

## CHAPTER 4

## CLEANING THE SLATE

## TERROR DOES ITS WORK

**Extermination in Argentina is not spontaneous, it is not by chance, it is not irrational: it is the systematic destruction of a “substantial part” of the Argentine national group, intended to transform the group as such, to redefine its way of being, its social relations, its fate, its future.**

—Daniel Feierstein, an Argentine sociologist, 2004<sup>1</sup>

**I had just one goal—to stay alive until the next day. . . . But it wasn't just to survive, but to survive as me.**

—Mario Villani, survivor of four years in Argentina's torture camps<sup>2</sup>

In 1976, Orlando Letelier was back in Washington, D.C., no longer as an ambassador but as an activist with a progressive think tank, the Institute for Policy Studies. Haunted by thoughts of the colleagues and friends still facing torture in junta camps, Letelier used his newly recovered freedom to expose Pinochet's crimes and to defend Allende's record against the CIA propaganda machine.

The activism was having an effect, and Pinochet faced universal condemnation for his human rights record. What frustrated Letelier, a trained economist, was that even as the world gasped in horror at reports of summary executions and electroshock in the jails, most were silent in the face of the economic shock therapy; or, in the case of the international banks showering the junta with loans, downright giddy about Pinochet's embrace of “free-market fundamentals.” Letelier rejected a frequently articulated notion that

the junta had two separate, easily compartmentalized projects—one a bold experiment in economic transformation, the other an evil system of grisly torture and terror. There was only one project, the former ambassador insisted, in which terror was the central tool of the free-market transformation.

“The violation of human rights, the system of institutionalized brutality, the drastic control and suppression of every form of meaningful dissent is discussed (and often condemned) as a phenomenon only indirectly linked, or indeed entirely unrelated, to the classical unrestrained ‘free market’ policies that have been enforced by the military junta,” Letelier wrote in a searing essay for *The Nation*. He pointed out that “this particularly convenient concept of a social system, in which ‘economic freedom’ and political terror coexist without touching each other, allows these financial spokesmen to support their concept of ‘freedom’ while exercising their verbal muscles in defense of human rights.”<sup>3</sup>

Letelier went so far as to write that Milton Friedman, as “the intellectual architect and unofficial adviser for the team of economists now running the Chilean economy,” shared responsibility for Pinochet's crimes. He dismissed Friedman's defense that lobbying for shock treatment was merely offering “technical” advice. The “establishment of a free ‘private economy’ and the control of inflation a la Friedman,” Letelier argued, could not be done peacefully. “The economic plan has had to be enforced, and in the Chilean context that could be done only by the killing of thousands, the establishment of concentration camps all over the country, the jailing of more than 100,000 persons in three years. . . . Regression for the majorities and ‘economic freedom’ for small privileged groups are in Chile two sides of the same coin.” There was, he wrote, “an inner harmony” between the “free market” and unlimited terror.<sup>4</sup>

Letelier's controversial article was published at the end of August 1976. Less than a month later, on September 21, the forty-four-year-old economist was driving to work in downtown Washington, D.C. As he passed through the heart of the embassy district, a remote-controlled bomb planted under the driver's seat exploded, sending the car flying and blowing off both his legs. With his severed foot abandoned on the pavement, Letelier was rushed to George Washington Hospital; he was dead on arrival. The former ambassador had been driving with a twenty-five-year-old American colleague, Ronni Moffit, and she also lost her life in the attack.<sup>5</sup> It was Pinochet's most outrageous and defiant crime since the coup itself.

An FBI investigation revealed that the bomb had been the work of

Michael Townley, a senior member of Pinochet's secret police, later convicted in a U.S. federal court for the crime. The assassins had been admitted to the country on false passports with the knowledge of the CIA.<sup>6</sup>

When Pinochet died in December 2006 at age ninety-one, he faced multiple attempts to put him on trial for crimes committed during his rule—from murder, kidnapping and torture to corruption and tax evasion. The family of Orlando Letelier had been trying for decades to bring Pinochet to trial for the bombing in Washington and to open the U.S. files on the incident. But the dictator got the last word in death, evading all the trials and issuing a posthumous letter in which he defended the coup and the use of “maximum rigor” in staving off a “dictatorship of the proletariat. . . . How I wish the Sep. 11, 1973, military action had not been necessary!” Pinochet wrote. “How I wish the Marxist-Leninist ideology had not entered our fatherland!”<sup>7</sup>

Not all the criminals of Latin America's terror years have been so fortunate. In September 2006, twenty-three years after the end of Argentina's military dictatorship, one of the main enforcers of the terror was finally sentenced to life in prison. The convicted man was Miguel Osvaldo Etchecolatz, who had been police commissioner of the province of Buenos Aires during the junta years.

