychoanalyst Juan Carlos Kusnetzoff (1986) observed evidence of *percepticide* during Argentina’s last dictatorship. Due to intense trauma, civilians tended to crowd out and ignore atrocities occurring within their visual field (see Suarez-Orozco, 1991). Even when kidnappings by military agents took place in full view, they often went unnoticed, for many witnesses suffered from denial as a prominent coping mechanism, allowing them to pretend that everything was normal (Feitlowitz, 1998). At many memorial sites in Buenos Aires, a jarring reminder of state terror is captured in a well-circulated picture: the action photograph shows soldier abducting a young man while a woman seated in a restaurant tucks her head into her hands in an effort to avoid looking at the brazen assault (see D. Taylor, 1997: 123–24; figure 17).

Taylor’s (1997) coupling of spectacle and disappearance underscores the significance of sociological dramaturgy, in particular Goffman’s (1959) interpretation of the *front* and *back stages*. Along those lines of inquiry, *percepticide* contributes to a deeper analysis of performance by throwing critical light on the perceptual process that consigns the obviously visible (*front stage*) to a seemingly invisible void (*back stage*). Manipulating the front and back stages would become an important tactic

for the military. In the immediate aftermath of the coup (March 24, 1976), the junta declared “No Public Spectacles,” temporarily banning events from theatre to horse racing. The exception was football—or soccer—which would later be orchestrated as an international spectacle during the 1978 World Cup in Argentina. “The idea was not to seize power—they had already done that. Now, they wanted to usurp space formerly associated with civil society” (D. Taylor, 1997: 60). In its place, the military would strategically perform its own drama, exercising what Foucault (1979: 200) termed “lateral invisibility.” That is, through the spectacle, the military would project an awesome threat: hereafter, *all Argentines (spectators)* were vulnerable to state terror.

The “dirty war” had profound cultural and psychosocial implications, especially since the military instituted various forms of censorship, blacklisting, and the not so subtle management of what Goffman would regard as *scripts* and *performances*, literally and figuratively. Theatrical plays, television programs, newspaper articles were subject to content control; by junta decree, “stories had to have happy endings.” Prohibitions—euphemistically referred to “guidelines”—governed cultural content, the junta having declared that the “dirty war” was not only about weapons but also about “ideological penetration” at the hands (and minds) of “subversives” (D. Taylor, 1997: 11; see also Suarez-Orozco, 1991). The same decree demanded that “nothing should diminish the image of the guardians of order [or illustrate] any deterioration in the image of parents, or justify the rebellion of their children” (Avellaneda, 1986: 155; D. Taylor, 1997: 11, 268).

This disciplinary power had a panoptic effect insofar as Argentines internalized the military’s gaze by censoring themselves (see Foucault, 1979, 1986). The sense of an omniscient deity loomed over civil society to the extent that people began burning any literature that might violate the “guidelines.” Diana Raznovich, an Argentine playwright, confessed: “The prohibitions made fascists out of all of us, we were on the lookout for anything that could be construed as ‘subversive’ in our possessions. . . . [I remember] burning even my Jewish cookbook” (D. Taylor, 1997: 12). The former detention, torture, and extermination site, Olimpo, has been transformed from a profane place of violence into a vibrant place for celebrating free thought. There, visitors contemplate the extent of censorship under the last dictatorship. On display is a small collection of banned books authored by Jose Murillo, Juan Domingo Peron, and Karl Marx. That modest example of “dangerous reading,” signals a broader recognition of censorship during the military junta.

