

## Exterminate and Denial

### *Transform Society*

Informed by cultural studies, scholars explore the meaning of the French Revolution, during which the newly minted patriots extracted from the *ancien régime* its arbitrary power while celebrating the values of the Age of Reason (Hunt, 1984; Sewell, 1996). With messianic zeal, those revolutionaries observed cult-like rituals aimed at purifying “a system of repression that had at its core the polluted symbol of the Bastille and the caprice of the king’s *lettre de cachet*, which could condemn citizens to prison without due process” (Smith 2008: 121). At its disposal was the guillotine, a device that had long been used around Europe and now quickly reemerged with forceful significance in France. In the rational and egalitarian climate of the Enlightenment, the guillotine was recognized for its technological efficiency; as Foucault writes, it was a “machine for the production of rapid and discrete deaths” (1979: 15). The Reign of Terror contagiously infiltrated French society, targeting anyone suspected of being an enemy of the state. In 1793 and 1794, more than 2,700 people perished under the “blade of justice” (Conciergerie, n.d.; Schama, 1990).

The guillotine shares many properties with genocide—the deliberate extermination of a distinct class of people. The first of these is the killing of huge numbers of humans; the guillotine was known to have processed as many as 20 victims per hour. Second, both the guillotine and genocide represent a “technological solution to a cultural problem . . . a literal and metaphorical surgical intervention that could cut disease from the body politic” (Smith, 2008: 123, 126). As noted, Foucault (1979) posited that the human body is the subject of every political, economic, and penal agenda. In the thrust of the French Revolution, the body became a signifier for meditating on the profound questions facing a new society (Hunt, 1991; Outram, 1989). The bodies decapitated by the guillotine provided symbolic remnants that would prompt critical debates over notions of justice, science, and progress (Smith, 2008).

Discussed in this chapter are the ways in which genocide was implemented in the southern cone as a technology of power to clean the slate for a new vision of society. As Daniel Feierstein (2014) describes in *Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina's Military Juntas*, extermination annihilates certain people as well as their culture. This destruction also reorganizes social relations, using terror as an instrument. It is important to emphasize that such atrocities are often shrouded in denial, which itself is a mechanism of power in pursuit of a transformed society (Cohen, 2001, 1995; Welch, 2003). To set the stage for critique, this chapter begins with a section on genocide aimed at the indigenous people in Argentina, or what been described as “state racism” directed at “subjects who do not belong to the new nation” (Trinchero, 2006: 122, 132). Attention then turns to matters of state terror and extermination in Chile and Paraguay.

### GENOCIDE IN ARGENTINA, AND BEYOND

Narratives on genocide in Argentina run long and wide. At the Museo Etnográfico in the San Telmo section of Buenos Aires, curators assembled an exhibit titled “Challenging the Silence: Indigenous People and the Dictatorship.” Visitors were reminded that 2016 marked 40 years since the last coup. A series of texts situated that dramatic shift in history in a broader context of progressive thought, emulating “Foucault’s Museum” as explored in the previous chapter (see Lord, 2006). “Remembering the coup requires thinking about state violence, resistance, absences, and the demands of justice.” The coup of 1976 was not the only time democracy was consumed by dictatorship; similar overthrows occurred in 1930, 1943, 1962, and 1966. However, it was the “National Reorganization Process” of 1976 that has left an indelible mark on Argentine society due to the use of genocide and state terrorism to impose sweeping political, economic, and cultural changes. Among the more than 30,000 victims were students, educators, and workers as well as union representatives who rallied against the prohibition of political parties.

The expressed goal of the exhibit “Challenging Silence” is to present the plight of the indigenous people who suffered tremendously under state terror. Enhancing that theme, commentary confronts “Two Centuries, Two Genocides.” In 1979, the centennial anniversary of the “Desert Campaign”—led by Julio Argentino Roca—was celebrated by the military government with tributes and commemorative medals, stamps, and coins. The principal event was staged in the city of Neuquén, where *de facto* President Jose Videla was joined by Economy Minister José A. Martínez de Hoz and a host of ecclesiastical authorities. “In the official act the process of dispossession and indigenous killing of 1879 was presented as a ‘glorious and transcendent making of all the Argentines.’” That “happy integration of a numerous mass of indigenous peoples to the national life” as characterized in similar tributes in 1979 was contested by some clergy. Monsignor Jaime de Nevares

issued a statement declaring solidarity with the grief and humiliation inflicted on the Mapuches. The duality of purity and danger makes an important reappearance in the controversies surrounding the Catholic hierarchy and native people.