During the historic trial, Jorge Julio López, a key witness, went missing—disappeared. López had been disappeared in the seventies, brutally tortured, then released—now it was happening all over again. In Argentina, López became known as the first person to be “double disappeared.”<sup>8</sup> As of mid-2007, he was still missing, and the police were virtually certain that he had been kidnapped as a warning to other would-be witnesses—the same old tactics of the terror years.

The judge on the case, fifty-five-year-old Carlos Rozanski of Argentina's federal court, found Etchecolatz guilty of six counts of homicide, six counts of unlawful imprisonment and seven cases of torture. When he handed down his verdict, he took an extraordinary step. He said that the conviction did not do justice to the true nature of the crime and that, in the interest of “the construction of collective memory,” he needed to add that these were “all crimes against humanity committed in the context of the genocide that took place in the Republic of Argentina between 1976 and 1983.”<sup>9</sup>

With that sentence, the judge played his part in the rewriting of Argentine history: the killings of leftists in the seventies were not part of a “dirty war” in which two sides clashed and various crimes were committed, as had

been the official story for decades. Nor were the disappeared merely victims of mad dictators who were drunk on sadism and their own personal power. What had happened was something more scientific, more terrifyingly rational. As the judge put it, there had been a “plan of extermination carried out by those who ruled the country.”<sup>10</sup>

He explained that the killings were part of a system, planned far in advance, duplicated in identical fashion across the country, and committed with clear intent not of attacking individual persons but of destroying the parts of society that those people represented. Genocide is an attempt to murder a group, not a collection of individual persons; therefore, argued the judge, it was genocide.<sup>11</sup>

Rozanski recognized that his use of the word “genocide” was controversial, and he wrote a lengthy decision backing up the choice. He acknowledged that the UN Convention on Genocide defines the crime as an “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, religious or racial group”; the Convention does *not* include eliminating a group based on its political beliefs—as had been the case in Argentina—but Rozanski said he did not consider that exclusion to be legally legitimate.<sup>12</sup> Pointing to a little-known chapter in UN history, he explained that on December 11, 1946, in direct response to the Nazi Holocaust, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution by unanimous vote barring acts of genocide “when racial, religious, *political* and other groups have been destroyed, entirely or in part.”<sup>13</sup> The reason the word “political” had been excised from the Convention two years later was that Stalin demanded it. He knew that if destroying a “political group” was genocidal, his bloody purges and mass imprisonment of political opponents would fit the bill. Stalin had enough support from other leaders who also wanted to reserve the right to wipe out their political opponents that the word was dropped.<sup>14</sup>

Rozanski wrote that he considered the original UN definition to be the more legitimate, since it had not been subject to this self-interested compromise.\* He also made reference to a ruling by a Spanish national court that had put one of Argentina's notorious torturers on trial in 1998. That court had also ruled that Argentina's junta had committed “the crime of genocide.” It defined the group the junta was trying to wipe out as “those citizens

\* The criminal codes of many countries, including Portugal, Peru and Costa Rica, bar acts of genocide, with definitions that clearly include political groupings or “social groups.” French law is even broader, defining genocide as a plan intended to destroy in whole or in part “a group determined by any arbitrary criteria.”

that did not fit the model determined by the repressors to be suitable for the new order being established in the country.”<sup>15</sup> The following year, in 1999, the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón, famous for issuing an arrest warrant for Augusto Pinochet, also argued that Argentina had suffered genocide. He too made an attempt to define which group had been targeted for extermination. The junta’s goal, he wrote, was “to establish a new order, like Hitler hoped to achieve in Germany, in which there was no room for certain types of people.” The people who did not fit the new order were ones “located in those sectors that got in the way of the ideal configuration of the new Argentinean Nation.”<sup>16</sup>

There is, of course, no comparison in scale between what happened under the Nazis, or in Rwanda in 1994, and the crimes of the corporatist dictatorships of Latin America in the seventies. If genocide means a holocaust, these crimes do not belong in that category. However, if genocide is understood as these courts define it, as an attempt to deliberately obliterate the groups who were barriers to a political project, then this process can be seen not just in Argentina but, to varying degrees of intensity, throughout the region that was turned into the Chicago School laboratory. In these countries, the people who “got in the way of the ideal” were leftists of all stripes: economists, soup kitchen workers, trade unionists, musicians, farm organizers, politicians. Members of all these groups were subjected to a clear and deliberate region-wide strategy, coordinated across borders by Operation Condor, to uproot and erase the left.