In *Public Pages: Reading along the Latin American Streetscape*, Marcy Schwartz (2018) meditates on the power of repression as well as the resistance it creates. Those “books that bite” are now available in libraries established at Olimpo and other former detention centers in Argentina. Rather than entering the commodified “memory market” of published testimonials, those collections “celebrate the end of censorship by transforming that experience into public reading spaces and events” (Schwartz, 2018: 193; see also Bilbija and Payne, 2011). By displaying

previously invisible, silenced, and hidden books, these libraries have once again put objects into circulation; metaphorically, the resurrected libraries symbolize the reappearance of those persons who were disappeared (Invernizzi and Gociol, 2003; Park, 2014). That process, what Taylor (1997) calls “acts of transfer,” preserves rather than erases. As a form of cultural resistance, libraries of banned books inject life into spaces that once practiced torture and death. The library at Olimpo, Biblioteca Publica y Popular Carlos Fuentealba, is named not for a victim of the junta but for a teacher and labor activist killed by police during a union protest in 2007. “Dedicating the library in his memory exemplifies the center’s interest in human rights in general, beyond the context of the dictatorship” (Schwartz, 2018: 204).

Strangely, detainees at Olimpo actually read forbidden books while in captivity. Those works had been confiscated during house raids and stored at the detention center, where detainees gathered them and distributed them on a cart. One survivor recalled: “How could there be library in a dungeon? . . . [ironically, the secret library formed] a bridge to our dreams” (Cerruti, 2010: 65). The junta’s surveillance of reading is documented in the more than 4,000 volumes contained in the collection at Olimpo, which began as an exhibit titled “The Return of the Banned” and is currently called “Banned under State Terrorism.” The community center offers a forum for critical thinking, a reminder that “reading can be a practice of resistance,” especially since the regime’s attack on the arts and culture was as calculating as its reliance on detention and extermination (Schwartz, 2018: 204).

By way of Debord, Taylor remains focused on how the spectacle was used by the military junta to produce a form of theatrical power that manipulated the population, rendering it passive and visually impaired (1997: 222; see Andermann, 2012). Interestingly, football (soccer) was exempt from the junta’s suspension of all public events; in fact, an important football match was played on the very day of the coup. While the sport has long been understood as a mechanism for building social solidarity—especially as a masculine expression of bonding—the military strategically deployed the allure of football to improve its image within Argentine society and beyond. That spectacle culminated in the 1978 World Cup. For years, the military had been working behind the scenes (*back stage*) with international football promoters. The event would enhance national identity and pride among Argentines, and in a Goffmanesque manner it would also provide a badly needed political “make-over” for the dictatorship (see Suarez-Orozco, 1982).

With the number of disappearances surging, the junta mounted a public relations campaign by directing the media to release articles blaming human rights abuses on the incompetence of President “Isabelita” Perón, who was in office at the time of the coup. In doing so, the military insisted that its intervention was rational and justified, aimed at placing the nation back on the right track. The generals went so far as to invite former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to sit with the military dignitaries so as to lend some legitimacy to the event. Elsewhere,

Kissinger and other Nixon and Ford insiders were condemned for their complicity in *dark secrets* of the Argentine junta and other Operation Condor dictatorships (Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay) (Dinges, 2004, McSherry, 2008; Welch, 2020b). The spectacle of the final World Cup match was closely monitored by a heavy military and police presence to ensure that the event proceeded without any disruptions. Taylor offers a distinct Debordian take on the spectacle, adding that the security measures staged a “complex net of ‘looks’ as spectators watched and were watched, [and] submitted to visual controls of surveillance” (1997: 113). The outcome of the 1978 World Cup—the Argentines took the cup—proved that spectacles possess a unique cultural power to unite citizens, even in the face of widescale crimes against humanity.

Given the social and political significance of the 1978 World Cup, it is unsurprising that the event is closely scrutinized in several exhibition spaces at ESMA. In the former “fishbowl” in the attic of the Casino, an elaborate set of *scripts* and *props* critically narrates the spectacle and its effects on those held in captivity. It is here that the World Cup is again *performed*. To maximize that performance, storyboards are translated into English for the benefit of a larger audience. A placard informs visitors that the proposal to host the World Cup had been ratified in (June) 1976 under the direction of the military, in particular Admiral Emilio Massera, who organized the championship as a “political instrument of the dictatorship to get social support” and “accumulate power.” Plans for the World Cup, however, faced stiff opposition from the global community. In France, a committee was formed to organize a boycott of the games; as it gained momentum, its activism spread to other European nations. Its slogan, “No Football in Between the Concentration Camps,” is accompanied by an image of Argentine General Videla superimposed on that of Hitler.

