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## Exhibiting Atrocity

Amy Sodaro

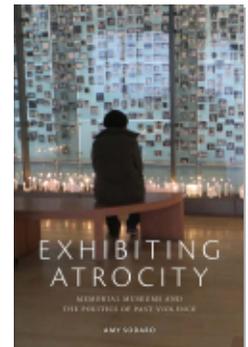
Published by Rutgers University Press

Sodaro, Amy.

Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence.

Rutgers University Press, 2018.

Project MUSE.[muse.jhu.edu/book/57541](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/57541).



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## 5 • THE MUSEUM OF MEMORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### “A Living Museum for Chile’s Memory”

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On January 11, 2010, six years after the Kigali Centre opened, the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Museum of Memory and Human Rights [MMHR]), opened in Santiago, Chile. Like the Kigali Centre, the MMHR was greatly influenced by Holocaust memorialization and is very much a part of the global proliferation of memorial museums as transcultural forms used to come to terms with violent pasts. A stunning glass-and-copper building suspended over a sprawling concrete Plaza de la Memoria, the museum was built on a neutral site to distinguish it and make it more universal than the many Chilean memorials constructed on the sites of torture and detention. The museum is intended to remember and educate about the human rights abuses of the brutal military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet from 1973 to 1990. Its mission is to reveal the truth about what happened and to “allow dignity for victims and their families, stimulate reflection and debate and to promote respect and tolerance in order that these events never happen again.” It is thus both a form of reparation to the victims and a site of education (Museo de la Memoria). And it is also a site that promotes an ethic of “never again”: in the words of Ricardo Brodsky, the museum’s director, “The political will of Chilean society to see that these events are never repeated is made concrete in the Museum” (2011, 10).

The museum had been almost twenty years in the making. The Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Rettig Report of 1991 had

recommended projects and policies that support memory, such as museums and memorials (Sepulveda 2011, 15). But politics and practical concerns intervened, and it was not until Michele Bachelet was elected president in 2006 that the creation of a museum became a reality. Though a group of human rights NGOs had been negotiating the construction of a Casa de la Memoria to house their vast archive of information about Chile's past human rights abuses, Bachelet, who had herself been tortured by the junta and whose father was killed, swept into office and immediately put into action plans for a government-sponsored memorial museum (Hite and Collins 2009, 19). In the rush to complete the museum before the end of her term in 2010, her administration wrested the project from the human rights NGOs and accelerated a process that many believed should be more inclusive, deliberate, and protracted. The result is today's Museum of Memory and Human Rights, which is meant as a universal, national space of remembrance and education that bridges divergent memories and ideologies of Chile's left and right. But of course, political reality is never as neatly contained as the past is in a museum, especially Chile's complex twentieth-century history. And so while the museum stands as a perfectly realized example of a twenty-first-century memorial museum, one that beautifully and carefully adheres to all the memorial museum tropes that today define the form, the political context of its creation and content compromise its efforts to promote ideals of human rights, democracy, and peace.

## STATE TERRORISM IN CHILE

Politically, Chile's history in many ways parallels that of its neighbors in Latin America, just as Chilean efforts to remember and come to terms with that past have followed a similar path. However, Chile's twentieth century started out with greater political stability than its neighbors and saw a period of parliamentary rule give way to presidential rule, with a succession of liberal presidents elected democratically by the populace. In fact, from the 1930s until the 1973 coup, Chile was the only Latin American country to experience no coup d'états or illegal government turnovers (Loveman and Lira 2007, 45). Despite this relative political calm, the twentieth century in Chile was marked by a series of social movements and demands made by various sectors of society that were often met by political repression (Lira 2011). Though there was a strongly established leftist movement in Chile,

the nation was already fractured in 1970, when Salvador Allende—the world’s first and only democratically elected socialist—won the presidency with 36.3 percent of the vote, to the right candidate’s 34.9 percent and the center-left Christian Democrat’s 27.8 percent. Allende’s platform promoting swift change and an overthrow of the capitalist system made some Chileans uncomfortable, and almost immediately his presidency was under attack. Opponents of Allende waged a strong media campaign, heightening fears that Allende’s presidency was bringing the nation to a civil war, and Chile became an important pawn in Cold War politics. As was a pattern throughout Latin American after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the United States was deeply involved in attempting to staunch the rise of socialism across the continent. As early as 1963, the United States began using funds to influence politics in Chile, laying the groundwork for a military coup (Lira 2011, 112). By the summer of 1973, divisions within Chile had deepened; the opposition majority in Congress had called for Allende’s removal by the military, and many in what was increasingly perceived as a “nation of enemies” expected military intervention (Wright 2007, 50).

On September 11, 1973, the military ousted the embattled Allende government. With the support of the United States, Augusto Pinochet, as commander-in-chief of the army seized power in what was described as a necessary act to “save the nation” (Lira 2011, 111). The attack began at 6 a.m., with the navy taking the seaside city of Valparaiso and then moving into Santiago. When Allende refused to surrender, the military made good on its promise to attack the presidential palace and began the dramatic bombing of La Moneda. From the burning palace, Allende made his last radio address to the nation and took his own life. By 6 p.m., the military had control of the country and announced the coup over the radio, swearing themselves in as the ruling junta and declaring a state of war that suspended civil liberties (Wright 2007, 52). Though the world saw the presidential palace in flames and heard Allende’s moving farewell address, the coup went unchallenged, and the junta ushered in a period of terror as the military dictatorship rounded up, detained, tortured, and killed many Chilean leftists and supporters of Allende. Tens of thousands were detained in makeshift centers, like the National Stadium, which became notorious as a symbol of repression. Others were forced into exile. All of it was deemed necessary by Pinochet’s regime as an act of saving the nation in the ongoing “war” against Marxism, though the junta had effectively overcome the opposition within weeks of seizing power. While the initial terror

subsided, for the next fifteen years Chile was held in the grip of dictatorship and repression as the military secretly and quietly, in an increasingly institutionalized manner, did away with those who opposed its policies.