Since the fall of Communism, free markets and free people have been packaged as a single ideology that claims to be humanity’s best and only defense against repeating a history filled with mass graves, killing fields and torture chambers. Yet in the Southern Cone, the first place where the contemporary religion of unfettered free markets escaped from the basement workshops of the University of Chicago and was applied in the real world, it did not bring democracy; it was predicated on the overthrow of democracy in country after country. And it did not bring peace but required the systematic murder of tens of thousands and the torture of between 100,000 and 150,000 people.

There was, as Letelier wrote, an “inner harmony” between the drive to cleanse sectors of society and the ideology at the heart of the project. The Chicago Boys and their professors, who provided advice and took up top posts in the military regimes of the Southern Cone, believed in a form of

capitalism that is purist by its very nature. Theirs is a system based entirely on a belief in “balance” and “order” and the need to be free of interferences and “distortions” in order to succeed. Because of these traits, a regime committed to the faithful application of this ideal cannot accept the presence of competing or tempering worldviews. In order for the ideal to be achieved, it requires a monopoly on ideology; otherwise, according to the central theory, the economic signals become distorted and the entire system is thrown out of balance.

The Chicago Boys could scarcely have selected a part of the world less hospitable to this absolutist experiment than the Southern Cone of Latin America in the 1970s. The extraordinary rise of developmentalism meant that the area was a cacophony of precisely the policies that the Chicago School considered distortions or “uneconomic ideas.” More important, it was teeming with popular and intellectual movements that had emerged in direct opposition to laissez-faire capitalism. Such views were not marginal but typical of the majority of citizens, as reflected in election after election in country after country. A Chicago School transformation was about as likely to be warmly received in the Southern Cone as a proletarian revolution in Beverly Hills.

Before the terror campaign descended on Argentina, Rodolfo Walsh had written, “Nothing can stop us, neither jail nor death. Because you can’t jail or kill a whole people and because the vast majority of Argentines . . . know that only the people will save the people.”<sup>17</sup> Salvador Allende, as he watched the tanks roll in to lay siege to the presidential palace, had made one final radio address suffused with this same defiance: “I am certain that the seed we planted in the worthy consciousness of thousands and thousands of Chileans cannot be definitively uprooted,” he said, his last public words. “They have the strength; they can subjugate us, but they cannot halt social processes by either crime or force. History is ours, and the people make it.”<sup>18</sup>

The junta commanders of the region and their economic accomplices were well acquainted with those truths. A veteran of several Argentine military coups explained the thinking inside the military: “In 1955 we believed that the problem was [Juan] Perón, so we took him out, but by 1976 we already knew that the problem was the working class.”<sup>19</sup> It was the same across the region: the problem was large and deep. That realization meant that if the neoliberal revolution was going to succeed, the juntas needed to do what Allende had claimed was impossible—definitively uproot the seed that was sown during Latin America’s leftward surge. In its Declaration of Principles,

issued after the coup, the Pinochet dictatorship described its mission as a “prolonged and profound operation to change Chilean mentality,” an echo of the statement twenty years earlier by USAID’s Albion Patterson, godfather of the Chile Project: “What we need to do is change the formation of the men.”<sup>20</sup>

But how to do that? The seed that Allende referred to wasn’t a single idea or even a group of political parties and trade unions. By the sixties and early seventies in Latin America, the left was the dominant mass culture—it was the poetry of Pablo Neruda, the folk music of Victor Jara and Mercedes Sosa, the liberation theology of the Third World Priests, the emancipatory theater of Augusto Boal, the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, the revolutionary journalism of Eduardo Galeano and Walsh himself. It was legendary heroes and martyrs of past and recent history from José Gervasio Artigas to Simón Bolívar to Che Guevara. When the juntas set out to defy Allende’s prophecy and pull up socialism by its roots, it was a declaration of war against this entire culture.

The imperative was reflected in the dominant metaphors used by the military regimes in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina: those fascist standbys of cleaning, scrubbing, uprooting and curing. In Brazil, the junta’s roundups of leftists were code-named *Operação Limpeza*, Operation Cleanup. On the day of the coup, Pinochet referred to Allende and his cabinet as “that filth that was going to ruin the country.”<sup>21</sup> One month later he pledged to “extirpate the root of evil from Chile,” to bring about a “moral cleansing” of the nation, “purified of vices”—an echo of the Third Reich author Alfred Rosenberg’s call for “a merciless cleansing with an iron broom.”<sup>22</sup>

### Cleansing Cultures

In Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, the juntas staged massive ideological cleanup operations, burning books by Freud, Marx and Neruda, closing hundreds of newspapers and magazines, occupying universities, banning strikes and political meetings.