For added grounding at the Casino, European protests are authenticated through a series of international news clips and photographs condemning the last dictatorship. In response to these, the junta reinvigorated its public relations efforts by attacking “foreign” opponents as “anti-Argentine” and as bent on unleashing “unpatriotic” sentiment. Curators at ESMA quote Graciela Daleo, who testified in the 2010 trial. She reports that when the Argentine team won the World Cup, all military personnel were celebrating in ESMA. Captain Acosta shouted “We won, we won,” and began shaking hands with the male prisoners and kissing the women. In a rare break in *percepticide*, Daleo thought to herself, “If they won, we lost.” That revelation within a larger performance, or *spectacle of resistance*, reveals a dramatic technique of temporality by which “lived time makes space for the assimilation of historical time” (Bishop, 2014: 565). Through the use of theatrical cues, curators at ESMA have transformed a formerly profane place that, in its current incarnation, inspires visitors to reflect on a sense of historical consciousness contained in the memorial space they temporarily inhabit.

## MEDIA OPERATIONS AND THE FISHBOWL

Moving beyond the wider parameters of performance, percepticide, and the spectacle, it is important to examine some of the political maneuvers that were occurring behind the scenes. In the wake of the coup, media operations were in full swing. On exhibit inside the “fishbowl” at ESMA, detailed notecards describe the junta’s campaign to improve its image, especially in the face of incriminating evidence. Under the direction of Admiral Emilio Massera, the armed forces took control of the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Chancellery, then established the Direction of Media and the General Directorate for Press and Broadcasting. Its purpose was to coordinate “propaganda actions” abroad and send out information that could discredit charges of human rights violations. Interestingly, the Navy’s Center for Press and Information (Centro Piloto) was based in the Argentine Embassy in Paris, from where it channeled messages throughout much of Western Europe.

That agency was more than a propaganda tool. Massera also used it to “infiltrate” and spy on exile organizations. Members of the Tasks Group at ESMA were dispatched to Centro Piloto de Paris, including Captain Alfredo Astiz (the Blond Angel of Death). Among their targets was Elena Holmberg, a career civil servant for the Foreign Service assigned to the Argentine Embassy in Paris. When Holmberg objected to the Centro Piloto, she was removed from her post and sent back to Argentina. In 1978, Holmberg was abducted by the Task Group; her body was recovered floating in the Lujan River of El Tigre Mendez (see Mendes Carreras and Villagran San Millan, 1982). Meanwhile, Massera retired from the navy in 1978 and deployed the media machine (with several newspapers) to rehabilitate his image in an effort to appear presidential, even claiming to be a moderate member of the junta and an advocate of democracy. After announcing his candidacy, Massera campaigned for the Party for Social Democracy until 1983, when he was detained on charges of participating in the disappearance of businessman Fernando Branca. Massera, as a result of his arrest, was disqualified for the elections.

As noted previously, media operations were accelerated inside ESMA’s “fish-bowl” (*percera*), where detainees prepared articles and press briefings favoring the military. Moreover, media outlets cooperated with the junta by knowingly disseminating false information. In a bizarre media event, Norma Esther Arrostito (aka Gaby) was abducted by the Task Group (in 1976). The army swiftly released a press statement declaring that Arrostito had been fatally shot while refusing to surrender. To bolster its case, the Task Force set up a sham armed confrontation and built a fake crime scene with blood of the same type as Arrostito. All the while, Arrostito was being held in isolation at ESMA, where she would be tortured for nearly two years. The Task Group bragged of her capture and even showed her to military leaders as a “War Trophy.” In 1978, Arrostito was murdered by the Task Group. With growing frequency, the junta’s media operations issued news stories

that portrayed detainees as people “killed in battle.” “These reports were published every day and were part of the political propaganda the regime used to create the ghost of fear and violence.”