In 1978, Pinochet declared amnesty for all crimes committed by the military in the years since the 1973 coup. Following this, the Chilean economy began to boom—sometimes termed the “Chilean miracle”—and Pinochet introduced a new constitution in 1980. The constitution was passed in a plebiscite by a supposed 67 percent of the vote, thus establishing Pinochet as leader of Chile for eight more years and ensuring numerous protections for himself and the military (Wright 2007, 81). However, over the course of the 1980s, a lagging economy; the democratization of Chile’s neighbors, especially Argentina; a growing domestic and international human rights movement; and several high-profile human rights abuses by the regime renewed the opposition both within and outside Chile. By the time of the constitutionally decreed 1988 plebiscite to determine whether Pinochet’s rule would be extended, a strong enough opposition existed to win the “No” vote (Wright 2007, 84). This removed Pinochet from power, allowing for democratic elections in December 1989. Following their successful mobilization of the “No” vote, the center-left coalition called the *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* (Coalition of Parties for Democracy, referred to as *Concertación*) won the presidency and swept into power, where they would remain until 2010.

Though Pinochet was democratically removed from the presidency, in the period of transition, he passed a set of “tie-up laws” to ensure his power and impunity would remain intact under the constitution’s “protected democracy” (Wright 2007, 184). He extended his leadership of the army for eight more years; passed the Organic Constitutional Law of the Armed Forces, making the military essentially autonomous and outside of presidential, civilian control; and filled the Supreme Court, Senate, and military with loyalists, ensuring that the amnesty law would be upheld. The first democratically elected president, Patricio Aylwin, his hands tied by the fundamentally undemocratic system that he had inherited and counted on for a peaceful transition to civilian rule, resigned himself to mostly symbolic efforts to address the past. As the military and many others in Chilean society maintained that they had been the good guys in the “war” against Marxism, Aylwin set about trying to uncover the truth. He created Chile’s first truth commission and carried out a number of symbolic gestures, like reburying Allende and creating memorials.

Despite the power the military and Pinochet maintained, Aylwin and his *Concertación* successors, supported and driven by the strong human rights movement that had arisen in opposition to the junta, continued to seek truth and justice, finding small, incremental ways to ensure the “erosion of impunity on a case-by-case basis” (Wright 2007, 207). Though in most investigations, the government had to guarantee the perpetrators not just amnesty but also anonymity, slowly trials began to take place, the undemocratic pieces of the constitution were revised, and the truth began to be uncovered.

The slow progress began to speed up in 1998. In this year, Pinochet resigned from his position of commander of the army and took the position of senator for life, an honor extended to presidents who had been in office for more than six years, which would grant him continued immunity (Wilde 1999, 474). However, that same fateful year, Pinochet traveled to London for back surgery and was arrested on an outstanding warrant from the Spanish National Court, which had granted itself universal jurisdiction over human rights crimes and had an extradition treaty with England (Wright 2007). Though Pinochet was not extradited to Spain and instead returned to Chile, deemed unfit for trial because of his age and declining health, the case revitalized the Chilean and international human rights movements. Pinochet was stripped of his immunity and charged two more times but was again found unfit to stand trial. Though Pinochet was never punished for his crimes, the power that he had sought to hold onto eroded as Chile looked for ways to confront the past. Pinochet died in 2006, shortly after Michelle Bachelet was elected president and began to make plans for a new memorial museum as yet another form of coming to terms with the past.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND MEMORY IN CHILE AND BEYOND

As the global “Pinochet effect”<sup>1</sup> following his arrest in London demonstrates, Chile’s struggle to confront its violent past is intertwined with the broader rise of international human rights in the second half of the twentieth century, which itself is tied to the emergence of memory and coming to terms with the past as a preoccupation for nations and collectives around the world today. Though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had been adopted in 1948, in response to the atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust, the international human rights regime was not very well

established as military dictatorships swept Latin America and enacted their policies of terror and violence. Add to the weak human rights regime the deep involvement of the United States in supporting the military dictatorships in the context of the Cold War, and we see a world that watched passively as human rights were blatantly violated.

However, this passivity did not apply to Chilean society and did not last forever. From the very beginning, there was strong resistance to the military dictatorship by Chilean human rights organizations, many led by the Catholic Church. These groups actively sought to help victims and their families. They also collected documentation, testimony, and other forms of evidence; produced reports and publications; and pressured both the junta and the international community to end the human rights abuses. And the impact of these groups reverberated, “activat[ing] the dormant system of [human rights] protections with implications that extend beyond Chile’s tragic human rights calamity” (Ensalaco 1999, 68). Chile’s opposition movement was similar to movements in Argentina, such as the well-known Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, and in other Latin American societies in the grip of dictatorship, and the work that these groups were doing was observed and supported by international groups and organizations. Thus the rise of a human rights regime in Latin America contributed to not only bringing down the Latin American dictatorial regimes but also strengthening the international human rights regime, playing a “major role in the development of tougher human rights standards and the tools necessary to enforce those standards” (Wright 2007, 32).

As has been argued, the rise of an international human rights regime is closely connected to the rise of memory, especially memory of violence, atrocity, and human rights abuses, which dominates today (Huysen 2011; Levy and Sznajder 2010). As is evident in all the museums analyzed in this book, this connection between memory and human rights rests on the notion that memory of past violence and human rights abuses is necessary for coming to terms with and righting the wrongs of the past and thus preventing future violence; there is an ethical duty to remember, especially past violence. This is in part because memory, as a link between past, present, and future, is a “vehicle for assuming (or attributing) responsibility” for rights and wrongs committed in the past at the level of the individual and the collective (Leccardi 2016, 109). A human rights discourse and regime thus depends on memory and the concomitant responsibility of

individuals and groups for past actions. And so with human rights comes a set of normative demands regarding memory of abuses of those rights that shape politics today. As Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider argue, “Memory politics of human rights has become a new form of political rationality and a prerequisite for state legitimacy” (2010, 3). Thus the rise of a human rights movement in Latin America, which helped consolidate and strengthen a global human rights regime, has also helped consolidate and strengthen the centrality and normative expectations of memory in politics around the world today. It is not only the movement for human rights that has moved between Chile and Latin America and the rest of the world but also mechanisms and modes of memory aimed at addressing past human rights abuses.

