

**Heterogeneous *Exiliados*, Permanent *Exilios*, and Imagined *Patrias*:  
Modern Exile from Argentina and Chile**

***Introduction***

The matter of exile is so recurrent in the social and political histories of Latin America that it can be difficult to address comprehensively. Political exile has changed nations and lives from the era of the Iberian colonies to the present, and the subject is important enough to merit a more concrete historiographical schema. With this goal in mind, it is useful to examine the cases of two major Latin American exiles of the twentieth century: the emigration of Chileans to escape the regime of Augusto Pinochet from 1973 to 1990 and the emigration of Argentines to escape the state-directed terror of the so-called “Dirty War”, which lasted for roughly a decade between 1973 and 1983.

These two stories illustrate the difficulty of categorizing Latin American exile; not only were they distinct from previous examples of political exile, but they were at once distinct from each other and internally heterogeneous. Yet, in spite of their heterogeneity, the mass movements from Argentina and Chile had factors in common that marked them as examples of a particular phase in the history of Latin American exile. These movements can be defined, along with expulsions from Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Guatemala, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela, as *modern* exiles.<sup>1</sup> Modern exiles differed from previous cases in the sociopolitical roles of the exiled and the large-scale implementation of exile as a national project—two factors indicative of the extent to which political modernity changed the practice of exile in the region. In terms of each of these factors, Argentina and Chile witnessed the most extreme cases of modern exile. The political

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, *The Politics of Exile in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 152-169.

expulsions from the two nations can be identified as the culmination of modern exile in Latin America, with the definitive currents of modernity taking unprecedented effect.

Like past victims of exile, Argentines and Chileans developed imagined homelands while abroad, defined by idealization of their past, their present political roles, or their hopes for a better future for their home countries. Testimonies of Argentines and Chileans attest to the importance of these imagined *patrias* in the mentality of exile. Yet, in the modern context, the imagined homelands of these refugees could not be achieved as easily as before. The bureaucracy and capitalism brought on by global modernity ensured that, psychologically, the exiles from Argentina and Chile were permanent. Victims could not return to the countries they had left, as their homelands had changed in their absence. Nor could they implement the rapid changes that they envisioned upon their return; instead, they had to settle for lengthy processes of reconciliation and readjustment.

### ***Heterogeneity of Exile and the Exiled***

The Chilean and Argentine processes of exile were superficially similar; both involved the flight of primarily politicized victims from violent military regimes. However, the processes differed from each other based not only on the country of origin but also on the site of asylum. Aside from exterior distinctions, they displayed deep internal divisions in terms of political loyalties and activities undertaken while in exile. The overall portrait is one of heterogeneous migrations from distinct circumstances and heterogeneous migrants caught up in each movement.

In comparison to other Latin American cases, the advent of exile in Chile came as a short, sharp shock. The Chileans who began to leave home after September 11, 1973 had lived through and (in most cases) supported the Popular Unity (UP) government under Salvador Allende from

1970 until Augusto Pinochet's military coup.<sup>2</sup> In the country with the most ostensibly stable democratic tradition in Latin America, Chileans observed the sweeping transition toward socialism and the nationalization of industry in 1970 followed by the economic crisis of 1973. The military coup that followed this crisis was not entirely unpredictable, but the brutality of the subsequent state repression certainly was. It caught Allende's supporters and leftist militants off-guard and typically unarmed, making exile an unanticipated necessity for thousands of Chileans.

On the other hand, escape from Argentina was the culmination of a long escalation of state violence. Violence and exile had been elements of the Argentine political scene for the better part of the twentieth century, especially in the context of the relatively recent "Revolución Libertadora" (1966-73) and subsequent clashes not only between left and right, but also between Peronists, anti-Peronists, and the various facets of political loyalty within each side.<sup>3</sup> The coup of 1976 came after a wave of increasing political violence following Perón's return to power in 1973 and marked the beginning of the new phase of exile.<sup>4</sup> Chile's exiles left from a context of shattered hopes after a burst of success, while Argentina's exiles departed from a country scarred by previous violence in the decades and months leading up to the coup.

The countries to which exiles fled also distinguished the Argentine and Chilean migrations from each other and marked their internal diversity. Exiles often lacked agency in selecting their new homes—many victims described their months spent laying low in the embassies of Buenos Aires or Santiago, awaiting the "safe-conduct" necessary to gain asylum in a new country selected

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<sup>2</sup> José del Pozo, *Rebeldes, reformistas y revolucionarios: una historia oral de la izquierda chilena en la época de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Ediciones Documentas, 1992), 93.