Museo Etnográfico, as a place of learning about Argentina's profane past, also dwells on forced disappearance. Applying a technology of power, the military targeted migrant workers for the purpose of securing economic gain for the elites. Less than two years after the 1976 coup, more than 100 indigenous laborers were kidnapped; 30 of them are still missing. Managers circulated local legends to explain those disappearances, in this way issuing cautionary tales so as to intimidate indigenous workers. "El Familiar," as one story goes, was a big black dog born from a pact between the sugar mill boss and the Devil. "It feeds from the sweat and blood of the harvesters and ensures the good harvest and profits for the employers." As resistance, indigenous people organized and lobbied for new laws to uphold their rights in the face of state repression. Many of those social movements persist today, drawing support from other progressive strands of Argentine society. At the time, however, military operatives took aim at key activists. Consider, for instance, Marina Vilte, who had trained as a teacher. As Secretary of the Provincial Teachers Association, she worked to improve the working conditions of educators. In 1975 she joined the Revolutionary Front 17 October and was arrested and detained for a month. Upon release, she resumed her activism. She was kidnapped again and remains disappeared. Such atrocities can be traced back to "the Indigenous concentration camps of the late nineteenth century aimed to discipline and 'prepare' those who were supposed to become part of 'civilization,'" as well as to send an effective "message of totalitarian discipline to society as a whole" (Delrio et al., 2010: 143).

"Challenging Silence" is very much a memory project, which raises the question: "Why should we remember them?" One reason, according to curators, is that resistance against repressors continues to fuel indigenous politics. Images of activists are found in neighborhood murals and in photographs carried in demonstrations. Moreover, testimonies in the trials—in which nearly 2,000 military officers have been charged—commemorate their contributions to progressive causes. The exhibit concludes by citing this passage: "Memory does not indicate a break but rather continuity. It does not remember the missing ones who will not return, but turns a worried gaze on those who remain and who cannot go missing again" (*Revista Puentes Editorial*, Provincial Commission for Memory, November 2015). That particular campaign for memory serves as a counterweight to what scholars recognize as invisibility and the hegemonic denial of aboriginal extinction, both of which have played a key role in the statecraft of Argentina. "Therefore, we cannot conceive of the Argentine state without the Indigenous genocide, and vice versa" (Delrio et al., 2010: 149).

The broader technologies of genocide include the separation of families, the redistribution of children, forced labor, material expropriation, and deportation.

Those atrocities are remembered at the Museo Etnográfico and are also revisited elsewhere in Buenos Aires. Museo del Holocausto spans the horrors of the Second World War while keeping an eye on Argentine culture during the same period. A tall banner sets a stark tone with a photograph of a huge Nazi rally. With swastikas in clear sight, the caption declares, “Mientras tanto . . . en Buenos Aires. Año 1937” (Meanwhile . . . in Buenos Aires, Year 1937). Original photographs of a Nazi rally are secured under protective glass. At first glance, the photographs appear to have been taken in Munich or some other German city. A subtitle indicates differently, informing visitors that particular Nazi celebration took place in Buenos Aires on May 8, 1937, at Estadio Luna Park. Curators furnish more details by pointing out that in the mid-1930s, members of the Nazi Party in Germany supported an office in Buenos Aires to maintain contact with German people in Latin America while seeking to raise funds for the fascist movement. They channeled their influence through various social and civic institutions in Buenos Aires, including German-language schools, sports clubs, and youth organizations. Through diplomatic mail, the German embassy in Buenos Aires distributed Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitic materials.

Argentina remained neutral during the Second World War. However, according to one of the many storyboards, there was strong Nazi backing within the political ranks in Buenos Aires that eventually led to the 1943 coup. Subsequently, an escape route for Nazis into Buenos Aires, organized in Rome, was directed by Bishop Alois Hudal. That “ruta de las ratas” (“rat line”) was already operating when Juan Domingo Perón took power in 1946. Argentina under Perón continued to authorize their entry so as to attract qualified scientists and engineers—not unlike the US, which also hoped to benefit from their technical expertise. Between 1947 and 1952, many of those fleeing Germany for Argentina were war criminals wanted by the Nuremberg tribunals. Upon arrival they were shielded by the Peronist government and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and were gradually incorporated into the state. They settled in certain areas that had large German immigrant populations, such as San Carlos de Bariloche, La Cumbrecita, Villa General Belgrano, and the north of Buenos Aires (see Goñi, 2003; Sands, 2021).

The Museo del Holocausto acknowledges the inherent tension in postwar Argentina by juxtaposing the desperation of refugees—most notably Jewish people as well as survivors of the Holocaust—alongside the many war criminals who were allowed to live and move freely in Buenos Aires and the rest of Argentina. Among the former members of the Hitler regime who came to Argentina and who are included in the exhibit are the Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele, “the Angel of Death,” and Eduard Roschman, “the Butcher of Riga,” who entered Argentina in 1949 and 1948 respectively. The focus then shifts to Adolf Eichmann, who arrived in Buenos Aires in 1950. Eichmann is described as having been in charge of “Jewish Affairs” for the Nazi state and as responsible for the mass deportation of Jews to “the concentration and extermination camps.” In 1960, Eichmann was captured in

his home; the following year, at a historic trial in Jerusalem, he was convicted of crimes against humanity (see Arendt, [1963]1994).

The exhibit does not spare visitors jarring images of genocide, or “the Final Solution.” The curators document a range of profane acts, including mass graves, corpses being pushed into industrial ovens, and gruesome medical experiments carried out on starved prisoners, including children. Altogether, these photographs capture a repulsive panorama of extermination. Still, the emotive messaging is coupled with more didactic lessons. One panel simply states, “Don’t forget so that it is not repeated.” The irony here is that in fact, extermination did once again occur, this time in Argentina (see Crenzel, 2019; Feierstein, 2006). In the following sections, other memorial sites such as ESMA offer further condemnation of genocide as well as state terror in tandem with state denial.