Some of the most vicious attacks were reserved for the “pink” economists whom the Chicago Boys could not defeat before the coups. At the University of Chile, rival to the Chicago Boys’ home base, the Catholic University, hundreds of professors were fired for “inobservance of moral duties” (including André Gunder Frank, the dissident Chicagoan who wrote angry letters

home to his former professors).<sup>23</sup> During the coup, Gunder Frank reported that “six students were shot on sight in the main entrance to the School of Economics to offer an object lesson to the remainder.”<sup>24</sup> When the junta seized power in Argentina, soldiers marched into the University of the South in Bahía Blanca and imprisoned seventeen academics on charges of “subversive instruction”; once again, most were from the economics department.<sup>25</sup> “It is necessary to destroy the sources which feed, form and indoctrinate the subversive delinquent,” one of the generals announced at a press conference.<sup>26</sup> A total of eight thousand “ideologically suspect” leftist educators were purged as part of Operation Clarity.<sup>27</sup> In high schools, they banned group presentations—a sign of a latent collective spirit, dangerous to “individual freedom.”<sup>28</sup>

In Santiago, the legendary left-wing folk singer Victor Jara was among those taken to the Chile Stadium. His treatment was the embodiment of the furious determination to silence a culture. First the soldiers broke both his hands so he could not play the guitar, then they shot him forty-four times, according to Chile’s truth and reconciliation commission.<sup>29</sup> To make sure he could not inspire from beyond the grave, the regime ordered his master recordings destroyed. Mercedes Sosa, a fellow musician, was forced into exile from Argentina, the revolutionary dramatist Augusto Boal was tortured and exiled from Brazil, Eduardo Galeano was driven from Uruguay and Walsh was murdered in the streets of Buenos Aires. A culture was being deliberately exterminated.

Meanwhile, another sanitized, purified culture was replacing it. At the start of the dictatorships in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, the only public gatherings permitted were shows of military strength and football matches. In Chile, wearing slacks was enough to get you arrested if you were a woman, long hair if you were a man. “All over the Republic a thorough cleansing is under way,” declared an editorial in a junta-controlled Argentine newspaper. It called for a mass scrubbing of leftist graffiti: “Soon enough the surfaces will shine through, released from that nightmare by the action of soap and water.”<sup>30</sup>

In Chile, Pinochet was determined to break his people’s habit of taking to the streets. The tiniest gatherings were dispersed with water cannons, Pinochet’s favorite crowd-control weapon. The junta had hundreds of them, small enough to drive onto sidewalks and douse cliques of school-children handing out leaflets; even funeral processions, when the mourning got too rowdy, were brutally repressed. Nicknamed *guanacos*, after a

llama known for its habit of spitting, the ubiquitous cannons cleared away people as if they were human garbage, leaving the streets glistening, clean and empty.

Shortly after the coup, the Chilean junta issued an edict urging citizens to “contribute to cleansing your homeland” by reporting foreign “extremists” and “fanaticized Chileans.”<sup>31</sup>

### Who Was Killed—and Why

The majority of the people swept up in the raids were not “terrorists,” as the rhetoric claimed, but rather the people whom the juntas had identified as posing the most serious barriers to their economic program. Some were actual opponents, but many were simply seen as representing values contrary to the revolution’s.

The systematic nature of this cleansing campaign is clearly corroborated by matching the dates and times of the disappearances documented in human rights and truth commission reports. In Brazil, the junta did not begin mass repression until the late sixties, but there was one exception: as soon as the coup was launched, soldiers rounded up the leadership of trade unions active in the factories and on the large ranches. According to *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (Never Again), they were sent to jail, where many faced torture, “for the simple reason that they were inspired by a political philosophy opposed by the authorities.” This truth commission report, based on the military’s own court records, notes that the General Workers Command (CGT), the main coalition of trade unions, appears in the junta’s court proceedings “as an omnipresent demon to be exorcised.” The report bluntly concludes that the reason “the authorities who took over in 1964 were especially careful to ‘clean out’ this sector” is that they “feared the spread of . . . resistance from the labor unions to their economic programs, which were based on tightening salaries and denationalizing the economy.”<sup>32</sup>

In both Chile and Argentina, the military governments used the initial chaos of the coup to launch vicious attacks on the trade union movement. These operations were clearly planned well in advance, as the systematic raids began on the day of the coup itself. In Chile, while all eyes were on the besieged presidential palace, other battalions were dispatched to “factories in what were known as the ‘industrial belts,’ where troops carried out raids and arrested people. During the next few days,” Chile’s truth and reconciliation report notes, several more factories were raided, “leading to massive arrests of

people, some of whom were later killed or disappeared.”<sup>33</sup> In 1976, 80 percent of Chile’s political prisoners were workers and peasants.<sup>34</sup>

