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## Signs of State Terrorism in Post-Authoritarian Santiago: Memories and Memorialization in Chile

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# DISSIDENCES

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## *Signs of State Terrorism in Post-Authoritarian Santiago: Memories and Memorialization in Chile*

Carolina Aguilera / Villa Grimaldi Peace Park  
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States should never violate Human Rights. Contrary to desire, the chronicle of the twentieth century presents millions of deaths, beatings and harm to non-adversarial civilians at the hands of public institutions at the central or local level.

Focusing on the South American cycle of new authoritarianisms (1964-1990), we maintain that the effectiveness of predatory States (McSherry, 2009) was measured by the

elimination of conational stigmatized as subversives (Tapia, 1980). Given that the concept of internal enemy also included foreigners, States containing a terrorist presence also secreted massive doses of xenophobia.

As is well known, the perpetrators conformed to a hierarchical structure and their mission was facilitated by the collaboration and even the complacency of segments of both urban and rural populations. Direct and indirect witnesses of the abuses, it was not unusual for these different social collectives to opt first to provoke and then to deny the evil nature / perversity of the violations. While it might seem incoherent, the justification that was later made of the crimes as excesses, errors, or flaws attributable to individuals and unbeknownst to the chain of command, it is a recourse that still tends to combine with a posture of negation.

In spite of the humanitarian role that some institutions specialized in the promotion of Human Rights can play, for the close circle of those intimate with the victims who didn't survive, the resilience has been a rocky road. At the same time, for those victims who have survived, the overwhelming violence of State Terrorism represents a trauma difficult to process.

Although the legacy of State Terrorism may be dealt with by different actors in a diverse and generally conflictive manner, it is more and more frequent for civil administrations to recognize the earlier abuses, seek official pardons, make available material compensations and promote symbolic-expressive recognition. But what seems necessary and evident, is not so evident or necessary when the introduction of a new civil government takes place in the interstices of a State subordinate to an autonomous military.

When there is redress for the victims on the part of governmental institutions, it can be tied to the installation of symbolic works in public spaces. When we find these, their designs and uses tell us as much about their messages and meanings as about the disputes and agreements

that arise when remembering and naming events of great violence (Young, 1993). In most cases, it is the same organizations of civil society that drive these works, challenging the State; with the latter tending, more often than not, to play a reactive role (Hite & Collins, 2009 and ICTJ et.al., 2008). What are the deeds that will be remembered in public spaces? What interpretation of the past will dominate and how will this translate to the public space? These and other questions send us directly to the arena of collaboration and open dispute that favors the interaction of State and civil society (Hite, 2007 and Stern, 2010).

In the case of Santiago de Chile, the signs of State Terrorism have ended up shaping a singular urban reality. Dependent upon the processes of remembering the past, the memorial sites attest to the complex processes of sedimentation of memory over two decades of representative democracy (Dávila et al. 2007). With regard to this, it seems relevant to ask again: How can we explain the proliferation, in post-Pinochet Santiago, of projects relating to the violations of Human Rights?

### **Conflicts and materializations during the short nineties (1990-1998)**

Almost concurrent with the end of the Aylwin administration (1990-1994) Santiago was witness to the inauguration of a powerful memorial, constructed by the State, that recognized the victims of the military dictatorship. While it was not the first memorial built in Chile to pay homage to both political prisoners who were executed as well as the detained-disappeared, the work looked to project a symbolic reparation of national character. The monument was possible thanks to a very disputed Law which permitted its public financing (Otano, 2006). What does the history of the Memorial tell us?

1990 was advancing and the formation of a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission was approached within a context of revelations which included the reopening of judicial investigations, the publication of interview books (Los Zarpazos del Puma), the exhibition of films focusing on the disappeared (Imagen Latente), and most important, the horrifying discovery of bones in mass graves (Stern, 2010). Spread out all over Chile, there more and more mass graves were found in military compounds, parcels of land adjacent to concentration camps, cemeteries and areas that were uninhabited or very difficult to access (Gómez, 1990 and Stern, 2010).

When Aylwin sought public pardon in the name of the nation (March 1991), the principal actors involved were already up against results that many thought were predictable. The span of positions was divided in three. The opposition parties, the principle families and the majority of the media, agreed in granting the Armed Forces a way to save face. Thrilled with the model of growth without development, the so called factual powers applauded the military for having recovered the country from marxist totalitarianism.