In Chile, with the restoration of democracy, as fragile as it was, the energy of the human rights organizations that had been aimed toward opposing the dictatorship began to find a new outlet: coming to terms with and commemorating the violence. Following a pattern similar to its neighbors, in Chile memorial sites proliferated across the country, and not just one but two truth commissions were created. Argentina had formed a truth commission to examine the crimes of its dirty war in 1983, and the commission and its report, *Nunca Más*, became a model for Latin American and other countries emerging from dictatorial rule (Wright 2007). Hence in 1991, the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation was created by Patricio Aylwin, a politically bold move with the military still holding tremendous power. The commission was composed of members from both the left and right under the leadership of a former senator and jurist, Raúl Rettig. It produced what is known as the Rettig Report, which found that more than two thousand people had been killed under the dictatorship. While the Rettig Report was significant in revealing the truth about Chile’s recent past, many were not satisfied that this put the past to rest, primarily because it did not name the perpetrators or sufficiently address their use of torture (Lazzara 2011, 87). A second commission, the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture was formed by President Ricardo Lagos, the first socialist president, elected in 2000, to investigate not just murders but also torture and imprisonment. The second commission’s report, known as the Valech Report, heard testimony from more than thirty-five thousand people, most of whom were deemed to have been “direct victims” of the regime. The commission was opened for a second time under Michele Bachelet’s first term and found an additional nearly ten thousand cases of

torture.<sup>2</sup> Both reports recommended as central to the project of reckoning with this violence the creation of memorials and/or a museum as one of the ways to come to terms with the past.

Chile has embraced this recommendation and obligation to remember the victims of the violent regime and to attempt to learn the lessons of the past. The country has more than two hundred memorials to the victims of the military dictatorship, some very well-known like the Villa Grimaldi detention and torture site in Santiago, and many other small, local memorials. Like countries around the world emerging from violence, Chile has enacted the mechanisms that increasingly follow an international set of norms for coming to terms with the past: truth commissions, trials, reparations, and memorials. What was missing, however, was a site where the consolidated collections of the human rights and victims' organizations could be housed—a national memorial and documentation center that could tell the story of the military dictatorship in a way that no one single site could do.

## CREATING CHILE'S MEMORIAL MUSEUM

An effort to create just such a site was under way, beginning in 2003 under President Lagos (Hite and Collins 2009). A coalition of human rights NGOs and organizations of families and survivors had collected vast archives of documentation of the military dictatorship and its crimes, which was declared part of UNESCO's Memory of the World Program in 2003, demonstrating its value. The coalition was seeking a permanent home for this collection, a Casa de la Memoria, where the collection could be preserved and displayed to educate about the past. The NGOs believed they had reached an agreement with the Lagos administration that such a site would be created and that the civil society actors themselves would design and run the museum. But then Bachelet came to power and announced that her administration would be creating a museum of memory and that the human rights NGOs would be turning over their archive to be displayed alongside the information gathered in the two truth commissions (Hite and Collins 2009, 21).

This was one of the first tensions in the development of the museum. In the debates and discussions of memory today, in not only academia but also civil society and politics, there is an ongoing question of the process through which memorials are created. As Katherine Hite and Cath

Collins write about memorials in Chile, “Memorials in post-conflict societies are all about process—what should the memorial be about, what groups are involved in the memorial’s impetus and design, who builds it, who funds it, who controls the outcome, what dialogues does a memorial trigger, who responds to the memorial once established, and to what degree, and how lasting or fleeting in time does the memorial prove to be?” (2009, 3). This notion does not hold just for Chile, but many scholars of memory and memorialization like James Young (1993; 2016) argue that memory is much less about the finished memorial than it is about the process of its creation. It is through the debates, discussions, and deliberations that true “memory work” happens and the past is truly addressed. Accordingly, memorials today follow an internationally suggested set of best practices that argue for an inclusive process, where various stakeholders, especially the families of victims and survivors, are given a seat at the proverbial table lest their voices are not heard in the development of a museum or memorial. It is also widely agreed that creating a memorial museum takes time and is not something that should be rushed. However, despite these trends that currently drive memorialization around the world, Bachelet’s regime worried that if the process was not rushed to completion by the end of her four-year term, it may not ever happen (Andermann 2012, 75), reflecting the deep divisions that remain in Chilean society over Pinochet’s rule and legacy.

Thus the museum’s creation had to negotiate several key tensions. On the one hand were the civil society groups who had helped to fight and ultimately oust the dictatorship and who wanted greater say in the shape the museum would take. And on the other were Chile’s *pinochetistas*, many of whom retained positions of influence and saw memory and memorialization as a political tool of the left that ignored their necessary war against communism. And of course, the museum was created not in a Chilean vacuum but in a region similarly grappling with coming to terms with past political violence and within an international community that not only places normative value on coming to terms with the past but also offers a set of guidelines on how to do so.

And so in September 2007, journalist Marcia Scantlebury was put in charge of the project to create a museum, becoming part of the Presidential Commission for Human Rights Policy. Though a 2007 report conducted by FLACSO (*Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales/Latin American Social Sciences Institute*) to assess the state of memorialization

and commemoration of the military dictatorship found that there was not a particular need or desire for national memorial museum (C. Aguilera, personal communication), Bachelet's administration went ahead with plans. Scantlebury and a team of civil society leaders and experts visited memorial museums around the world, including the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, former concentration camps like Bergen-Belsen and Sachsenhausen in Germany and Auschwitz in Poland, and the apartheid Museum in South Africa to see just what was expected in and of a memorial museum.

Because it was such a rushed process, an architectural competition was held for the design of the building at the same time that one was held for the museum's exhibition design. Estudio America, a Brazilian architectural firm, was selected for the building and Arbol de Color, a design firm based in Santiago, for the exhibitions. Meanwhile, the collection was being gathered from the Memory of the World documentation but also through appeals to families and survivors to donate documents and artifacts. And in a separate process, the script for the exhibition was being composed. This rushed timeframe and its disjointed process meant that the building and exhibition were designed separately, and the script was made to fit the collection that was being gathered, which has had a clear impact on the exhibition, as we shall see.