<sup>3</sup> Marina Franco, *El exilio: argentinos en Francia durante la dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores Argentina, 2008), 36-37.

<sup>4</sup> Jorge Luis Bernetti and Mempo Giardinelli, *México: El exilio que hemos vivido* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2003), 20.

not for its benefits, but to avoid the dangers of life in their own nation.<sup>5</sup> Once the victims escaped, their lives and lifestyles depended largely on their host countries, which were not necessarily singular, as many exiles bounced tensely from place to place before settling down.<sup>6</sup>

The comparison of Argentine exiles in France to those in Mexico serves as an illustrative example of heterogeneity in sites of asylum. Although migration to France was not economically easy, Argentines often felt welcome there upon interacting with French authorities who saw their country as a hub of human rights which fulfilled its existential purpose by sheltering Argentine exiles (who conveniently tended to be both educated and white).<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, although Mexico had a long history of harboring exiles, Argentines who arrived after 1976 saw themselves not so much as guests of a benevolent host nation but as participants in the negotiation of a new identity.<sup>8</sup> Encountering novel racial tensions, cultural connections, and linguistic points of contact, Argentines in Mexico experienced deeper and more complex *convivencia* than Argentines in France. Differences in site of asylum meant that exiles who had been neighbors in Santiago or Buenos Aires could live completely distinct experiences in their new homes abroad.

In addition to their differences of origin and destination, fleeing Argentines and Chileans were heterogeneous in terms of their political loyalties. The fact that devotees of many political currents abandoned their countries is telling of the broad threat of violence from both military regimes—nonconformity was risky no matter what form it took. The fall of Chile’s UP sent waves of Chilean Socialists, Communists, Radicals, left-leaning Christian Democrats, and militants of the Movimiento Izquierdista Revolucionario (MIR) into exile. While various

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<sup>5</sup> Pablo Yankelevich, *Ráfagas de un exilio: Argentinos en México, 1974-1983* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2009), 60. My translation.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas C. Wright and Rody Oñate Zúñiga, “Chilean Political Exile,” *Latin American Perspectives* 34 (2007): 36.

<sup>7</sup> Franco, *El exilio*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> , 288-89, 330.

components of the UP made efforts to reconsolidate their political coalition abroad, new alliances emerged between the entities of the Chilean left in exile, and the structure of the UP changed irrevocably.<sup>9</sup> Moreover many exiled leftists shifted away from party loyalty altogether, moving toward more general goals of return and democracy.<sup>10</sup>

The cocktail of Argentine exiles was even more confusing the Chilean example in terms of political loyalty. Aside from an assortment of Peronists and leftists, guerrillas of the Montoneros and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores-Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (PRT-ERP) fled the junta's repression. The idiosyncrasies of Argentine politics (particularly regarding Peronism) meant that Argentine causes did not mesh with the structures of exiles' host countries. Additionally, divided political commitments and differing levels of militancy fractured the Argentine migration. A victim in Mexico described one major organization of exile support, the Comité de Solidaridad con el Pueblo Argentino (COSPA), as "basically led by the Montoneros, with some participation of the PRT" while the other main organization, the Comisión Argentina de Solidaridad (CAS) was "formed by a more intellectual left that didn't agree with the guerrillas".<sup>11</sup> The Chilean and Argentine expulsions were both composed of variegated groups of migrants who were united by their general politicization but not by their particular political opinions.

A final factor of heterogeneity was the activity in which Argentines and Chileans involved themselves after leaving their countries. While many retained their partisan loyalty to domestic political causes, exiles also commonly turned from conventional politics to new forms of actions based on the discourse of human rights. A key example of this shift was the 1977 formation of the

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<sup>9</sup> Wright and Zúñiga, "Chilean Political Exile," 10.

<sup>10</sup> Del Pozo, *Rebeldes, reformistas y revolucionarios*, 292.

<sup>11</sup> , 142. My translation.