Argentina’s truth commission report, *Nunca Más* (Never Again), documents a parallel surgical strike against trade unions: “We notice that a large proportion of the operations [against workers] were carried out on the day of the coup itself, or immediately after.”<sup>35</sup> Amid the list of attacks on factories, one testimony is particularly revealing about how “terrorism” was used as a smoke screen to go after non-violent worker activists. Graciela Geuna, a political prisoner in the torture camp known as La Perla, described how the soldiers guarding her became agitated by an impending strike at a power plant. The strike was to be “an important example in the resistance to the military dictatorship,” and the junta did not want it to happen. So, Geuna recalled, the “soldiers in the unit decided to make it illegal or, as they said, to ‘Montonerize’ it” (the Montoneros being the guerrilla group the army had already effectively broken). The strikers had nothing to do with the Montoneros, but that didn’t matter. The “soldiers at La Perla themselves printed leaflets they signed ‘Montoneros’—leaflets calling on the power workers to strike.” The leaflets then became the “proof” needed to kidnap and kill the union leadership.<sup>36</sup>

### Corporate-Sponsored Torture

Attacks on union leaders were often carried out in close coordination with the owners of the workplaces, and court cases filed in recent years provide some of the best-documented examples of direct involvement by local subsidiaries of foreign multinationals.

In the years prior to the coup in Argentina, the rise of left-wing militancy had affected foreign companies both economically and personally; between 1972 and 1976, five executives from the auto company Fiat were assassinated.<sup>37</sup> The fortunes of such companies changed dramatically when the junta took power and implemented Chicago School policies; now they could flood the local market with imports, pay lower wages, lay workers off at will and send their profits home unhindered by regulations.

Several multinationals effusively expressed their gratitude. On the first new year under military rule in Argentina, Ford Motor Company took out a celebratory newspaper advertisement openly aligning itself with the regime: “1976: Once again, Argentina finds its way. 1977: New Year of faith and hope for all Argentines of good will. Ford Motor of Argentina and its people

commit themselves to the struggle to bring about the great destiny of the Fatherland.”<sup>38</sup> Foreign corporations did more than thank the juntas for their fine work; some were active participants in the terror campaigns. In Brazil, several multinationals banded together and financed their own privatized torture squads. In mid-1969, just as the junta entered its most brutal phase, an extralegal police force was launched called Operation Bandeirantes, known as OBAN. Staffed with military officers, OBAN was funded, according to *Brazil: Never Again*, “by contributions from various multinational corporations, including Ford and General Motors.” Because it was outside official military and police structures, OBAN enjoyed “flexibility and impunity with regard to interrogation methods,” the report states, and quickly gained a reputation for unparalleled sadism.<sup>39</sup>

It was in Argentina, however, that the involvement of Ford’s local subsidiary with the terror apparatus was most overt. The company supplied cars to the military, and the green Ford Falcon sedan was the vehicle used for thousands of kidnappings and disappearances. The Argentine psychologist and playwright Eduardo Pavlovsky described the car as “the symbolic expression of terror. A death-mobile.”<sup>40</sup>

While Ford supplied the junta with cars, the junta provided Ford with a service of its own—ridding the assembly lines of troublesome trade unionists. Before the coup, Ford had been forced to make significant concessions to its workers: one hour off for lunch instead of twenty minutes, and 1 percent of the sale of each car to go to social service programs. All that changed abruptly on the day of the coup, when the counterrevolution began. The Ford factory in suburban Buenos Aires was turned into an armed camp; in the weeks that followed, it was swarming with military vehicles, including tanks and helicopters buzzing overhead. Workers have testified to the presence of a battalion of one hundred soldiers permanently stationed at the factory.<sup>41</sup> “It looked like we were at war in Ford. And it was all directed at us, the workers,” recalled Pedro Troiani, one of the union delegates.<sup>42</sup>

Soldiers prowled the facility, grabbing and hooding the most active union members, helpfully pointed out by the factory foreman. Troiani was among those pulled off the assembly line. He recalled that “before detaining me, they walked me around the factory, they did it right out in the open so that the people would see: Ford used this to eliminate unionism in the factory.”<sup>43</sup> Most startling was what happened next: rather than being rushed off to a nearby prison, Troiani and others say soldiers took them to a detention facility that had been set up *inside* the factory gates. In their place of work, where

they had been negotiating contracts just days before, workers were beaten, kicked and, in two cases, electroshocked.<sup>44</sup> They were then taken to outside prisons where the torture continued for weeks and, in some cases, months.<sup>45</sup> According to the workers’ lawyers, at least twenty-five Ford union reps were kidnapped in this period, half of them detained on the company grounds in a facility that human rights groups in Argentina are lobbying to have placed on an official list of former clandestine detention facilities.<sup>46</sup>