To enable all this to happen in the narrow timeframe, the Bachelet regime established a private foundation that is funded publically. The foundation not only funded the creation and the operating costs of the museum but, because of its unique public-private status, will continue to operate no matter who is in charge of the government. While those who argue that the creation of a memorial museum should be a long and deliberative process generally cite philosophical reasons, in the case of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, the practical reasons for taking more time with the creation of such a museum also become evident in the awkward layout of the building and exhibitions and the tensions with the human rights NGOs. But most troubling is the limited context of the museum's narrative; because division remains in Chilean society over Pinochet's rule, the story that the Museum tells is strictly limited to the military dictatorship from 1973 to 1990, meaning much necessary historical context and background is excluded from the story the museum tells. Despite all these tensions, however, the museum opened on January 11, 2010, dedicated by Michelle Bachelet whose presidential term was over. Thus the museum's opening

marked the end of two decades of rule by the *Concertación*, which had lost to Sebastián Piñera, the first rightist president to be elected since Pinochet left power.

## THE MUSEUM OF MEMORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The MMHR is located on the edge of downtown Santiago in a neighborhood undergoing revitalization, which the museum is intended to help spur. It is on a plot of land granted by the Ministry of National Goods and is purposefully in a neutral location on which no particular violence or atrocity occurred to underscore the universality of its message (Sepulveda 2011, 17). The architects, Estudio America, created a building intended to be both bright and solemn; one that symbolizes transparency and conveys a feeling of space and lightness. The dramatic building floats over the vast concrete Plaza de la Memoria, meant to be an “ark where all the reminiscences of Chilean history can be deposited” (Architonic 2009). The museum hangs, suspended like a bridge over a body of water, but in this case the sparkling, greenish museum resembles the water and one imagines—on a hot day, in the blazing sun—the huge, empty concrete plaza feels not unlike Chile’s Atacama Desert.

At the base of the sprawling plaza is the discretely marked museum entrance where, behind a small entrance desk, the exhibition begins. Audio guides in many languages are available to augment a visit to the permanent exhibition and accommodate international, non-Spanish-speaking visitors, as much of the exhibition is not translated. In an interesting framing of the museum’s permanent exhibition, it begins with a display on truth commissions. A large panel describes truth commissions and how they have been used around the world and in Chile. On the wall hangs a collage of images, forming a “map” of the world; drawing closer, one sees that the images are of human rights abuses around the globe. Below the map are one page summaries of the work of thirty truth commissions, such as those in South Africa, Panama, Argentina, Ethiopia, Bosnia, and Kenya. In glass display cases, the two Chilean truth commission reports reference the centrality to these commissions and their findings to the story the museum will tell. Indeed, the reports provided much of the script of the exhibition, and it is in large part on the basis of their recommendations that the museum was created. This opening exhibit also provides a momentary comparative



FIGURE 10. Museum of Memory and Human Rights exterior and Plaza de la Memoria.

Photo by Amy Sodaro.

framework, contextualizing Chile within a world of varied forms of political violence demanding truth, accountability, and commemoration. However, the thread of comparison ends here, as does any deeper discussion of the work of Chile's truth commissions.

The other part of the ground floor exhibition complements the truth commissions in its display of a different, but often parallel, form of coming to terms with violence: symbolic reparations in the form of memorials. The focus here is on the more than two hundred memorials to the victims of the dictatorship across Chile. A long, thin map of the country made of stone is the base for photos and brief descriptions of more than seventy memorials that dot the Chilean landscape from the northern tip to the southern. Above these hang a dozen enlarged photos of select memorials. The overall effect is of the tremendous breadth of Chilean memorialization—literally every corner of the country has created memorials, meaning every corner of the country was touched by violence. But with this dual framing of the museum in terms of truth commissions and memorials, the question begins to form of what the museum is. Is it meant to further the work of the truth

commissions by presenting documentation and evidence of the truth of what had happened? Or is it a memorial that is a symbolic reparation to the many victims across the country? Is it both? And because the work of both the Chilean truth commissions and memorial projects are so centrally on display, is the museum somehow redundant or unnecessary? At the very least, the museum appears to be wrestling with these kinds of self-reflexive questions about its memory work, and as the visitor puzzles over this with the museum, they are directed to the next floor where the main exhibition begins.

While there was reluctance on the part of the museum's creators to see the exhibition and the museum itself as historical because the past it recounts is so recent, the centerpiece of the museum is in fact a historical exhibit telling the story of the military dictatorship (C. Aguilera, personal communication). Reflecting the controversial—on both right and left—decision taken to depoliticize the violence by focusing exclusively on human rights abuses, the exhibit begins with the morning of September 11, 1973, and ends with the plebiscite of 1988 and, other than the truth commissions and memorials displayed on the ground floor, gives no other context to Chile's recent past. As mentioned, the MMHR's exhibition script is based on reports of the two truth commissions, and much of the documentation and exhibition comes from the human rights organizations' archives<sup>3</sup>—the very materials these groups hoped to house in a Casa de la Memoria that they would oversee. Like the other memorial museums described here, the exhibition uses film, photographs, newspaper articles, official and other documents, testimony, and various other media to tell the story of the dictatorship.

The exhibit begins with the "Area of September 11, 1973." Entering the room, one immediately succumbs to the chaos of (the first) September 11. The exhibit is multimedia—huge images of fearful Chileans in the streets line the wall on one side of the room. Display cases hold a few artifacts like a typewriter and a sign from la Moneda, the destroyed presidential palace. Columns project rotating newspaper headlines from Chile and around the world, announcing the coup. And on the back wall is an eerie image of la Moneda, which does not quite reveal itself to be video or photograph. All around are sounds of bombardment, screams, and expressions of disbelief. It takes a few moments to find the centerpiece of this room, which is a triptych of televisions on the wall to the left, playing footage of the military attack that ousted Allende. The footage is absolutely arresting—the same footage seen in Guzman's well-known film *The Battle of Chile*. One

can hardly take one's eyes off of it; and from all appearances on my many visits, most visitors feel the same way and spend a good deal of time watching. Above the televisions is a timeline of the events of the day, beginning at 6 a.m. when the military began to gather at Valparaiso and going until 6 p.m., when the military announced the coup and a curfew went into effect. As we shall see with the "other" 9/11, time has become an important trope in remembering. While Holocaust and other memorial museums also focus on a chronological telling of their histories, in the case of the two 9/11s analyzed here, it is the telling of the events of a single day that forms the most coherent narrative in the museum, pointing toward an intense focus on the minutiae of time but at the expense of deeper understanding and contextualization.