### PUTTING DEATH INTO MOTION

Touring ESMA’s memorial space, visitors are provided details that contextualize the last dictatorship, its genocidal tendencies, and the sweeping campaign to transform Argentine society. Themes of danger and purity, as cultural binaries, are profoundly evident. “As from the 1930s, authoritarian, catholic and nationalist ideas had a great impact on Argentine military training, together with Nazi and Fascist ideologies and a growing feeling of anti-Semitism and anti-Communism. The military considered themselves the moral reservoir of the Nation.” That self-assigned sense of duty prompted the junta to defend its “free” and “Christian” world against the threat of “subversive” elements (see Der Ghougassian and Brumat, 2018; Robben, 2012).

ESMA provided the leaders of the last dictatorship with a clandestine space where they could carry out genocide in secrecy. Those secret tasks were planned in an area within the Casino called El Dorado. Hidden in the *back stage* of the “dirty war,” that ceremonial room served as an intelligence hub. Today, El Dorado occupies a *front stage* and is one of the many performative spaces at ESMA that rely on a sense of temporality to bring the record of past atrocities into the present. In that place, curators provide more excerpts from survivors’ testimonies to narrate the now-exposed “theatre of operation” (see D. Taylor, 1997). The Tasks Group was established to impose “its own war doctrine in which the main idea was to exterminate popular activists. . . . Its efficiency in operating is clearly shown in the results obtained; within a year 2,000 Argentine citizens were captured (from March 1976 to March 1977). The number increased to 4,750 by the month March 1978” (Milia, Marti, and Osatinsky, 1979, 1980; see CONADEP, 1986).

As the inner sanctum of the “dirty war,” El Dorado set in motion dark, strategic, and inside secrets. In that very room, intelligence officers decided who was to be abducted, and upon their capture, they were brought to basement of the Casino. There detainees were tortured by interrogators, who demanded the names of other

civilians. Once those targets were located, military “gangs” carried out more kidnappings, in this way fueling the repressive cycle. While the detainees were being held in the upper floors of the Casino, their fate was being decided by military leaders operating downstairs in El Dorado. To maintain its dark secrets—and later as a mechanism of denial—the military would destroy much of the evidence with a paper shredder known as the “crocodile.” Since former officers refuse to divulge information, prosecutors rely heavily on the testimony of detainees who worked in ESMA. Survivor Lidia Cristina Vieyra (2010) testified that officers in El Dorado determined “who was going to live or die. . . . Every Wednesday there were transfers.” Such God-like power was pervasive during the last dictatorship (see Actis et al., 2006; CONADEP, 1986).

As noted earlier, the basement of ESMA was given the seemingly mundane name “Sector 4.” Yet it was very much a place of profane and calculated violence. A poster explains that “the main method of extermination consisted in throwing prisoners to the ocean, or La Plata river, alive and anesthetized. That technique was later known as the *flights of death*.” Putting death into motion, prisoners were subjected to the following ritual:

At about 5pm, in “Capucha” (The Hood), the sub officers started to call the detained people by their numbers. They were made to stand in a straight line, held one another at their shoulders, in hoods and shackles at their feet. In those conditions, from the third floor they went down through the stairs in the whole building. In the Basement, a nurse gave them an injection of Pentothal, a drug that the repressors called ‘pentonaval’ [as an inside joke about the navy]. The sedative made them unconscious but it did not kill them. Under those conditions they were taken through a lateral door, taken into a truck waiting outside in the parking lot and drove to the Airport or military airports.

The military blatantly denied that it used death flights. In one remarkable disclosure in 1995, however, ex-Captain Adolfo Scilingo publicly confessed to participating in two death flights. In one mission, he pushed thirty naked, drugged victims out of an airplane into the Atlantic Ocean. Scilingo was sentenced to more than 1,000 years in prison (Verbitsky, 1996; see also Feitlowitz, 1998).

The “transfers” and death flights were premeditated murder; they were also a means to conceal extermination. The death flights were finally exposed when corpses began washing ashore on the beaches of neighboring Uruguay. Survivor Susana Burgos (1984) recalls a conversation she had with Lieutenant Aztiz (the “Blond Angel of Death”). Sharing a strategic secret, Aztiz told her, “The sea helps us. You may know the river has given the bodies back, so we thought about the Argentine Sea. We throw them from planes, the sea is blessed, from that height the sea is not soft it turns into a steel plate, that is why they break their necks, but in case they do not die, the whales do their job. We throw them asleep, of course” (Graziano, 1992). Argentine writer Rodolfo Walsh (1977) openly condemned the dictatorship’s efforts to eradicate a segment of the population and “carpet the River

Plate with dead bodies” as having the “systematic character of extermination.” Walsh added that the “mutilated bodies afloat in the Uruguay shores” included a 15-year-old boy, Floreal Avellaneda, whose autopsy revealed “injuries in the anal area and visible broken bones.”