While in semi-opposition, the Human Rights movement demanded truth with justice, having on their side a left wing without parliamentary representation. The case was closed, the governing party considered its work partially fulfilled with the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Confronted with the dilemma of justice, the official line was always subordinated to a conservative version of political realism. For the majority of the "concertacionista"[3] politicians, violations of Human Rights were being dealt with thanks to the implementation of compensatory programs that included economic, medical and educational support to the victims and their direct families (Lira & Loveman, 1999).

Although the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission stipulated the importance of realizing works of reparation in the public sphere, a decade had to go by before the State would provide the Program of Human Rights special resources (Dávila et al. 2007). The first memorials financed with governmental contributions and erected on public lands were not exempt from polemic and unfortunate delays. This can at least be deduced from the conflicts that took place around the Memorial of the General Cemetery (1994) and the Villa Grimaldi Memorial Park (1997). In both cases, the erecting of the monuments was possible thanks to the existence of a social movement that knew how to put pressure on the public apparatus and obtain, from an always moderate political class, something more than a mere spoken declaration of support.

At least since 1991, the Human Rights organizations had proposed placing a monument in the center of the city and a memorial in the General Cemetery of Santiago (Wilde, 2008 and Stern, 2010). When an ad-hoc commission announced the Cemetery as the only location, Human Rights organizations criticized its confinement within the “City of the Dead.” For the Association of Families of Disappeared Detainees and Executed Political Prisoners, placing the memorial in a graveyard minimized the strength of a symbol which should, according to its promoters, transcend before encapsulating.

In its design, the memorial had a limited number of niches available as if the State had assumed in advance that the bodies of the disappeared would remain disappeared for ever. Apparently defeated in their aspirations, the collectives themselves would take time to represent and personalize the memorial until they transformed it into a station for their principal commemorations. While studies are lacking that permit us to determine the effect of its location

next to the newly-buried in the Cemetery, at least for the family members, this Memorial has allowed a certain level of personalization of memory.

Again from 1992 – 1993, we can affirm that a line of tension divided the promoters of the memorial. While for Human Rights organizations, the monument represented a demand that openly accused Pinochet of being a criminal, the memorial was also meant to confer on those who suffered reprisals of State Terrorism, the quality of being protagonists of their time instead of branding them as passive victims.

On the contrary, for the centrist and moderate government of Patricio Aylwin, the erection of the monument constituted a symbolic and compensating gesture more than a political and challenging act; more than bodies, it would only hold names. In his vision, the mere mention of a memorial in front of La Moneda was a symbolic error and a political impossibility. As to the former, the erection of a monument, in the end accusatory, would create more tension in the already conflictive relationships with the military, and particularly, with the untouchable Pinochet. As to the latter, inside the political system there did not exist a completely condemning position regarding the perniciousness of State Terrorism during the dictatorship.

Built to pay funereal homage to the deceased victims of State Terrorism, the marble of the plates attached to the main wall was secondary to the dominant materials of the necropolis. Four heads of sculpted stone occupy all of the points of a small raised square from which it is possible to have a panoramic view of the interminable lists of disappeared or executed. Their look oscillating between troubling and lost, the sculptured faces are a figurative blow in the midst of such material smoothness. Completing the monument, two rows of niches extend the memorial out until it blends into the typical mortuary architecture that predominates in many cemeteries.

In the lesser known chapter, the conflicts between the convenience and opportunity for erecting the Memorial would carry on until eventually tarnishing the inauguration of the very project. In spite of being a governmental work, built thanks to fiscal resources and placed on public land, not only was the outgoing President absent at the unveiling but the majority of his ministers as well. It was not until the summer of 1994, just a few weeks since the Concertación had earned a clean electoral triumph, that the marble slabs, which included extensive lists of those who had suffered reprisals (at the hands of the State), could finally be contemplated by a small group of attendees (Stern, 2006). Such a symbolic gathering would be conveniently dodged by the President elect – Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle – as well as by the main cabinet members of his government.

The same year in which the Memorial in the Cemetery was inaugurated, for the first time in the Southern Cone the recuperation of a past kidnapping, torture and disappearing center was carried out. The Villa Grimaldi Memorial Park was a singular experience in its location and appropriation (Stern, 2010 and Lazzara, 2003). For more than a decade, it was the only public space, outside of a cemetery, capable of housing a gathering for those who lived the experience of State Terrorism. It also stood out for its location on the edge of the foothills. Its aesthetic project is also different. As the first recuperation of an authentic site in Chile, the memorial Park adopted an abstract design, almost at the expense of the material traces of the space. Whatever the reasons, one part of the Park was built on the original foundation, and the design in the form of a cross and some of the artistic pieces incorporated found material (cobblestones, floor tiles, stone stairs) as raw material for the creation of symbolic-expressive elements.