Dotted throughout the room are lighted boxes that provide a more individual experience. Donning headphones, individuals can watch or listen to other documentary footage, such as the swift round-ups of people for detention, the military's announcement of the coup, and Allende's final radio address, when he knows that he will soon take his life. All this audio and image saturation eerily foreshadows the depiction of September 11, 2001, in the memorial museum that is the subject of the next chapter, and reminds us of the now-international exhibitionary language we have for depicting acts of extreme violence. And all the while, the restored la Moneda is in the background; by the end of this part of the exhibit, one realizes that the image is live webcam footage. Why is not as clear, though it suggests a nod to former (socialist) president Ricardo Lagos's efforts to restore Allende's reputation and put la Moneda at the center of Chilean memory of the recent past (Hite and Collins 2009, 15).

It is here that one gets lost and realizes that the clear, controlled path one has come to expect in memorial museums is not present in this one—evidence that the exhibition had to be fit into the existing space (C. Aguilera, personal communication). Not knowing this, a visitor may feel a bit frustrated but can wander, checking room numbers to find the small hallway on the side of the 9/11 exhibit, where the chronology picks up. This part of the exhibition, "The End of the Rule of Law," focuses on the junta's takeover and restructuring of the institutions of Chile, giving the political context of the dictatorship. The left side of the hallway is lined with large photographs of the military junta, each with a scant paragraph of text describing different aspects of the junta's rule, such as its shaping of law

enforcement and the political system. The other side of the hallway is lined with display cases of documents, books, and other small artifacts, as well as photographs, newspapers, and newspaper headlines and more detailed information panels.

In addition to the decrees and propaganda of the regime that are on display, there is an emphasis in this section on the junta's use of the media as a tool for its political repression, hence the many newspapers on display. However, as Carolina Aguilera pointed out to me, the museum never clarifies whether the various news accounts on display—articles, newspaper headlines, or televised news stories—are displayed as objective evidence of what had happened or as a demonstration of the junta's ability to manipulate the press and the "reality" of life under dictatorship. Photographs of exiled Chileans, lists of prisoners, and a description of how the regime turned public spaces, like the National Stadium, into places of torture and detention give way to the "Area of International Condemnation." International solidarity with the repressed Chilean population is a theme that will resonate throughout the museum, as though underscoring the "universal" condemnation of the human rights abuses of Pinochet's regime but also contextualizing Chile's experience. And in a striking omission of how this condemnation was in fact not universal, a section on Operation Condor demonstrates the ways in which the Chilean regime was coordinating its repressive policies and practices with the other states of South America but ignores the role of the United States in supporting and promoting the operation.<sup>4</sup> When asked about this omission, Museum Director Brodsky admitted that this should be included, but that the museum's primary goal is to emphasize that what happened is the responsibility of Chile and Chileans and the blame cannot be placed elsewhere.

With slight confusion about the exhibition path again, the visitor rounds the corner to the most dramatic, emotionally charged, and experiential part of the museum: the "Area of Repression and Torture." A dark hallway is lined with black fabric; if one gets close enough, one sees that it is printed with the names of those who were disappeared and tortured by the regime, adhering to the trope of naming victims, though a more subtle yet dramatic take on the wall of names than most memorial museums employ. There is also a small warning about the disturbing content of this part of the exhibit.

In a small, dark room the tactics of the military junta are described in detail. On one wall are descriptions of popular torture methods and a

handbook used by Chile's secret police, the *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* (DINA; National Intelligence Directorate). Along another, a dark map of Chile is lit up by an astonishing number of red lights marking the locations of detention and torture centers, stretching up and down its long, thin span. More than 1100 clandestine centers have been found, and more continue to be discovered, evidencing the far reach of the DINA (Achtenberg 2013). The room is dominated by a video screen hung over a metal bed. The screen shows nine images of survivors, who recount their torture on grim and heart-wrenching loop. Though the testimony is in Spanish, the English subtitles ensure that many audiences will understand the terrible torture the individuals describe. One after another, they describe the fear, humiliation, and pain that they endured; while the methods of torture vary, almost all of them recall their conviction that they were going to die. It is a stark reminder of the horrors of torture and the impulse to create the Valech Commission to uncover the truth about the tens of thousands of individuals who were tortured. To illustrate the horror further, below the testimony is a metal bed frame, a replica (though only the audio guide will tell you this) of one of the most popular torture techniques, the *parrilla*, or "grill." The *parrilla* was hooked up to electric wires and its victims "grilled" on the



FIGURE 11. Represión y tortura (ALTA) / Area of Repression and Torture. Archivo MMDH.

exposed metal bed slats. Other displays focus on executions and death sentences; letters and other official documents are displayed, although most victims were simply disappeared.

Like the other memorial museums described in this book, this part of the exhibit is highly affective and experiential, encouraging the visitor to feel, for just a few moments, what the victims felt. Through the simultaneous depiction of scale—in the multitude of red lights spanning the nation—and individuality of the victims—in the agonizing testimony—the museum shows the visitor that she too would have likely been caught up in the violence just like the innocent individuals recounting their harrowing tales. In the raw descriptions of humiliation and terror, the visitor cannot help but empathize with the victims, experiencing “a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect” (Keen 2006, 208). This experience of empathy is the key to the visitor’s internalization of the museum’s moral message and is what makes the experience of a memorial museum more powerful than that of mere memorial or museum.

This hauntingly affective room gives way to a room of evidence collected on disappearances and another room on “Findings” that describes some of the most infamous cases of people who were disappeared, whose bodies were later found. One such story is of Marta Ugarte, a communist activist who was disappeared but whose body washed up in a bay. This spurred a search of the bottom of the bay, where railroad ties were found with traces of the clothing that they had been tied to in order to weigh down the bodies so that they may never wash up. Some of those railroad ties are now on display at Villa Grimaldi.