#### CHILDREN BORN IN CAPTIVITY

In 1976, in the wake of the military coup, ESMA transitioned from primarily a training academy to a “clandestine detention center of torture and extermination.” The military now transformed the entire compound in order to conceal its activities. The garage, for example, was used to disguise cars that the junta had stolen from detainees by repainting them and changing their license plates. The printing house produced forged documents, such as falsified deeds for homes seized from the abducted. Even more horrific was the abduction of children born into captivity at ESMA. On the infirmary staff were doctors who would deliver the babies of tortured detainees; those infants were given to military families and their mothers were exterminated.

Recall Nora’s (2002) remarks on the “upsurge of memory” that challenges the “official” stories of history, pursues the recovery of aspects of the past that have been confiscated, and stresses the importance of heritage, which individuals seek as they learn more about their own identity. Those concerns are evident in the fate of pregnant detainees and their children. That controversy has produced many roles in the resistance against the last dictatorship, but one group stands out, namely the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (Asociación Civil Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo). The Grandmothers remain committed to identifying the “stolen” babies whose mothers were disappeared by the junta. It is estimated that more than 500 babies were born in detention and then “adopted” by military families (see Park, 2014). In memory of the pregnant women—and their infants—detained at ESMA, a series of exhibits inform visitors of that tragic chapter in Argentine history. In the attic of the Casino, a dimly lit message is written on the floor of an empty room: “Como era posible que en este lugar nacieran chicos?” (How is it possible for children to be born in this place?). Visitors tend to stare motionless into the void, and some of them openly weep.

Curators reveal the details of these systematic abductions—*confiscaciones*—of children while keeping the emphasis on memory. Lila Pastoriza (abducted from June 15, 1977, to October 25, 1978) testified at the ESMA Trial in 2010: “I asked [Officer] D’Imperio how it was possible that children were born in that place, in that place where people were tortured and he said: ‘Look the children are innocent, they are not to blame for having terrorist parents, that is why we give them to families that are going to educate them differently out of the terrorist world’” (ESMA Trial Testimony Case, 1270, July 8, 2010). Being pregnant did not prevent detainees from being tortured, abused, and subjected to inhuman conditions of



confinement at ESMA. A few days after giving birth, the mothers were murdered. However, before her death, the mother would be told that her baby would be given to her own family, and she would be instructed to prepare a letter with the child's information. The text of one such letter has been posted in the area where an estimated 30 children were born:

Dear Mum. Today you have news from me after such a long time. I'm so sorry for not having written before but I wasn't able to do so as I was abroad working. This is my baby boy. His name is Sebastian. He was born in a clinic in Buenos Aires. . . . I am in perfect shape, the person carrying the baby is a friend of mine, and he is doing me a favor as I can't do it myself at the moment. I want you to be calm as I'm all right and I will contact you again soon. . . . Paty.

In most instances, the letter was destroyed and the infant was given to an unrelated family. Through the tireless efforts of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, more than 100 of those children, as adults, have been identified and reunited with their biological families. The former dictator General Jorge Videla was convicted and sentenced to a 50-year prison term for his involvement in the unlawful adoptions. So that visitors will not forget those merciless acts, ESMA displays a list of doctors who participated in the birth scheme. The military and the medical staff referred to the child abduction process as "a well-oiled machine" (Feitlowitz, 1998; see *The Official Story*, 1985).

Since visitors actually enter the very space where these atrocities occurred, sitedness—the power of place—is established to promote its memory project. At several points, signs are posted to remind visitors that "here, a crime against humanity was perpetrated." The legacy of the "dirty war" pervades Argentine culture as well as thinking about the past. However, rather than positioning the sacred against the profane, the narrative situates one profane against another. Here enters *Teoría de los Dos Demonios* (Two Demons Theory), which sets out to explain—and excuse—political violence during the last dictatorship. In brief, it suggests that the junta was responding to guerrilla factions that had taken aim at the government. The military and the armed resistance fought a war that engulfed the rest of civil society (Familiars, 2006). Some of the political prisoners were also members of revolutionary groups; thus, they were labeled as terrorists. The military justified its violent methods by claiming to be the "lesser evil."

As a deeply entrenched form of denial, Two Demons Theory supposedly safeguarded the "civil society's endorsement of the genocide" (Trinchero, 2006: 123; see Perelli, 1994):

To clarify, the Two Demons Theory did acknowledge that victims existed but only a certain type of victim. According to this theory, the main group of victims was the general public—the citizens who were caught between the military and guerrilla violence and were silent either by fear or by choice. Those who disappeared were reimagined as innocent youths, and they were also considered victims. (Park, 2014: 26)



In many of the trials of former military officers, prosecutors focused on victims who had no political affiliation. The Two Demons Theory continues to be evoked in proposals for amnesty and eligibility for early release. Outside ESMA's gates, banners condemn those forms of impunity. Most recognizable is the catchphrase "No Al 2 x 1" ("No To The 2 for 1"), which challenges proposals that convicted officers be able to earn two years of "good time" for every year served in prison. That particular controversy continues to resonate in Argentine culture as an ongoing push and pull between justice and injustice.