Reconstructing incidents of shootouts was just one aspect of the junta’s media apparatus. To reiterate, the 1978 World Cup stands as perhaps the most highly crafted event during the last dictatorship. To stage that global spectacle, however, required years of maneuvers behind the scenes. Posters and storyboards inside the “fishbowl” chronicle those developments. The campaign to host the 1978 World Cup was launched in 1973 and then fast-tracked in 1976 by Admiral Massera and Captain Carlos Lacoste, who had strong contacts in international football (he would serve as vice president of FIFA in 1980). “The Navy and Massera used it to accumulate power. A great deal of the population massively supported it and celebrated the triumph as a national victory.” Along the way, the regime pushed back hard against human rights activists opposing the event, in particular the French-based collective “Boycott against Soccer World Cup in Argentina.” In yet another peculiar move by the military, Lisandro Raul Cubas, a detainee at ESMA, was issued new clothes and media credentials to attend what is described as a “surreal press conference” at the 1978 World Cup. A photograph of Cubas appeared in the newspaper *La Nación* (3 May), showing him (alongside his undercover captors) transcribing the words of Cesar Luis Menotti, the coach of the Argentine team. Apparently, Cubas had been tasked to prompt a favorable statement about the military by coach Menotti that could be circulated in other news outlets.

#### SIGNS OF TROUBLE

Matters of censorship and propaganda—as dual tactics—surface in other societies, especially those mired in conflict. In Northern Ireland during the later Troubles, British authorities went to great lengths to silence opposition groups, activists, and rival paramilitaries. Not without controversy, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd imposed media restrictions on the voices of political opponents, most notably members of Sinn Fein who expressed their support for the Republican movement. As a form of state censorship, the Broadcasting Ban of 1988 had the full backing of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who declared: “Democracies must find a way to starve the terrorists and hijackers of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend” (Cottle, 1997: 283). The restrictions went beyond news reporting, applying to television dramas, documentaries, and talk shows. Much like Paul McCartney and Wings, whose 1972 song “Give Ireland Back to the Irish” was banned in the UK, the Irish rock band, The Pogues, was also targeted. Their lyrics in “Streets of Sorrow/Birmingham Six” were barred for criticizing the British response to terrorism. That song defended Irish prisoners (including the Guilford 4) who were later exonerated after being convicted on bombing charges (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*,

1988). In resisting the Broadcasting Ban of 1988, news executives found creative ways to defy censorship, such as overdubbing voices of controversial figures (e.g., Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin). Under intense pressure by journalists and free speech advocates, the ban was eventually lifted in 1994.

Mass media scholars paid close attention to the manner in which news was relayed during the Troubles. Mainstream reports typically focused on the violence committed by the IRA while downplaying the brutality of the British army, who were at times portrayed as “a rather superior kind of Boy Scout Troop” (Cottle, 1997: 285; see also Moloney, 1991). In the midst of the conflict, both sides waged a “propaganda war” during which claims and counterclaims took turns in a flurry of partisan publicity. Liz Curtis explains: “The British public is generally allowed to see only the worst of the ‘enemy’s side and best of their own. As a result, cause and effect become topsy-turvy—IRA violence comes to appear the alpha and omega of the problem, and Britain’s historical and contemporary responsibility is obscured” (1984: 275–76; 1991; see also Taylor, 1986).

Faced with media regulation, banning, and censorship, political activists in Northern Ireland energized another popular form of communication: street art. Those public expressions thrived due in large part to their capacity to fuse use-value in conveying political messages with signifying-value in promoting political culture. Throughout much of the urban space, murals promoted both the Loyalist and Republican causes while also commemorating those who had perished in paramilitary and colonial violence. Correspondingly, the harsh experience of political imprisonment—and censorship—inspired muralists to take up arms in the arts. Republican Gerard Kelly developed his “revolutionary art” while serving time for a “politically related offence” (Rolston, 1992: vi). Kelly, known as “mo chara” [Irish for “my friend”], recalls:

Prison was supposed to be a breakers’ yard for republicans. You were stripped of your dignity, your clothes, anything that showed your identity. You were allowed to paint hankies (handkerchiefs) of the Pope, the Virgin Mary, Mickey Mouse and things like that. They censored everything. Anything with “Long Kesh” on it or “H Blocks,” anything like that was not allowed. (Rolston, 1992: vi)

Under the watchful eye of the prison guards—known as “screws”—Kelly immersed himself in Irish mythology. Upon his release, he fused his interest in Celtic traditions with the Troubles by painting murals of Gerry Adams, the 1981 hunger strikers, and the eight IRA men killed by the SAS in Loughgall. Describing his artwork, Kelly says: “I don’t like the word ‘propaganda,’ because propaganda seems to be telling half-truths. . . . People would stand and look at a mural before they would read a paper. Also it gives the people of the immediate area a sense of pride” (Rolston, 1992: vii). Bill Rolston’s series of books *Drawing Support* reflects on the social and symbolic significance of murals. “In a war such as the one in progress in the North of Ireland,” murals play a vital role in political education in the local community; indeed, “murals thus have a crucial role in the battle for the hearts

and minds of people. . . . They are an effective form of propaganda” (Rolston, 1992: viii; 1998, 2003, 2013). Rolston adds that allies of paramilitaries rely on murals—as well as pamphlets and posters—to offset the propaganda of the British state that dominates the main channels of mass media. Against those barriers, images contained in murals become windows that allow onlookers to see a different political and cultural world.

The “propaganda war” during the Troubles went beyond broadcasting. Much like competing Loyalist and Republican murals, political posters remind us that many overlapping social worlds cannot escape their inherent contradictions, since, according to Lotman (2000), they are unequal yet unified as well as asymmetrical and uniform. As discussed in previous chapters, the boundary sharply divides cultural and territorial space between “our” internal space that is “my own,” “safe,” and “harmoniously organized” from “their” external space, which is “hostile, dangerous, and chaotic” (131). Just like murals, political posters animate streetscapes where heritage is contested. By way of use-value, political posters deliver pointed messages about the Troubles. And with added signifying-value, the Irish Republican and Nationalist movements inject vivid symbolism into their campaigns, condemning the Royal Ulster Constabulary, supporting hunger strikers, and calling for the unification of Ireland. Relying on an array of techniques, those *signs of trouble* are aimed at generating solidarity in the face of adversity, thereby adding to what Graham recognizes as “the contested interpretation of heritage” (1996: 10).

Political posters in Northern Ireland benefit from a duality of use-value and signifying-value. In the context of the Troubles, the word sign operates in two fundamental ways. First, it is an object that is meant to be publicly displayed. Second, it is something that symbolically stands for something else. The Irish Republican History Museum, a place of learning in Belfast, boasts a vast collection of political posters (see also Welch, 2019). Those material artifacts, in their previous incarnation, added to the “propaganda war” from the Republican standpoint. In their afterlives, however, archived posters are testament to the importance of preserving the past while connecting it to the present. In the museum, political posters contain cultural residue from a period of intense conflict, and their preservation stabilizes collective memory while resisting its erasure. Those particular *signs of trouble* are kept in a series of albums of original posters dating back to the 1960s. As Carrabine correctly points out, “archival practices have a significant bearing on how meanings are organized” (2014: 134). The range of subject matter reaches deep into the history of the Troubles; it includes resistance and sacrifice, women as warriors, and great escapes. In that context, issues pertaining to occupation and brutality are worth examining, especially as they resonate in the “propaganda war.”