In 2002, federal prosecutors filed a criminal complaint against Ford Argentina on behalf of Troiani and fourteen other workers, alleging that the company is legally responsible for the repression that took place on its property. “Ford [Argentina] and its executives colluded in the kidnapping of its own workers, and I think they should be held responsible for that,” says Troiani.<sup>47</sup> Mercedes-Benz (a subsidiary of DaimlerChrysler) is facing a similar investigation stemming from allegations that the company collaborated with the military during the 1970s to purge one of its plants of union leaders, allegedly giving names and addresses of sixteen workers who were later disappeared, fourteen of them permanently.<sup>48</sup>

According to the Latin American historian Karen Robert, by the end of the dictatorship, “virtually all the shop-floor delegates had been disappeared from the country’s biggest firms . . . such as Mercedes-Benz, Chrysler and Fiat Concord.”<sup>49</sup> Both Ford and Mercedes-Benz deny that their executives played any role in the repression. The cases are ongoing.

It wasn’t only unionists who faced preemptive attack—it was anyone who represented a vision of society built on values other than pure profit. Particularly brutal throughout the region were the attacks on farmers who had been involved in the struggle for land reform. Leaders of the Argentine Agrarian Leagues—who had been spreading incendiary ideas about the right of peasants to own land—were hunted down and tortured, often out in the fields they worked, in full view of the community. Soldiers used truck batteries to power their *picanas*, turning the ubiquitous farm implement against the farmers themselves. Meanwhile, the junta’s economic policies were a windfall for the landowners and cattle ranchers. In Argentina, Martínez de Hoz had deregulated the price of meat, and the cost was up more than 700 percent, leading to record profits.<sup>50</sup>

In the slums, the targets of the preemptive strikes were community workers, many church-based, who organized the poorest sectors of society to demand health care, public housing and education—in other words, the “welfare

state” being dismantled by the Chicago Boys. “The poor won’t have any goody-goodies to look after them anymore!” Norberto Liwsky, an Argentine doctor, was told as “they applied electric shocks to my gums, nipples, genitals, abdomen and ears.”<sup>51</sup>

An Argentine priest who collaborated with the junta explained the guiding philosophy: “The enemy was Marxism. Marxism in the church, let us say, and in the mother country—the danger of a new nation.”<sup>52</sup> That “danger of a new nation” helps explain why so many of the juntas’ victims were young. In Argentina, 81 percent of the thirty thousand people who were disappeared were between the ages of sixteen and thirty.<sup>53</sup> “We are working now for the next twenty years,” a notorious Argentine torturer told one of his victims.<sup>54</sup>

Among the youngest were a group of high-school students who, in September 1976, banded together to ask for lower bus fare. For the junta, the collective action showed that the teenagers had been infected with the virus of Marxism, and it responded with genocidal fury, torturing and killing six of the high-schoolers who had dared to make this subversive request.<sup>55</sup> Miguel Osvaldo Etchecolatz, the police commissioner finally sentenced in 2006, was one of the key figures implicated in the attack.

The pattern of these disappearances was clear: while the shock therapists were trying to remove all relics of collectivism from the economy, the shock troops were removing the representatives of that ethos from the streets, the universities and the factory floors.

In unguarded moments, some of those on the front lines of the economic transformation have acknowledged that the achieving of their goals required mass repression. Victor Emmanuel, the Burson-Marsteller public relations executive who was in charge of selling the Argentine junta’s new business-friendly regime to the outside world, told a researcher that violence was necessary to open up Argentina’s “protective, statist” economy. “No one, but no one, invests in a country involved in a civil war,” he said, but he admitted that it wasn’t just guerrillas who died. “A lot of innocent people were probably killed,” he told the author Marguerite Feitlowitz, but, “given the situation, immense force was required.”<sup>56</sup>

Sergio de Castro, Pinochet’s Chicago Boy economics minister who oversaw the implementation of shock treatment, said he could never have done it without Pinochet’s iron fist backing him up. “Public opinion was very much against [us], so we needed a strong personality to maintain the policy. It was our luck that President Pinochet understood and had the character to

withstand criticism.” He has also observed that an “authoritarian government” is best suited to safeguarding economic freedom because of its “impersonal” use of power.<sup>57</sup>

As is the case with most state terror, the targeted killings served a dual purpose. First, they removed real obstacles to the project—the people most likely to fight back. Second, the fact that everyone witnessed the “troublemakers” being disappeared sent an unmistakable warning to those who might be thinking of resisting, thereby eliminating future obstacles.