#### MIENTRAS TANTO . . . EN SANTIAGO, AÑO 1973

Meanwhile in Santiago, the events surrounding September 11, 1973, inflicted enduring anguish on the country and its people. The bloodshed directed by General Pinochet was so rampant that the CIA's own sources struggled to keep track of the casualties. By the end of Pinochet's 17-year reign, more than 3,000 Chilean citizens had been eliminated through state-sponsored terror (Rettig Commission Report, 1993). Under the dictatorship, all threats to its authority were swiftly eradicated. Thousands of civilians were subjected to the brutal technologies of power, including mass detention, torture, and assassination. Civil society was immediately transformed: the junta suspended political parties, shut down Congress, took over universities, and imposed tight control over the media. On October 12, 1973, a diplomatic cable from US Ambassador Nathaniel Davis discussed his private meeting with Pinochet, who was soliciting economic and military assistance. When Davis expressed concerns about human rights atrocities, Pinochet replied that he would do his "best to prevent violations and loss of life" (Kornbluh, 2013: 163).

Apparently, the dictator was merely posturing. Three days later, Pinochet launched the *Caravana de la Muerte* (Caravan of Death). General Sergio Arellano Stark, a coup leader, was dispatched to exact revenge on political prisoners. For four days, Stark and his death squad of elite officers traveled by Puma helicopter to key provincial regions. At each stop along the way, Stark would enter a detention center, identify prisoners—most of whom had surrendered upon an official arrest warrant—then summarily torture, bayonet, and execute them. In an interview years later, General Joaquín Lagos Osorio said that Arellano had shown him paperwork in 1973 documenting his authority as Pinochet's official delegate and his order to "review and accelerate" the judicial process. Lagos offered a graphic account of their actions:

They cut eyes out with daggers. They broke their jaws and legs, Lagos said, adding that firing squads were used to inflict maximum pain instead of instant death. They shot them to pieces, first the legs, then the sexual organs, then the heart, all with machine guns. . . . They were no longer human bodies. I wanted to at least put the bodies back together again, to leave them more decent, but you couldn't. (Bernstein, 2016; see Ewel, 2018)

The Caravan of Death would leave a trail of 68 victims. US intelligence officers were aware of the massacres but reported them in vague terms, even characterizing the victims as extreme leftists. In fact, most of those killed were upstanding civil leaders and well-respected members of their communities, among them municipal leaders, lawyers, professors, and prominent union representatives (Spooner, 1999; Verdugo, 2001).

In 1998, 25 years after the coup, Pinochet was arrested in London, where he would remain in detention for 504 days while legal proceedings weighed the crimes of his dictatorship, including the Caravan of Death. The case against Pinochet had implications for the entire world as well as in Chile, where citizens underwent an “irruption of memory” (Wilde, 1999: 473). In 2000, Pinochet returned to face more than 70 judicial cases. Just 72 hours after Pinochet’s plane landed in Santiago, Judge Juan Guzmán filed a motion to have Pinochet’s immunity lifted so that he could be prosecuted for his role in the Caravan of Death. On December 1 (2000), Guzmán indicted Pinochet as “the intellectual author of the Caravan of Death” (Kornbluh, 2013: 477). Pinochet was placed under house arrest and interrogated by investigators. On December 10, 2006, Pinochet died before any trials could take place. While Pinochet had his share of mourners, crowds of detractors celebrated in the streets of Santiago. Observers noted that—ironically—he had died on International Human Rights Day. “The criminal has departed without ever being sentenced for all the acts he was responsible for during his dictatorship,” said Hugo Gutiérrez, a lawyer who had represented many victims (*Guelph Mercury*, 2006). President Michelle Bachelet, herself a victim of Pinochet, refused to provide a state funeral: “It would embarrass Chile’s conscience to honor somebody who was involved not only in human rights issues but even in misappropriation of public funds” (Agence France-Press, December 11, 2006).

With strange fanfare, however, the Chilean Military School sponsored Pinochet’s funeral, becoming a “national spectacle. . . . The ceremony attracted thousands of supporters, several of whom were caught on camera giving the Nazi salute to the deceased ex-dictator” (Kornbluh, 2013: 496). The event was another exercise in collective denial: Pinochet’s grandson, Augusto III, delivered a eulogy lauding his grandfather as a hero who had defeated Marxism. Augusto III also chastised the judges for prosecuting the cases against Pinochet. For breaching the government-imposed protocol for the funeral, Augusto III was dismissed from the military (Agence France-Press, December 13, 2006; Associated Press, 2006). As evidence of an emerging “Pinochet Effect” by which perpetrators would ultimately face justice, other military leaders with links to the Caravan of Death were tried and convicted (Roht-Arriaza, 2005). For their roles, General Manuel Contreras received a seven-year prison sentence and Colonel Pedro Espinoza, six years. The Chilean Supreme Court ruled that General Arellano should serve six years in prison, but the sentence was suspended due to his rapidly deteriorating mental health (Bernstein, 2016).