Barbed wire is among the recurring motifs used to convey the message that the Irish Catholic community is under occupation by a foreign power. One poster, for instance, shows a prisoner behind barbed wire at the Long Kesh internment camp. It should be noted that Long Kesh is not only a contested site in the events of the Troubles but also a significant source for political and cultural dispute. In the early

1970s, Long Kesh held hundreds of detainees, and most of them were Republican/Nationalist. In the wake of “Operation Demetrius”—a sweeping round-up—many of those detainees were interned without trial (McEvoy, 2001; Taylor, 2001). Years later, Long Kesh was replaced by Her Majesty’s Prison Maze (or “H Blocks”—due to the shape of the design). Still, political prisoners continued to call the entire prison compound Long Kesh (or “the Kesh”), while the British authorities referred to it as “The Maze.” After the prison was closed in 2000, rival political groups and stakeholders debated plans for the site. Republicans organizations (e.g., Sinn Fein) advocated the development of an International Centre for Conflict Transformation. Loyalists proposed that the compound be bulldozed, since it would prevent the contested site of heritage from being transformed into place of pilgrimage and a “shrine” to the IRA and its leader, Bobby Sands, who died there on while a hunger strike (Kindynis and Garrett, 2015; Neill, 2017). Eventually, “the Kesh”—or “the Maze”—was quietly demolished except for a “representative sample” of the prison (e.g., a cell block, a guard tower, and the medical unit) (Graham and McDowell, 2007; McAtackney, 2014; Wylie, 2004). To reiterate, the physical erasure of the Maze was driven, in part, to undermine any cultural potential for a Bastille Effect.

Returning to the significance of barbed wire, the illustration shows a guard tower looming over the prisoner’s shoulder as he looks left. A caption states: “Irish republican p.o.w.’s tortured and denied political status.” Above is a picture of members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. One officer of the unit is armed with an assault weapon. Another subtitle reads: “British army and RUC murders and torturers go scot free” (see figure 18).

The RUC’s policing practices were (are) so controversial that it was disbanded, paving the way for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in 2001. Political parties swiftly weighed into the debate with contrasting responses. The Social Democrat and Labour Party (SDLP, a moderate Nationalist organization) backed the PSNI from its inception; however, Sinn Fein (a Republican party) withheld its support (Hearty, 2014). Numerous posters in the archive capture the tone of that opposition to police reform, including one with a large photograph of an officer in riot gear aiming an assault rifle at the audience, thus ensnaring political tourists in the social drama of the Troubles. The text blends methods of “naming names” with official reportage alongside Hollywood (action) movie promotion. At the top of poster, three politicians are listed: David Trimble, Ronnie Flanagan, and Tony Blair, with the statement “These men are after your hearts and minds.” In report style it continues. “They want you to join a paramilitary force that:

Stands condemned by the UN and Amnesty  
Engages in collusion with loyalist death squads  
Uses plastic bullets to kill children  
Is not supported by the nationalists and republicans

With detectable degrees of ridicule and sarcasm, the poster’s headline reads “Coming Soon PSNI—the shocking sequel to the RUC. . . . Only the name has been