And it worked. “We were confused and anguished, docile and waiting to take orders . . . people regressed; they became more dependent and fearful,” recalled the Chilean psychiatrist Marco Antonio de la Parra.<sup>58</sup> They were, in other words, in shock. So when economic shocks sent prices soaring and wages dropping, the streets in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay remained clear and calm. There were no food riots, no general strikes. Families coped by quietly skipping meals, feeding their babies *maté*, a traditional tea that suppresses hunger, and waking up before dawn to walk for hours to work, saving on bus fare. Those who died from malnutrition or typhoid were quietly buried.

Just a decade earlier, the countries of the Southern Cone—with their exploding industrial sectors, rapidly rising middle classes and strong health and education systems—had been the hope of the developing world. Now rich and poor were hurtling into different economic worlds, with the wealthy gaining honorary citizenship in the State of Florida and the rest being pushed back into underdevelopment, a process that would deepen throughout the neoliberal “restructurings” of the postdictatorship era. No longer inspirational examples, these countries were now terrifying warnings about what happens to poor nations that think they can pull themselves out of the Third World. It was a conversion that paralleled what prisoners were going through inside the junta’s torture centers: it wasn’t enough to talk—they were forced to renounce their most cherished beliefs, betray their lovers and children. The ones who gave in were called *quebrados*, the broken ones. So it was in the Southern Cone: the region wasn’t just beaten, it was broken, *quebrado*.

### Torture as “Curing”

While the policies attempted to excise collectivism from the culture, inside the prisons torture tried to excise it from the mind and spirit. As an Argentine

junta editorial noted in 1976, “minds too must be cleansed, for that is where the error was born.”<sup>59</sup>

Many torturers adopted the posture of a doctor or surgeon. Like the Chicago economists with their painful but necessary shock treatments, these interrogators imagined that their electroshocks and other torments were therapeutic—that they were administering a kind of medicine to their prisoners, who were often referred to inside the camps as *apestosos*, the dirty or diseased ones. They would heal them of the sickness that was socialism, of the impulse toward collective action.\* Their “treatments” were agonizing, certainly; they might even be lethal—but it was for the patient’s own good. “If you have gangrene in an arm, you have to cut it off, right?” Pinochet demanded, in impatient response to criticisms of his human rights record.<sup>60</sup>

In testimony from truth commission reports across the region, prisoners tell of a system designed to force them to betray the principle most integral to their sense of self. For most Latin American leftists, that most cherished principle was what Argentina’s radical historian Osvaldo Bayer called “the only transcendental theology: solidarity.”<sup>61</sup> The torturers understood the importance of solidarity well, and they set out to shock that impulse of social interconnectedness out of their prisoners. Of course all interrogation is purportedly about gaining valuable information and therefore forcing betrayal, but many prisoners report that their torturers were far less interested in the information, which they usually already possessed, than in achieving the act of betrayal itself. The point of the exercise was getting prisoners to do irreparable damage to that part of themselves that believed in helping others above all else, that part of themselves that made them activists, replacing it with shame and humiliation.

Sometimes the betrayals were completely beyond a prisoner’s control. For instance, the Argentine prisoner Mario Villani had his agenda book with him when he was kidnapped. It contained the coordinates for a meeting he had scheduled with a friend; the soldiers showed up in his place, and another activist was disappeared into the terror machinery. On the table, Villani’s interrogators tortured him with the knowledge that “they got Jorge because he’d kept his date with me. They knew that my knowing this would be a far worse torment than 220 volts. The remorse is almost more than you can take.”<sup>62</sup>

\* This brought electroshock therapy full circle to its earliest incarnation as an exorcism technique. The first recorded use of medical electrocution was by a Swiss doctor practicing in the 1700s. Believing that mental illness was caused by the devil, he had a patient hold on to a wire that he powered with a static electricity machine; one jolt of electricity was given for each demon. The patient was then pronounced cured.

The ultimate acts of rebellion in this context were small gestures of kindness between prisoners, such as tending to each other’s wounds or sharing scarce food. When such loving acts were discovered, they were met with harsh punishment. Prisoners were goaded into being as individualistic as possible, constantly offered Faustian bargains, like choosing between more unbearable torture for themselves or more torture for a fellow prisoner. In some cases, prisoners were so successfully broken that they agreed to hold the *picana* on their fellow inmates or go on television and renounce their former beliefs. These prisoners represented the ultimate triumph for their torturers: not only had the prisoners abandoned solidarity but in order to survive they had succumbed to the cutthroat ethos at the heart of laissez-faire capitalism—“looking out for No. 1,” in the words of the ITT executive.<sup>63</sup>