In Santiago, memories of state terror continue to resonate at various sites. Recall Casa de José Domingo Cañas, a memorial on the demolished property of a former detention/torture center, where many narratives are delivered on human rights violations committed by the Pinochet regime (Arenas Uriarte, 2016). The most conspicuous atrocity is the pre-Condor—cross-border—mission called Operation Colombo, which today is signaled throughout the city with the foreboding number 119. In 1975, DINA disappeared at least 119 Chileans who had been labeled “subversives.” The operation was followed by a classic example of “black propaganda” as publications (funded by the CIA) released stories reporting that the 119 Chileans had been killed in the course of guerrilla activities in Argentina or during fighting between leftist factions. Photographs showed dead bodies recovered in Argentina, many of which had been mutilated to conceal their identity. As Dinges explains in *The Condor Years*: “The ID cards with the bodies were Chilean, but the bodies were not. They belonged to Argentine victims of the AAA death squads” (2004: 235–36). At Casa de José Domingo Cañas, a well-known reminder speaks to those murders in the form of a newspaper headline “Exterminados Como Ratones” (“Exterminated Like Mice”). Alongside a black and red banner with the number 119, pictures of the Chilean victims are memorialized on small pedestals surrounded by objects re-collected from the ruins of the Casa. The commemorative space is supported by a collective that animates memory through political—at times combative—activism, a move that is in sharp contrast to the “museumological” approach at Villa Grimaldi (Collins and Hite, 2013).

The Caravan of Death, Operation Colombo, and other crimes of the Chilean dictatorship reactivate a profound consciousness each September 11, the date of the coup. In 2017, on “Once de Septiembre”—as the day is known locally—groups of demonstrators make their way through downtown Santiago to remember the loss of life in 1973. In front of La Moneda, the presidential palace where President Salvador Allende committed suicide amid air raids, several young adults gather. There they protest in silence, wearing large white paper hats to make them appear as mice. To underscore the meaning of their performance, they conspicuously hold up newspapers bearing the infamous headline “Exterminados Como Ratones” (“Exterminated Like Mice”) (see figure 21).

#### FROM “PARAISO” TO VALPARAISO

At other sites in Santiago, crimes of the dictatorship have entered the collective consciousness. Most notable is Villa Grimaldi, which in its previous incarnation was a popular restaurant known as “Paraíso” (“Paradise”). In a sharp turn for the worse, from 1974 to 1978, it served as a secret “Center of Abduction, Torture and Extermination.” Operating under the code name “Cuartel Terranova,” DINA agents tortured more than 4,500 political prisoners. As many as 229 of them were executed on the premises, which were later demolished to conceal criminal evidence. As noted earlier, the villa was transformed into a solemn peace park



FIGURE 21. “Exterminated Like Mice.” In Santiago, on September 11, 2017, protesters gathered in front La Moneda, where they dressed as mice and held newspapers with the headline “Exterminados Como Ratones” (“Exterminated Like Mice”) in reference to Operation Colombo.  
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in 2004. Narratives about its cruel past, however, remain. The use of conceptual art adds elements of mystique. On the edge of the property is a large cube tilted in a manner that seems to defy gravity. It is a monument to the victims of Operation Puerto Montt (1974–78). Information posted next to the cube explains that prisoners were taken from secret torture centers, such as Villa Grimaldi, José Domingo Cañas, and 38 Londres, then transferred to other locations where they were injected with substances that numbed (or killed) them. Their limp bodies were secured to pieces of metal railing so as to add weight. They were then loaded onto a Puma helicopter that flew along the coast until all of the victims had been pushed out into the sea. Eventually some bodies began to float and wash up on the beach. Investigators discovered pieces of rusty metal that had been used during the operation. The installation was conceived as a “silent witness of horror,” with the cube representing a container that had lost “historical stability.” A short footbridge invites visitors to enter the cube and view remnants of the rails recovered from the ocean floor.

The various spaces within Villa Grimaldi consist of reconstructed prison cells, memorial gardens, and scholarly poster boards. Altogether, they point to a Bastille Effect by a stating its mission: “For a culture of human rights: Fighting against oblivion in Villa Grimaldi.” In its afterlife, that place of memory insists that “Nadie esta olvidado” (“Nobody is forgotten”). A timeline chronicles the transformation of the site into a memorial space. The last entry is for October 14, 2006. On that date President Michelle Bachelet visited Villa Grimaldi, “and she is the only President of Democratic Chile to do so.” When Pinochet seized power, Bachelet’s father Alberto—who headed the Food Distribution Office under Allende—was detained for treason. After months of torture, he died in custody in 1974. The following year, Michelle and her mother were confined to Villa Grimaldi, where they too were subjected to abuse and torture. In 2013, Bachelet disclosed that while she was held at Grimaldi, she was personally interrogated by Manuel Contreras, the head of DINA. Bachelet went on to serve two terms as President of Chile (2006–10, 2014–18). In 2018, she was named the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (Cea, 2013; see also Collins, Hite, and Joignant, 2013).