Commission Argentine des Droits de l'Homme (CADHU) in Paris.<sup>12</sup> Although its founders were Montoneros and members of the PRT, the organization rejected political goals in favor of advocacy for Argentine victims of torture and disappearance. As exiles extended into the 1980s, the tendency to favor human rights over politics grew, especially in France. One Argentine remarked in hindsight that human rights were “the only bridge, the only possible horizon” toward which exiles could progress as hopes for radical political change in Argentina itself became increasingly bleak.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, as some exiles devoted themselves to supposedly apolitical activity, others remained at least discursively active in the political structures of their old countries. Contributors to the magazine *Controversia para el Examen de la Realidad Argentina*, published in Mexico City starting in 1979, carried on debates between Peronists and conventional Marxists, arguing for the benefits of the implementation of either system in Argentina upon the hoped-for defeat of the junta.<sup>14</sup>

Some exiles dedicated themselves to new activity neither through human rights organizations nor through conventional politics, but instead through sharing their stories. Perhaps the most famous example is the writer Ariel Dorfman, who embarked on the mission of storytelling after the ostensible end of his exile from Chile in 1983.<sup>15</sup> Writing from Chile in 1990 (he departed again in 1991, realizing that exile was inescapable even after state violence ended), Dorfman asks in his diary if he should feel obligated to tell the story of “treason and vengeance” that marks his country’s past. Later, halfheartedly hoping that there must be someone else to share this burden, he asks, “¿O es lo que me toca?”<sup>16</sup> In the case of Dorfman and other writers, who were well

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<sup>12</sup> Franco, *El exilio*, 100.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 116. My translation.

<sup>14</sup> , 163.

<sup>15</sup> Ariel Dorfman, *Entre sueños y traidores: Un striptease del exilio* (Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 2012), 380.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 271. This could be rendered roughly into English as: “Or does it fall to me?”

represented among Argentine and Chilean exiles, art centered on state repression was a medium through which victims could tackle memories of exile and advocate political change.

From start to ostensible end, the processes of exile from Argentina and Chile were internally and externally heterogeneous. Exiles departed in different ways from markedly different countries, and upon arriving in their new settings they had to negotiate new lives in a variety of contexts. Groups and individuals arrived in new countries with various political loyalties and undertook various forms of public activity in addition to the day-to-day struggles of work and family life. Of course, exiles eventually experienced unique processes of return—some arrived back as soon as possible as the military regimes fell while others trickled in gradually, sometimes in secret if they were linked to militant groups. Others exiles remained in their sites of asylum, some wishing to return and others simply having adapted to their new lifestyles. The heterogeneity of the Argentine and Chilean exiles of the 1970s makes them difficult to study as continuations of the Latin American tradition of political exile and perhaps even more difficult to study as comparable examples of the same process.

### *Modern Exiles*

However, the mass political migrations from Argentina and Chile in the 1970s do share certain traits that serve to situate them within an overarching history of Latin American exile. The first of these relates to the identities of the exiled. Those who fled Pinochet and the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional occupied political and social spaces that clearly distinguished them from previous Latin American exiles; based on this difference, the movements from Argentina and Chile can be identified as illustrative examples of truly modern exile. The second trait which marks these movements is the implementation of exile as a project of the national governments, which also

affirms the modern nature of these mass displacements—along with others that took place during the second half of the twentieth century—in comparison to previous examples. Despite their heterogeneity, the migrations from Argentina and Chile represent parallel separations from the previous paradigm of Latin American exile and culminations of a new model of modern exile.

Looking at exile through a wide-angle lens, it is clear that the use of exile changed profoundly from the colonial period to the conflicts of the late twentieth century. The basic trend is one of “massification”.<sup>17</sup> The standard model from the inception of Iberian rule to the middle of the twentieth century was the exile of small numbers of sociopolitical elites whose personal leadership might jeopardize the stability of the established order.<sup>18</sup> Examples of this form of exile are abundant—Simón Bolívar, Bernardo O’Higgins, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, José Martí, Juan Domingo Perón, and Fidel Castro are a few of their famous names. However, overwhelmingly, the names of the victims of exile in the 1970s are not so well known.