In the hallways awkwardly flanking these rooms is the “Passage of Jail Handicrafts” where items created by prisoners are displayed. There are symbolic and beautiful works, such as dolls referred to as *soporopos*, letters written by prisoners, and various small carvings of seahorses, doves, and other symbolic figures. Perhaps most notable are the copper carvings created by Chilean Air Force general Alberto Bachelet, Michelle Bachelet’s father, while he was imprisoned. And countering these small and precious artifacts are two that are large and imposing: a door from the former public jail of Santiago and a watchtower from the Calle Republica 580 torture center. The final section on this floor of the museum is the “Area of the Pain of the Children.” The collection of children’s drawings of life under the dictatorship, demonstrating the fear and violence that became a part of everyday life, and video testimony of children is drawn from the collection

of the *Fundación de Protección a la Infancia Dañada por los Estados de Emergencia* (PIDEE/Foundation for the Protection of Children Damaged by the State of Emergency) and reminds the visitor that the junta's reach extended beyond adults: 150 children were killed and more than one thousand tortured and imprisoned.

From here, the visitor ascends to the third floor and “The Demand for Truth and Justice.” While the title of this part of the exhibit may lead one to believe that it will address the period after the military dictatorship when accountability and justice were sought, the narrow context of the museum means that this part focuses on opposition to the regime up to its fall in 1988. The awkward layout of the second floor is replicated on this one, and the long hallway is lined with displays on different groups that fought against the oppression and violence of the junta. Through photos, videos, documents, newspapers, and other artifacts, the work of social institutions like the church and various civil society and human rights organizations to fight the regime is displayed. Thus the internal resistance is granted significant space in the museum, and a section on international condemnation of the dictatorship reminds visitors that Chile was not alone in its resistance and suffering.



FIGURE 12. Sala 11 de septiembre—Matías Poblete Aravena / Area of September 11, 1973.

Photo by Matías Poblete Aravena, Archivo MMDH.

Inserted in these displays on resistance is the “heart of the exhibit” (*Museo* 2011, 70): a glass box suspended over the exhibit below, facing a massive wall of photographs of the victims that fills the south wall of the museum. The box is lined with Plexiglas “candles” meant to evoke the candles left at the *velatones*, the vigils held by families of the victims and disappeared (*Museo* 2011, 70). The strikingly beautiful “Area of Absence and Remembrance” is the memorial to the victims. Benches overlooking the exhibit below and the photos provide a space of quiet memory and contemplation. But it is also a place for information, as one can look up individuals in a touchscreen database of victims drawn from the Rettig Report. The memorial museum tropes of naming and displaying photographs of the victims, which echoes the Tower of Faces in the USHMM, the House of Terror’s courtyard wall of victims, and the Kigali Centre’s wall of names and photo memorial, have become fully formed here and foreshadow the similar memorial found in New York’s 9/11 Museum. Exhibiting photographs of the victims is central to the work of memorial museums, as it furthers their goals of healing and restoration in the way photographs help return the humanity of the victims that the perpetrators sought to destroy. But displaying photographs of the victims goes beyond restoration; it is also intended to place a burden of empathy and responsibility on the visitor. The photographs of the victims invite the visitor to bear witness in a way that “moves individuals from the personal act of ‘seeing’ to the adoption of a public stance by which they become part of a collective working through the trauma together” (Zelizer 2002a, 699). Visitors are thus asked, through the act of looking at the photographs, to take responsibility for the past and play an active role in overcoming the trauma of the past and ultimately preventing violence in the future.

The permanent exhibit moves on through the “Area of the Struggle for Liberty,” which traces the final decade of the military regime. Growing anger and opposition led to protest and strikes demanding a return to democracy. Opposition media helped spur the resistance of the population, and in 1986, Pinochet’s motorcade was attacked. A state of emergency was declared, but the junta was already in its dying days. The exhibit ends with a depiction of the cultural resistance that helped deliver the final blow. Displays on the music and art of opposition bring the visitor to the “Area of the End of the Dictatorship.” In this section, the 1988 plebiscite is recounted, in which a resounding “NO” vote at last overthrew the military dictatorship that had terrorized the country for fifteen years. With “NO” ringing

in the ears of the visitor, she exits the exhibit, abruptly thrown back out into the narrow stairs descending down from the permanent exhibit. The early display on truth commissions had suggested some kind of exploration of Chile's efforts to uncover the truth and seek justice in the aftermath of such oppression and violence. But that is it. The exhibit and the story of the museum ends, anticlimactically, with the *plebiscite*.

On the quiet third floor is a display of beautiful *arpilleras*—colorful patchwork tapestries that emerged as an art form during the dictatorship, often created often by families of the disappeared. When I visited, a temporary exhibit was also being installed. There is a small video and audio archive, and in the basement are administrative offices and the documentation center, which is open to the public. Outside, awkwardly hidden in a shaded hallway, are a café and a well-curated gift shop, with local and indigenous arts and crafts and other souvenirs with a human rights emphasis. Apparently there were no plans to include a café and gift shop in the initial design; it was controversial and thought to be in bad taste for people to be eating, drinking, and shopping in a place meant for remembering and contemplating (C. Aguilera, personal communication). But, like other memorial museums around the world, ultimately it was deemed important to give people a place to think and decompress with some nourishment as well as the option to buy something to take away with their memories.<sup>5</sup>

## A "PLURAL SPACE"

The MMHR, like the other memorial museums described here, aims to go beyond the traditional functions of a museum collecting and displaying objects. Rather, it has a documentation center that is open to the public for researchers, scholars, and students as well as an oral history archive, where individuals who experienced life under the dictatorship can record their memories and researchers can access the testimonies. The museum offers educational programming, inviting school groups to visit the exhibits and learn about Chile's recent past. It creates temporary exhibits to delve deeper into topics that are not fully covered in the permanent exhibition. For example, when I visited, there was a temporary exhibit on exile and a set of human rights posters on display. And its work extends beyond memory of the recent past and to the larger community through concerts, film screenings, art exhibits, and other forms of public programming. The large

memorial plaza is also conceived to be a public space for a variety of uses. Thus while it tells a narrow story of the military dictatorship, it aims to be an institution that is actively engaged in public life and learning.