Elsewhere in Chile, political imprisonment under the dictatorship is cast into memory. Consider, for instance, the city of Valparaíso (“Vale of Paradise”), birthplace of both Allende and Pinochet. There, the former prison Cerro Carcel contains historical fragments of state repression. Tucked into a hillside, surrounded by rugged working-class neighborhoods, Cerro Carcel is decidedly part of the community. Officially named Parque Cultural de Valparaíso, the memorial space functions as an elaborate visual and performing arts center offering a busy schedule of theatre, dance, exhibitions, and lectures. On one of the interior walls of the ex-prison, former political prisoners are commemorated in large high-resolution portraits. Down the hill, in the city center, a modern monument remembers the disappeared by listing the local victims by name and the dates they went missing or were executed by the military.





FIGURE 22. "The Selk'nam." On a street in Valparaíso, an artist tells the story of the Selk'nam people who were subjected to genocide by European settlers in the 19th century. © retrowelch 2022.

Valparaíso—or just Valpo—is synonymous with public art: murals and political graffiti saturate the urban landscape, attracting tourists from all over the world. Some of the messages deliver historical and cultural lessons about the territory and its people. One series of brightly colored paintings tells the story of the "The Selk'nam (or Ona)" people, who

were a nomadic tribe, indigenous to the Tierra del Fuego region of southern Chile and Argentina. They believed that in the time of the ancestors all things walked as people: the Sun, Moon Mountains, everything. With the arrival of the Europeans in the late 19th century, the Selk'nam were hunted and murdered to rid them from the land, which the Chilean government was parceling out to Europeans. Chile paid a bounty for each carcass, as given proof of delivering an ear. After 10,000 years in Patagonia, their genocide took less than thirty. They are now considered extinct—Hailey Gaiser [artist], 2017. (See figure 22)

On the other side of the city, in 2017, the Museo de Bellas Artes (Museum of Fine Arts) sponsored an exhibit on the Selk'nam. Of particular interest, the gallery displayed photographs by Martin Gusinde (2015), who conducted anthropological research with the indigenous people of Tierra del Fuego in southern Chile. In the early 20th century, Gusinde, an ordained minister from Austria, immersed himself in the tribe for 22 months and was allowed to participate in initiation rites. He also recorded songs and chants, which have been archived at the Martin Gusinde Anthropological Museum in Puerto Williams, on Navarino Island south of Tierra del Fuego (see Chapman, 1982). Other artistic and scholarly critique on colonial power as it intersects indigenous people is displayed in other cities in the southern cone of Latin America, including Asunción (Paraguay).

#### LEGACY OF COLONIAL POWER IN PARAGUAY

In the foyer of the Archives of Terror in Asunción, an elaborate display on the rise of colonial power in Paraguay throws critical light onto an apparatus of abuse inflicted on the indigenous people. The first in a series of panels containing images and text informs visitors that initially the Spanish were friendly with the Indians. However, those relations eroded as the Indians—in particular the Guaraní—were treated as “vassal servants,” which drove a wedge between the two cultural groups. That tension had already been instilled by a feudal system of economic exploitation. Over time, customary tribal sanctions intended to maintain community cohesion were replaced by more monarchical-based penalties. Illustrations of corporal punishments and medieval executions demonstrate a turn toward European punishments, such as breaking on the wheel, stocks and pillories, and a primitive guillotine. Guaraní society was also injected with elements of the Inquisition. Colonizers tortured Indians for “crimes against faith,” thus blurring the lines between the sacred and the profane as well as danger and purity. Even in the face of a reformed “Justicia Colonial,” provisions to protect the indigenous people often went unfulfilled.

As a place of learning, the exhibit leaps ahead to the Stroessner dictatorship (1954–89). The regime launched a fierce anti-communist campaign and imposed repression on vast sectors of Paraguayans. Photographs of police beating members of a small crowd in broad daylight confirm a collective fear. Mass detentions,



torture, and disappearances were directed at workers, farmhands, and students. More images of the detention cells, currently open to the public at the Memorial Museum, remind visitors of the brutalization of civilians through the use of electric shock and *la pileta* (the filthy bathtub used for mock drowning). “Campos de Concentración” have an appalling history in Paraguay; compounding matters, Stroessner also displaced people to remote areas of the country. The text of the exhibit is punctuated with padlocks, creating a visceral effect of a country under lockdown. In the early 1990s, the transition to democracy embraced the rule of law, especially the rights of women, children, and indigenous people. The final installment of the display turns special attention to the lifting of impunity for crimes against humanity and genocide. Much like the critique of “Foucault’s Museum,” which promotes a progressive commentary on human rights, the presentation concludes with an optimistic tone by depicting justice as a force that prevails over injustice.

With respect to contemporary attacks on the indigenous communities, however, the exhibit provides few details. Filling that void, international activists have exposed compelling evidence of extermination. In 1973, Mark Munzel released findings in a document titled *The Ache Indians: Genocide in Paraguay*. The report concludes that the UN Charter of Human Rights had been denied to the Ache Indians, “not through indifference or neglect, but by a deliberate Government policy of genocide disguised as benevolence” (1973: 5). The study goes on to contextualize the war against the Ache as an extension of colonial rule that served to conquer new territories and capture indigenous people for cheap as well as slave labor. Massacres, manhunts, and other forms of calculated violence contributed to what J. A. Borgognon, a member of the armed forces and at the time Vice Director of the Native Affairs Department in the Ministry of Defense, described as a tribe “close to extinction” (1968: 360). The methodical extermination involved the hunting and selling of Indian children, often to sex traffickers (Cadogan, 1967). The separation of families has been justified by the dubious claim that the children would be better cared for by non-Indian parents. That convenience of denial is “a remarkable example of the colonial mentality still rampant among some Paraguayans, who always suppose that Ache parents are unable to give their children a decent education” (Munzel, 1973: 15; see also Barros, Campos, and Griffin, 2018; Costa, 2019b).