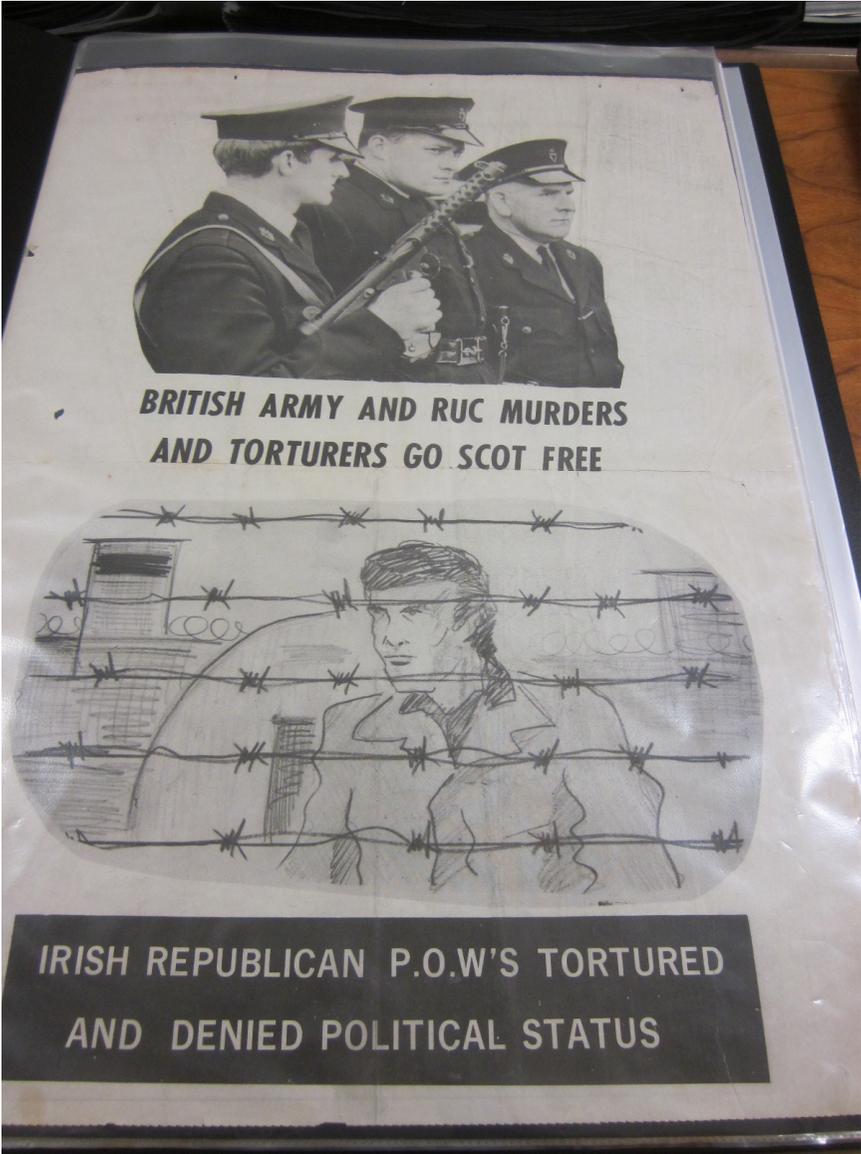


FIGURE 18. "British Army." A poster archived at the Irish Republican History Museum combines themes of brutality and political imprisonment. © retrowelch 2022.

changed." Critics of the PSNI continue to characterize its practices as "political policing" against those "left behind" through covert policing and misuse of anti-terrorism legislation. Sinn Fein issued a bolder condemnation by referring to the PSNI as a continuation of colonial policing by a "British police force still referred to as the 'the RUC'" (Saoirse, 2013; Hearty, 2014: 1053). The residual effects of the

brutality of the RUC have been located in the everyday experiences of the Republicans, who view its members as a force of the “state oppressors” (Ellison and O’Reilly, 2008; see also Ellison and O’Rawe, 2010).

Unsurprisingly in a cultural world of dissonant heritage, *assault* is a theme that is repeated in many posters. Among the more inventive techniques is the reworking of the topography of Great Britain and Ireland in which the island of Great Britain is morphed into an officer in riot gear with a club striking Ireland. Again, that theme speaks to the “memory politics” of a divided society in ways that rely on the meanings of maps to express the Republican/Nationalist vision of a united Ireland (Hearty, 2014). Through repetition, a standard technique in persuasion, the map of Ireland is drawn without a partition separating the North. Thus, without a boundary, the notion of unity is visually conveyed. Moreover, the map of Ireland is superimposed with the letters “S F”, as a reminder that Sinn Fein is an all-Ireland political party as well as a major stakeholder in contested heritage. Shoring up support for Sinn Fein, its public relations office commonly prints Irish words and phrases in ways that evoke a strong sense of ancestral belonging and identity, especially since language is a form of shared symbolism (Burke, 1966). Similarly, cultural observers recognize that “difference” has considerable signifying purchase, for it allows ethnic groups to distinguish themselves from colonial occupiers (Gregory, 2004; Said, 1993). As noted previously with respect to political tourism in Belfast, there is the tendency to “exacerbate difference” in the drama over contested heritage in Northern Ireland (McDowell, 2008)