A large quote on a wall at the entrance to the museum reads “The museum is a school; the artist learns to communicate; the public learns to make connections,” demonstrating the MMHR’s desire to be a space of education, where there is an interaction between the creators of the museum and the public who visit it. It very much sees itself as part of the public, intellectual, and cultural life of Chile but also a part of international memory discourses. It has hosted seminars, workshops, and lectures for Chilean researchers and students, as well as international conferences and symposia, inviting international memorialization and memory experts like Andreas Huyssen and Tzvetan Todorov. And it is part of a network of similar institutions throughout the region that organizes conferences and workshops on issues related to memory and memorialization. Current and recent memorial museum projects in Colombia, Peru, and Brazil have looked to the MMHR for guidance and assistance (R. Brodsky, personal communication).

Through its public and other programming, the MMHR also seeks to address human rights issues beyond Chile. It has hosted international human rights film festivals and exhibitions, such as the Colombian painter Fernando Botero’s series on the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Like the other museums in this book, the MMHR sees itself as much more than a museum; it is a vibrant and vital part of the national and international community, contributing to ongoing efforts to come to terms with the past and to build a more peaceful and democratic present and future.

## A MODEL MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Ricardo Brodsky, the museum director, writes about the MMHR, “The monumentality of the architecture and the power of the permanent exhibition are the expression of the museum’s lasting purpose: to remember the truth and to speak in a voice that crosses generations, using the language and the technical and artistic media necessary to create an experience that is not locked away in the victims themselves, but which rather makes sense to visitors who did not live through this period” (2011, 10). In order to bring visitors into the experience of the pain and suffering of the victims of political violence, the MMHR uses the increasingly familiar global commemorative

memorial museum form, which emerged to do just this. As this brief tour of the museum demonstrates—from its architecture, which calls to mind museums like the 9/11 Museum and Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin, to its memorial, complete with photographs of the disappeared, eternal flames, and a searchable database, to its exhibits that combine historical information with affective, experiential techniques, and to its goal of morally educating visitors—the MMHR solidly fits the definition of memorial museum. Its inspiration in memorial sites around the globe is evident, as is its international standing within this community of like-minded institutions. The MMHR has membership in international organizations like the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and the International Council on Museums' Committee of Memorial Museums in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes. Like all memorial museums described here, the MMHR seeks to take Chile's past and translate it into a universal lesson of human rights and democracy for the present and future. And very much like the House of Terror, its goal is to demonstrate to Chileans—especially younger populations—just how bad dictatorship is in order to remind them to work hard at embracing and maintaining democracy.

The MMHR's strict adherence to the many tropes of memorial museums suggests that the form has successfully made its way around the globe and crystallized into its particular shape. In this way, the museum very much suggests that memory—and especially the forms that it takes—has become transcultural in the way that Levy and Sznajder, Erll, and Rothberg suggest. Though Chile's past is quite different from the Holocaust, communism, or genocide in Rwanda, the form in which it is remembered is strikingly similar. In the MMHR, common memorial tropes are borrowed from Holocaust and other remembrance, connecting memory of dictatorship in Chile to other instances of political violence.

As we have seen, memory studies is increasingly focused on memory as a transcultural phenomenon that is not necessarily tied to one particular culture or nation but instead moves through time and space, recycling both form and content. Indeed, the museums in this book appear to embody Astrid Erll's notion of travelling memory, seemingly illustrating "the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual 'travels' and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders" (2011, 11). We have followed the travels of the form and practice of memory in memorial museums from the United States to Hungary, Rwanda, and Chile. This

is just a small global sampling, suggesting that as Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson write, we can view “remembrance as a fluid process in which commemorative tropes work to inform the representation of diverse events and traumas beyond national or cultural boundaries, bridging—but not negating—spatial, temporal and ideational differences” (2014, 18). While the story of the MMHR is particular to Chile, the way in which it is told is not. And of course, the form in which a memory is embodied is important in shaping the meaning of the past (Wagner-Pacifici 1996). Chilean memory of the past is thus shaped by this international form in which it is contained.

But there is reason to be wary of this notion of transcultural memory that travels the world, unaware of borders, especially when we look at the politics of commemoration in a particular context. Susannah Radstone’s worries about the globalization of memory studies can easily be applied to the global reproduction of commemorative forms. She writes, “There remains something more than a little paradoxical as well as instrumental . . . about the attempt to produce a fully ‘globalizable’ version of memory studies [or forms], for memory research, like memory itself (notwithstanding possibilities for transmission and translation) is always located—it is specific to its site of production and practice” (2011, 114). While the forms used to remember past violence may be global, the violence that they remember is located and particular in a way that can be lost in what can seem a generic, one-size-fits-all memory container.

Thus in the context of the MMHR, we see the state terror of Chile’s past contextualized globally in the very first display on truth commissions around the world. Chile’s past is placed not only in the continuum of the global violence of the twentieth century but also within a global set of “best practices” for addressing past violence as varied as genocide, apartheid, military dictatorship, and ethnic cleansing. The world map and descriptions of truth commissions from around the world demonstrate that Chile was not alone in being victim to political violence nor in the mechanisms used to come to terms with that violence, suggesting the travelling, transcultural nature of memory and its mechanisms. However, when it comes to contextualizing Chile’s violent past within the context of Chile’s history, the museum is silent. And this lack of context and narrow focus is the most enduring criticism of the museum.

Because of the particulars of the Chilean transition, the museum tells a very narrow and limited story of the past. As was outlined earlier, though

Chile held democratic elections in 1990 and transitioned to democracy peacefully, Pinochet and his supporters ensured a “protected democracy” in which they would enjoy continued power and impunity. Thus the influence of the right and the military did not significantly diminish throughout the transition, and many of Pinochet’s supporters and colleagues remained and remain in positions of power in the government and military. As Hite and Collins argue (2009), because of the continued strength of the right and their version of history that sees the dictatorship as a necessary struggle against Marxism, official memorials, like a government-sponsored memorial museum, are more difficult to build than “bottom-up,” grassroots memorials because they challenge the memory and story of a still-influential part of the government. Thus though Bachelet had the force of her *Concertación* government behind the creation of the museum, the decision was taken early on to make the story and memory in the museum as politically neutral and palatable as possible. The best way to do this, the museum creators believed, was to focus strictly on the human rights violations that occurred between the 1973 coup and the 1988 plebiscite because there is agreement across political lines that the violation of human rights is wrong.