The result was a memorial park, marked by multiple symbolic elements, none too expressive of the horror or of the questions regarding the prosecution of those responsible.

Imagined as a space for reparation and gathering, one that would allow an atmosphere of peace, the absence of references to State Terrorism justified that in the years following its construction, significant elements of the concentration camp experience (the Tower and solitary confinement) were recreated. Since 2007, remains of the tracks used by the repressive arm of the dictatorship to throw bodies into the sea and make them disappear definitively are exhibited in this space. It is a space that today challenges its visitors to talk to each other, through the development of educational projects and the transmission of the memories about the place. In an exemplary manner, it is possible to bear witness to the testimonies of more than 100 people who either suffered solitary confinement in the ex Terranova Secret Prison, as well as to those of family members and those who participated in the recuperation of the space.

### **Memorialization as a Work of Art**

As far as judicial investigations are concerned, the end to judicial bias was key. After the leaders of the secret police were sentenced (1995), trying other perpetrators proved possible. Although the rulings against Contreras and Espinoza seemed exceptional, the challenging effect produced by the flood of lawsuits against Pinochet (1998), undermined the legitimacy of the person who, to a degree, was the overseer of a transition designed to guarantee his complete impunity. His international detention would accelerate his decline and in its collapse, pinochetism as a political project, would suffer irreparable damage. Although Pinochet's return to Chile was conceived to be a spectacular triumph (2000), his criminal record made things awkward and would chip away at the image of a political right now lacking the respectability it sought. A few years later, as a result of the accusations of corruption that would follow from the discovery of secret accounts in

Riggs Bank, his primary political supporter (the UDI) would comfortably distance themselves from Pinochet as well as from his legacy.

Half-way through his term, it fell to Lagos' to draw up official Human Rights policies ("There is No Future Without a Past"). Although he failed to include the memorialization of space as part of the reparations, he did include Human Rights as an educational resource. It is thanks to his administration that people who had been physically or psychologically harmed by agents of the State could be heard, acknowledged and recompensed without fear of death. It is worth remembering that the official report of the National Commission on Political Prison and Torture (2004) estimated a total of almost 30,000 victims. It is possible that his socialist background lent it a different memory of the dictatorial period, one that bore in mind the torture in prison of those who were pursued for participating in or supporting the Unidad Popular government.

Just as the performance of the Justice Department changed, and to a lesser extent so did that of the media, so too did the relationship between city and memory under the new, timidly social democrat administration (Aguilera et al. 2010). In this regard, the majority of physical memorialization projects were started, although not concluded, during both socialist administrations. In our opinion, their administrations understood these works as part of a civic obligation that moved towards the decisional center of Santiago, nonetheless its realization never stopped being conflictive/polemical.

As to be expected, the completed memorialization projects created a new presence in the city. Whereas until this moment these memorials had been few and very small, their expressive materiality would no longer be confined to spaces of limited access (cemeteries or parks). It could now expand to include, for example, the complete covering of a derelict bridge (the Bulnes

Bridge Memorial), or aspire, through the transparency of glass, contiguity with active military precincts (the first location considered for the Memorial de las Mujeres).

Under Lagos' administration a second line of memorialization developed. More than at previous administrations, the figure of the martyr-president —socialist to be specific— becomes a subject of memorialization; in particular at the inauguration of a sculpture in his honor and with the reopening of the Puerta de Morandé 80 (Hite, 2003). Allende's presence will multiply when Bachelet turns the Moneda's Salón Blanco (the White Room) into a museum, subsidizes artistic presentations that remember him or collaborates actively with the installation of the Salvador Allende Foundation by lending out a building belonging to the Office of Public Prosecutions, - that also happened to be former center of repression.

Taking into account what we have previously outlined, and without mention of what is occurring regionally and in the provinces, it is not surprising that the project receiving the second honorable mention in the National Museum of Memory competition, should have at its center an image of Allende. What is notable about this is that it proves that the process of "Allendization" has been capillary (Cáceres et al. 2009), extending out from wide sectors of Chilean society with few objections to become what can only be understood as the colonization of the National Museum by the image of Allende. Even so, including Allende as an emblem of the Museum forced it, at the very least, to widen its scope beyond September 11 1973. This opportunity to widen the scope of the project, which would mean for the people behind the National Museum of Memory the opening up of a Pandora's box of uncontrollable consequences, was dismissed as an alternative (Joignant and Menéndez-Carrión, 1999).

