

On arrival, the major cities of Argentina and Chile may seem hardly foreign to a citizen of the United States. Restaurants accepting all major credit cards line the streets, electronic equipment works properly, hot water heaters abound, and stores give receipts at the checkout counter. In many ways these societies defy the expectations most from the United States have regarding Latin America. Their climates are mostly temperate, their economies and everyday life immediately comprehensible, the greatest differences, seemingly, being late dinners, small breakfasts, and the utter lack of drip coffee.

Though this is a simplification these similarities to life in the United States do represent a real continuity. These are modernized societies, in some ways more like those of Europe and North America than their closer neighbors. Argentina especially resembles the United States as a society of immigrants, coming from Italy, Germany, and Spain. They are undoubtedly as much a part of the West as Western Europe.

And yet, there is something that holds them apart. If one walks down a street - any street - in central Santiago or Buenos Aires, one might see a plaque fixed to an outer wall or embedded in the sidewalk. One might be forgiven for assuming, as one might in the United States or elsewhere, that they noted the birthplace of a famous citizen, or the foundation of the city, or some other banality of interest to specialists and local history buffs. In some cases, this may even be correct. In others, it could not be less so.

These plaques and markers, in their dozens and hundreds, mark sites of extrajudicial kidnappings, killings, and violence that pervaded Argentine and Chilean society from the late seventies through the eighties. In Argentina this period is known as "La Guerra Sucica," the Dirty War, in which the country's right wing military government rounded up and killed over 30,000 Argentines, real or accused political dissidents, almost always in complete secrecy.

Loved ones might wake up to find that their son or daughter, mother or boyfriend was not home. No one knew where they had gone. Going to the authorities would at best result in a nightmare of bureaucratic rhetoric ripped straight from the pages of Kafka's *The Castle* - the missing person is merely missing, the location the missing person has been taken to does not exist, the missing person herself does not exist. Years, decades might be spent learning merely that the person was alive, or that they were not.

The story in Chile is much the same. This is no coincidence - the leaders of both countries, General Pinochet in Chile and Argentina's military junta, were in regular communication regarding their programs of kidnapping, torture, and murder. They even cooperated with one another's efforts in what amounted to an under-the-table extradition system, Argentines finding Chileans who had escaped their government to return them to their future executioners, and vice versa. This web of violence and repression extended across South America and Central America, resulting in literally untold deaths.

As a human being, these facts appal me, as they should anyone. That this could happen, that people could do such things so regularly and systematically, speaks to something disgusting about us and the kind of world we live in.

But, as a historian, I must confess that these facts also fascinate me. Who committed these atrocities? How did this happen? Who committed these acts, and how were they chosen? What kind of ideology supported them, what kind of justification did they offer? Why was this pattern repeated and replicated throughout the region at roughly the same time? Many aspects of these questions have been answered before by previous historians, but much more work is needed, particularly on the subject of ideology and motivation. To truly understand these events, we must look beyond them to the actors that committed them, to their mindsets, ideological

assumptions, and principles. We must go where they went, see what they wrote in treatises or graffitied on sidewalks, read what they read, listen to the voices that drove them. This was my project in Chile and Argentina during the previous summer.

As such, my trip was something less glamorous than those of many others. I spent my time not with non profit organizations or among peasant activists but with books, in libraries, archives, and seminaries. My travels began in Buenos Aires, at the Archivo General de la Nacion and CeDINci, an archive specializing in materials from radical political organizations in the mid twentieth century. I also visited the archive of the former secret police of Buenos Aires province, located a short commuter train ride away from the capital in the city of La Plata. Next I visited two smaller cities, Córdoba and Paraná, provincial capitals and themselves sites of the kind of right wing organizing I hope to study in my dissertation research. Finally I crossed the Andes at Mendoza to reach Santiago, Chile, where I began my studies anew in that different context. Again, the majority of my time was spent in Chile's own Biblioteca Nacional.

The right wing magazines, propaganda pieces, and theoretical texts I found in these archives may not seem astonishing when described on its surface level. Indeed, it should be expected. But its importance to the study of the right in Chile and Argentina is immense. All too often the thinking of the right wing is assumed to be opaque, muddled, and illogical. In contrast to the historic left, centered on the project of Marxism and its various offshoots from the USSR to the Labor Party in the UK, the right is thought of as fragmented, national, sporadic, and chaotic. However, my work seeks to show precisely the opposite, to examine transnational connections in thought and act, to look into shared principles, mutual favorite authors and theoreticians, and the umpteen other aspects of right ideology and practice shared by adherents throughout South America.

As I am a researcher rather than an activist, a thinker rather than a practitioner, my trip this summer was only the first step in the process of adding to our understanding of these questions. What follows is many more years of research and analysis, of thinking and writing, a lifetime of it if I am willing and able. But I am glad to have started.