As the peace process urges communities in Northern Ireland to enter a new era of openness, more disclosures are emerging about what actually occurred during the Troubles (McAtackney, 2013, 2014; McGlinchey, 2019). In a revealing comment, a former British intelligence officer conceded that while the British won the “intelligence war,” the IRA won the “propaganda war” (Spy in the IRA, 2017; see Curtis, 1984). By that remark, one can surmise that the Republican movement achieved formidable success in generating support for its campaign. Moreover, political posters—such as those examined herein—most likely played a cultural role in boosting morale and solidarity, especially within Republican strongholds, where the struggle was most intense. And, in doing so, those posters have contributed to a dissonance of heritage, collective memory, and ethno-political identity.

## CONCLUSION

Among the ironies of censorship and propaganda, as technologies of power, is that they tend to produce various forms of resistance. As mentioned at the onset, in pre-Revolutionary Paris, banned books actually thrived on the black market. Well-known French authors evaded royal censors by having their books printed outside the country. Even more clandestinely, some books were printed in France but had Amsterdam, Geneva, or Kehl inscribed on the frontispiece. Voltaire’s

works, in fact, were published in that manner, giving his writings a boost for public consumption. Moreover, his arrest and imprisonment in the Bastille added to the martyrdom of authors and intellectuals persecuted by the *ancien régime*. In 1717, at the age of 22, Voltaire was jailed for writing a scurrilous Latin verse about the Regent having incest with his daughter. For eleven months, he was stuck in windowless cell wrapped by walls 10 feet thick. In 1726, he was returned to the Bastille for a 12-day stint following a quarrel with the aristocrat de Rohan-Chabot (Godechot, 1970). Facing indefinite confinement without a trial, Voltaire agreed to be exiled to London, where for two-and-a-half years he immersed himself in its literary circles (BnF, 2010; Gay, 1988). For his legacy of defiance, Voltaire would be inducted into the “cult of patriot-heroes” by having his remains interned in the Pantheon—the “Westminster for the French.” In what was staged as a grand spectacle, Voltaire’s “body had been transported from Romilly-sur-Seine in a simple wagon . . . escorted by National Guardsmen to the ruins of the Bastille, where the philosopher’s smile might contemplate his victory over the fortress in which he had been twice incarcerated” (Schama, 1990: 564).

The elaborate procession to the Pantheon featured a monumental chariot two stories in height with engravings of Voltaire’s words. One of the stone models of the Bastille carved by Polloy joined a chorus of men in Roman costumes bearing Voltaire’s books. Even in the rain, 100,000 Parisians attended the highly decorated memorial ceremony. Visitors today are invited into the Pantheon, where a statue of Voltaire—“defender of tolerance”—stands in the vestibule. The tribute to Voltaire highlights other exhibits at the Pantheon. Of particular interest is the display titled “Courage and Resistance” that honors “those who helped the Jews to hide during World War II . . . the Resistance fighters . . . the spirit of resistance against the Nazi occupier . . . and Rene Cassin, principal author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948” (Pantheon, n.d.). Much like other modes of persuasion, these enlightened words—and noble acts of courage—are a reminder of their potential to transform the mind in a positive direction.

In closing, we should note that the Pantheon represents a significant extension of the Bastille Effect. Quite often in post-conflict societies, memory of repression is activated not only at the actual sites of atrocities but also at other places that undergo cultural transformation. Again, the Irish Republican History Museum in Belfast transitioned from a mundane industrial yard into a space for learning about the Troubles. Along the way, much of its collection of objects and artifacts has been converted into expressions of the ultimate freedom for Irish Republicans—a united Ireland. Republican murals, likewise, reinforce those messages. As examples of a contested heritage, however, Loyalist street art amplifies the commitment to the United Kingdom. In the next chapter, torture is examined in Northern Ireland as well as in the southern cone of Latin America, where transformation of the body serves as another technology of power of the state.