Both groups of shock “doctors” working in the Southern Cone—the generals and the economists—resorted to nearly identical metaphors for their work. Friedman likened his role in Chile to that of a physician who offered “technical medical advice to the Chilean Government to help end a medical plague”—the “plague of inflation.”<sup>64</sup> Arnold Harberger, head of the Latin American program at the University of Chicago, went even further. In a lecture delivered to young economists in Argentina, long after the dictatorship had ended, he said that good economists are themselves the treatment—they serve “as antibodies to combat anti-economic ideas and policies.”<sup>65</sup> The Argentine junta’s foreign minister, César Augusto Guzzetti, said that “when the social body of the country has been contaminated by a disease that corrodes its entrails, it forms antibodies. These antibodies cannot be considered in the same way as the microbes. As the government controls and destroys the guerrilla, the action of the antibody will disappear, as is already happening. It is only a natural reaction to a sick body.”<sup>66</sup>

\* The contemporary expression of this personality-breaking process is found in the way Islam is used as a weapon against Muslim prisoners in U.S.-run jails. In the mountain of evidence that has cascaded out of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, two forms of prisoner abuse come up again and again: nudity and the deliberate interference with Islamic practice, whether by forcing prisoners to shave their beards, kicking the Koran, wrapping prisoners in Israeli flags, forcing men into homosexual poses, even touching men with simulated menstrual blood. Moazzam Begg, a former prisoner at Guantánamo, says he was frequently forcibly shaved and a guard would say, “This is the part that really gets to you Muslims, isn’t it?” Islam is desecrated not because it is hated by the guards (though it may well be) but because it is loved by the prisoners. Since the goal of torture is to unmake personalities, everything that comprises a prisoner’s personality must be systematically stolen—from his clothes to his cherished beliefs. In the seventies that meant attacking social solidarity; today it means assaulting Islam.

This language is, of course, the same intellectual construct that allowed the Nazis to argue that by killing “diseased” members of society they were healing the “national body.” As the Nazi doctor Fritz Klein claimed, “I want to preserve life. And out of respect for human life, I would remove a gangrenous appendix from a diseased body. The Jew is the gangrenous appendix in the body of mankind.” The Khmer Rouge used the same language to justify their slaughter in Cambodia: “What is infected must be cut out.”<sup>67</sup>

### “Normal” Children

Nowhere were the parallels more chilling than in the Argentine junta’s treatment of children inside its network of torture centers. The UN Convention on Genocide states that among the signature genocidal practices is “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group” and “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”<sup>68</sup>

An estimated five hundred babies were born inside Argentina’s torture centers, and these infants were immediately enlisted in the plan to reengineer society and create a new breed of model citizens. After a brief nursing period, hundreds of babies were sold or given to couples, most of them directly linked to the dictatorship. The children were raised according to the values of capitalism and Christianity deemed “normal” and healthy by the junta and never told of their heritage, according to the human rights group the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo that has painstakingly tracked down dozens of these children.<sup>69</sup> The babies’ parents, considered too diseased to be salvageable, were almost always killed in the camps. The baby thefts were not individual excesses but part of an organized state operation. In one court case, an official 1977 Department of the Interior document was submitted as evidence; it was titled “Instructions on procedures to follow with underage children of political or union leaders when their parents are detained or disappeared.”<sup>70</sup>

This chapter in Argentina’s history has some striking parallels with the mass theft of indigenous children from their families in the U.S., Canada and Australia, where they were sent to residential schools, forbidden to speak their native languages, and beaten into “whiteness.” In Argentina in the seventies, a similar supremacist logic was clearly at work, based not on race but on political belief, culture and class.

One of the most graphic connections between the political killings and the free-market revolution was not discovered until four years after the Argentine

dictatorship had ended. In 1987, a film crew was shooting in the basement of the Galerías Pacífico, one of Buenos Aires’ plush downtown malls, and to their horror they stumbled on an abandoned torture center. It turned out that during the dictatorship, the First Army Corps hid some of its disappeared in the bowels of the mall; the dungeon walls still bore the desperate markings made by its long-dead prisoners: names, dates, pleas for help.<sup>71</sup>

Today, Galerías Pacífico is the crown jewel of Buenos Aires’ shopping district, evidence of its arrival as a globalized consumer capital. Vaulted ceilings and lushly painted frescoes frame the vast array of brand-name stores, from Christian Dior to Ralph Lauren to Nike, unaffordable to the vast majority of the country’s inhabitants but a bargain for the foreigners who flock to the city to take advantage of its depressed currency.

For Argentines who know their history, the mall stands as a chilling reminder that just as an older form of capitalist conquest was built on the mass graves of the country’s indigenous peoples, the Chicago School Project in Latin America was quite literally built on the secret torture camps where thousands of people who believed in a different country disappeared.