## **Memorialization Without Strings**

What can be said about the memorialization of space within the policies of Human Rights maintained by the government of Michelle Bachelet (2006 – 2010)? The record was conservative: a) to the Human Rights Program administered by the Department of the Interior a new coordinating entity would be added that answers directly to the president — la Comisión Asesora Presidencial de Derechos Humanos (the Presidential Advisory Commission on Human Rights). Created as a result of the scandal that ensued after the false identification of bodies found buried in a semi-abandoned patio (Patio 29) of the National Cemetery, it played an important centralizing role for various memorialization projects as well as for promoting the creation of the capital's most famous urban memorial landmark: the Museum of Memory; b) projects proliferated throughout the city and were justified as being part of the process of reparation; c) the physical magnitude of each project can be seen in their visibility and centrality to the point that they are considered must-see landmarks on certain national tours; d) the majority of the initiatives were competitions which increased the number of authors responsible for the works, mainly artists and architects; e) the competitions were financed by a range of ministries and were set up by mutual agreement with the organizations that were requesting them (with the awards sometimes directly granted by these same organizations); f) all of the projects included an artistic element that was carried out collectively and included the relations of the victims; g) at least one of the competitions, the one corresponding to a National Monument, was convened by the National Monuments Council, and h) The increase in the state registry of business included projects promoted by municipalities (Isla de Maipo and Huechuraba).

Whatever the outcome, the projects speak to an important relationship. The State and Civil Society coordinated joint initiatives that, despite specific disagreements and delays of all

type, were inaugurated with great care. As previously mentioned, Michelle Bachelet's interest in continuing with projects designed by Lagos meant she had to deal with the crisis of the mistaken identities of Patio 29 and the scandal surrounding the wrongful beneficiaries.

Even more memorials were built with public funds (from different sources), ranging from small-scale operations to institutions of great importance. The work was part of much wider cultural logic that even catapulted some of the spaces to must-see landmarks to visit during national heritage day (such as, the DINA's former secret detention center, known as "Yucatán," on 38 Londres Street smack in the middle of the state capital) (Lazzara, 2011).

Another visible trend was seen in the interest for advancing an every-day socialization for the values of Human Resources. It was no longer just about symbolically remembering a singular character in the face of a constructed form. To settle the debt, in 2010 the Museum of Memory was inaugurated.

### **Final Considerations**

On more than one occasion, Chile has revealed itself to be a paradigmatic case: in the 1960s, for understanding a political project of the Left via democratic means; later for shining the light on the figure of an implacable dictator; and thereafter for providing an "exemplary" dynamic for the transition to democracy. Currently, it would seem that Chile again sets itself up for its unique process of transnational memorialization, one marked by the proliferation of signs of a reparatory nature—more than half of the human rights memorials constructed by 2006 were inaugurated that year—and accompanied by legal proceedings with sentences unprecedented for their sheer number—the legal proceedings against the perpetrators of State Terrorism spread and the

number of sentences is striking (Valenzuela, 2006). Paradoxically, civilians who had a prominent political role during the dictatorship have not been punished with the same rigor.

Today, in Santiago at least, we can find various public memorial spaces dedicated to remembering the country's authoritarian past. They are recuperated spaces administered by human rights groups but with a certain amount of state subsidy. Until now, the right wing government of Sebastián Piñera has not wanted to challenge this policy.

Today it would seem that the fight for a city that remembers is giving way to pledges to commit to the recovery of the debate around those spaces marked by reparation. Apparently, a new twist in the plot is beginning, one in which the open acknowledgement of State Terrorism is tentatively replacing the naming of the horror as human rights violations.

Finally, a tour of those public spaces that were once the dictatorship's centers of detention and torture and are now memorial spaces, reveals that their management principally falls to associations made up of ex prisoners or relations of those detained and disappeared. The result of reactive state action of a reparatory nature (only after long struggles the spaces are first recuperated as government buildings designated for public use and then conceded free of rent to human rights organizations), their current state contains a paradox: the discussion concerning what should happen to these spaces of horror has generally fallen on a very particular group within society, generally those who suffered the most cruel violations of their human rights. Spaces of symbolic reparation and gathering that have been relatively successful, although sometimes isolated from the international debates in circulation, today have the challenge of opening themselves up to a wider discussion, one that convenes more actors in the debate around what is at stake in the reparation and resignification of these spaces. What is at stake? The elucidation of the truth, the search for justice, and a debate about the type of democracy we want.

## Notes

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[2] Historian and urban planner. Teaches at the Institute of Urban and Territorial Studies of Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. gacacere@uc.cl

[3] Translator's note: The *concertacionista* politicians are those belonging to the Concert of Parties for Democracy (la Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia). The parties belonging to the Concert were a coalition of the center-left. The Concert was formed in 1988.

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