What this means is that the museum’s narrative begins with the coup of September 11, 1973, with absolutely no historical context to situate and explain the coup. This incensed the right in Chile, who believed that the museum’s narrative of human rights violations should start earlier and address pre-1973 violations by the left. But the left was also unhappy to have no historical and political context for the violent coup and even more violent repressions that followed; their struggle was in some ways erased in the effort to depoliticize political memory. And the exhibition ends abruptly with the plebiscite and the first democratic election following it. Though the ground floor displays about truth commissions and memorials imply that the museum will address Chile’s transition to democracy and the long struggle for transitional justice and truth that it has entailed, again this context is completely lacking. In its effort to construct an apolitical, universal message of human rights, the museum undermines its efforts to reveal and impart the truth about the political past in Chile. Rather, it creates a narrative of “victimization as virtue” (Barkan and Bećirbašić 2015) and presents a decontextualized and depoliticized set of martyrs to some unknown and unnamed higher cause.

This lack of context characterizes the museum as a museum, as well. It was constructed, as noted, on a neutral site with no historical meaning in its effort to promote a universal message of human rights. Because, as we have seen, the human rights movement in Chile is linked to a specific political (leftist) ideology, it was believed that a neutral site would help untangle the politics from the notion of human rights (R. Brodsky, personal communication). However, with the neutral site and the deliberate decision to limit the scope of the museum so dramatically, in many ways what you find in the MMHR is a neutral message without the same kind of impact as an authentic historical site, like Villa Grimaldi, which is deeply moving and widely considered to be a “successful” memorial (Hite and Collins 2009). Villa Grimaldi was a lovely estate just outside of Santiago that was taken over by DINA and became one of the most notorious sites of torture and detention. In 1994, the site was opened to the public and in 1997 was transformed into a “peace park.” Today it is dominated by beautiful artworks and mostly resists the urge to reconstruct the instruments of its repression and torture, but a powerful audio guide walks the visitor through the horrors that once occurred on such a peaceful and beautiful site. The experience of Villa Grimaldi is deeply moving, and the power of the place itself reveals a truth and authenticity—a Benjaminian “aura”—that the MMHR cannot.

Thus while the memorial museum form is beautifully realized in the striking glass and copper building, reflecting international expectations and ideals for coming to terms with past violence, in many ways the museum feels rather empty—as if this one-size-fits-all memory container does not quite “fit” Chile’s past and its memory. Superficially, the “ill-fit” of the form is evident in the layout of the exhibition: because the architects did not yet have the museum script when they designed the building, they created an awkward container for a memory that had not yet been determined. Thus the path through the exhibit is confusing and not at all intuitive for a frequent museum-goer. But the ill-fitting form goes deeper. While the MMHR checks all the memorial museum boxes in the tropes and trends that it employs, in the truncated story it tells, it is a “partial memory” of the past that leaves the visitor wanting and needing more context to make sense of the violence of Chile’s past (Estrada, qtd. in Opatow 2015, 230). And if memory is indeed linked to responsibility, as memorial museums suggest, there is the worry that in the kind of “museification of memory” and “banalizing the past and its potentially destabilizing aspects” in a museum such as

the MMHR, the “responsibility of remembering seems to be placed entirely on archives” (or museum, in this case; Leccardi 2016, 116). Of course, the root of this depoliticization and “banalization” is the particular political situation in Chile, which is not at all explicated in the museum, meaning that it cannot address the complexities of memory of political violence in Chile. The museum raises the important question that Bond and Rapson ask, “whether we are right to increasingly think about the past as ‘memory without borders’ without rigorously questioning whether the most idealistic aspects of memory theory actually reflect the complexity of how commemoration works in practice” (2014, 18). In some sense, all memorial museums have a tension between their desire to create universal messages while attending to the particularities of their pasts. In Chile this tension is even more apparent and complicates and compromises the work of the museum.

## CONCLUSION

Brodsky writes, “The task of building a memory must therefore be guided by a moral compass. . . . The goal in the museum’s construction of memory is to become a space that assists the culture of human rights and democratic values in becoming the shared ethical basis of our present and future coexistence. Only in this way can we empower our claim of NEVER AGAIN” (2011, 11–12). Just as the other memorial museums described here have a goal to serve as a “moral compass” that helps maintain society’s commitment to human rights, democracy, and nonviolence, so the MMHR embraces this ethic of “never again.” By exhibiting the antidemocratic human rights abuses of the past, its goal is to deepen a culture of human rights in the present and future. Although Chile has employed truth commissions, trials, memorials, reparations, and other transitional justice mechanisms to this end, it was also deemed necessary to create a memorial museum as a public place in which “never again” can be institutionalized.

However, in negotiating Chile’s still precarious political situation, the decision to focus the museum solely on the human rights abuses of 1973–88 sacrifices necessary historical context for a more universally agreeable message. This indicates what Greg Grandin has described as a “shift away from trying to understand the historical causes and social consequences of violence to an almost exclusive focus on how violence is experienced” (qtd. in

Estefane 2013, 164). The danger, of course, is that violence—such as that perpetrated on the bodies of the survivors whose testimony plays in the museum—becomes something inexplicable. But in order to make sense of the past and prevent such violence in the future, the causes and consequences must be explained and understood.

As I have argued in this chapter, the existence of this museum points to the transcultural nature of memory and its forms today. The MMHR is very much a part of what can be seen as a global memory culture. However, in the particular context of Chile's recent past, the form that this memory takes may undermine what the museum seeks to do. Because it is an official institution that needed to be politically acceptable, the MMHR is limited in the ways in which it can confront the past. In seeking to create a robust public institution with a universal message of peace, human rights, and democracy, the creators turned to a neutral site and followed the global memorial museum tropes of remembrance and education. And while the experience of visiting the museum is emotionally powerful and intellectually informative, the past that it contains feels partial and sanitized. Rather than allowing for a travelling, vibrant memory, the museum seems a container that seeks to hold its memory and past still. Michelle Bachelet, trained as a doctor, has said of the past that "only cleaned wounds can heal." However, in the MMHR, the wounds of the past, while well-cleaned and bandaged in the striking building, have been wrenched from the context that would help understand what caused them and how to truly heal them. But the nagging question remains of whether in fact memory and memorial museums can heal; as the museums in this book suggest, whatever healing potential of memory may exist is often eclipsed by political agendas and expediencies.