Activist clergy, however, resisted the regime and its abuse of the Ache people. Father Bartomeu Meliá, an anthropologist and linguist, devoted his work to the indigenous people and in 1976 was deported from Paraguay by Stroessner. Meliá, who died in 2019, recalled being in his bathroom when police entered his home; at gunpoint, he was ordered to leave the country immediately. Meliá was targeted for his condemnation of the dictatorship’s systematic massacres of the Ache carried out by soldiers and mercenaries, who also kidnapped children and enslaved them as servants. His criticism gained international recognition, prompting US President Jimmy Carter to demand that the Paraguayan government investigate

incidents of genocide. “The military regime’s response was to deny everything and expel the complainants” (Carneri, 2019; see also Harder Horst, 2007). Formal charges of genocide have been lodged, but judicial bodies have deflected them by insisting that proof requiring “specific intent” is lacking. Nevertheless, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission has issued concerns that grave abuses against the indigenous people were committed by the Stroessner government (Cooper, 2008; Quigley, 2006).

Collective memory—and denial—in Paraguay is further complicated by Stroessner’s eagerness to harbor Nazis fleeing Germany to avoid being prosecuted for genocide and crimes against humanity. Without characterizing the entire German immigrant community as supporting fascism, it should be noted the first Nazi party outside of Germany was established in Paraguay in the 1930s. During the Second World War, Paraguay maintained political distance from Germany; in 1945, it declared war on Germany, albeit just three months before its defeat. When Stroessner, of German descent, assumed power, he implemented an authoritarian style reminiscent of the Nazis. Much like Perón in Argentina, Stroessner opened the “rat lines” for Nazi fugitives, so that his country became known as the “poor man’s Nazi regime” (Cooper, 2008: 167; Sands, 2021). Among those welcomed to Paraguay were Joseph Mengele (who naturalized as a Paraguayan citizen), Marko Colak, Erwin Fleiss, Ante Pavelić, and Edward Roschmann (Goñi, 2003, Steinacher, 2012). In reference to Nazi collaborators living with impunity during the Cold War, Dasa Drndic writes: “Wars are an orgy of forgetting” (2019: 22).

## CONCLUSION

Returning to the cultural meaning of the guillotine, it is important to note just how deeply mythologized that form of execution really was. Smith (2008) captures that significance by theorizing about the symbolism of death as it relates to complex imaginaries of the body, pollution, and salvation (see Bataille, 1991; Hertz, [1960]2009). At the time, advocates of the guillotine insisted that the instrument would accommodate the 1791 penal code requiring executions to be carried out without pain inflicted on the body. Dr. Guillotine, whose name is synonymous with the device, famously declared to the National Assembly, “With my machine I’ll cut off your head in the blink of the eye, and you will feel nothing but a slight coolness on the back of the neck” (1790: 278). Such pronouncements added to a broader legitimacy of the machine; they also channeled currents of meaning and utopian narratives, thus paving the way for an emergent ideology of a new political order (see Alexander, 2005). Correspondingly, the guillotine provided a ritual intervention on the body that carried magical properties and inspired awe (Turner, 1977; Smith, 2008). Still, opposition to Dr. Guillotine’s argument mounted as counterclaims proposed that the device did not deliver instantaneous death; rather, it caused moments of intense pain. The procedure, therefore, breeched

revolutionary penal policy and the humanistic values of the Enlightenment. In the end, the mutilated body signified pollution that impeded civilization and progress, casting a gothic shadow over modernity (Hurley, 1996).

Smith suggests that the guillotine stands as strategic research site for exploring the cultural ramifications of penal technologies; in the same vein, a critique of extermination provides opportunities for careful circumspection of the duality between purity and danger. Recall the pretentious claims of the Argentine generals who hailed the death flights as a divinely ordained ritual. Those pronouncements went well beyond blatant denial. From the standpoint of the junta, such euphemisms spoke to a presumably higher purpose of extermination – that it was an attempt to purify a Western and Christian civilization by eradicating “subversive” elements. To the contrary, the “dirty wars” in Argentina and elsewhere in the southern cone have inflicted sustained harm on society, leaving its people—and indigenous communities—in a state of grief. As Trinchero observes: “Native peoples have internalized the memory of war in their consciousness as a state policy against them” (2006: 133). Of course, confronting denial remains a key strategy of human rights activism. “We must,” in the words of Stan Cohen, “make it difficult for people to say that they ‘don’t know’” (2001: 11). The National Institute against Discrimination condemns expressions of denial or minimization of the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, and the genocide by Argentina’s last dictatorship. Conspicuously absent from that proclamation is any mention of the indigenous people of the southern cone (Delrio et al. 2010; see also Sozzo, 2016; Zysman, 2017).