The Argentine and Chilean examples reveal a paradigm shift in the use of exile as the practice turned from the expulsion of elites to that of common citizens. A demographic snapshot of Chileans exiled in Montreal, Canada reveals that the majority belonged to the urban middle-class, with 31 out of 120 working as “professionals or specialists” before fleeing. Additionally, 25 of the 120 were “urban workers”, and the vast majority were from urban areas of Santiago or Concepción.<sup>18</sup> Argentine exiles also tended to come from the professional class; many found work as university professors, journalists, or psychoanalysts in Mexico, where one exiled psychiatrist remarked, “insertion [into the job market] was very easy”.<sup>19</sup> Exile in modernity was no longer limited to elites or even to non-elite political leaders. Fleeing Argentines and Chileans normally

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<sup>17</sup> Sznajder and Roniger, *The Politics of Exile in Latin America*, 136. <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>18</sup> Del Pozo, *Rebeldes, reformistas y revolucionarios*, 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> Yankelevich, *Ráfagas de un exilio*, 300-10. My translation.



came from an urban, often intellectual middle class that posed a political threat to the military governments.

The displacements of the 1970s also represented a break from the past in terms of scale and implementation. Massification applied not only to the identities of the exiled but also to their numbers. Under the military regimes of the late twentieth century, exile suddenly ballooned into a large-scale, national project. Brazil, Bolivia, and Uruguay all sent thousands into exile, but Argentina and Chile were the most extreme cases: over half a million citizens of each nation fled.<sup>20</sup> These population movements had little in common with the elite, conditional expulsions of the past; instead, they were endeavors built into the processes of national reconsolidation following military coups.

The new Argentine and Chilean governments created a veneer of legality over the process of exile. The Chilean junta issued Decree Law 81 in 1973 shortly after taking power, allowing for the indiscriminate expulsion of Chilean citizens. By creating an organized expulsion system, the regime could cut down on interior detention centers in favor of shipping dissidents abroad.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Chile's Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA) intimidated potential political opponents in order to force them into exile.<sup>22</sup> The Argentine process was less thoroughly legalized than the Chilean process, but it had legislative precedents based on the manipulation of Article 23 of the Argentine Constitution, which technically allowed dissidents to exit the country on the condition of arrest upon their return.<sup>23</sup> The expulsions of the 1970s were not only massive, but also legally legitimated by regimes that used exile as a tool of political repression.

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<sup>20</sup> Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, "Political Exile in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 34 (2007): 22.

<sup>21</sup> Wright and Zúñiga, "Chilean Political Exile," 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Franco, *El exilio*, 39.

The modernity of the Argentine and Chilean projects of exile is noticeable on both individual and national levels. The victims of exile were no longer powerful elites; they were intellectuals, trade unionists, and politicized members of the urban middle class. Exile was no longer the fate of a small percentage of a nation's upper crust; instead, it was a massive political project imposed by the state upon thousands of citizens. These two trends are symptomatic of the increasing political participation implied by modernity. High levels of popular political engagement in both Chile and Argentina meant that massive expulsions and extreme state violence were perhaps the only options available to military governments in order to install and maintain dictatorships. Ironically, the shift toward democratic government as a global ideal made state repression a political necessity for military regimes in Latin America. Mass exile was a consequence of modern, mass politics and a tool of this repression.

### ***Imagined Homelands and Permanent Exiles***

The modern processes of exile from Argentina and Chile in the 1970s did not differ from the previous model only in demographic and political terms. The movements also differed in terms of their psychological effect on victims, once again in a way that demonstrates their modernity. One consequence of any forced displacement is the formation of an imagined homeland in the mind of the victim—a conception of the place to which the exile hopes to return, defined by memories, awareness of the nation's present condition, and desires for its future. In earlier cases of Latin American exile, such as that of Bolívar and Sarmiento, exiles could imagine new homelands and, upon their return, take steps toward recreating them in the real world. In the chaotic period of independence and national formation, exiles had a genuine chance of return and continued relevance as political actors.

Modern exiles from Argentina and Chile typically did not enjoy this opportunity. Like previous exiles, they formed imagined homelands, idealizing the past or hoping for brighter futures for their *patrias*; these memories and ambitions are well represented in personal testimonies. Yet in a modern context, these imagined homelands were unattainable. The politics of transition, the globalization of capitalism, and the rise of commercial culture made hopes for idealistic change unrealistic. Particularly during the 1980s, the national economies of Chile and Argentina moved in a direction that rendered both countries less traditionally industrial and thus less appropriate for the leftist revolutionary shifts envisioned by many exiles. Also, many Argentines and Chileans found that return was not an option after years abroad—financial limitations and family obligations meant the exiles had to stay in their new homes. In other cases, exiles had established themselves comfortably in new countries and simply did not want to leave. For many Argentines and Chileans who remained abroad, exile was permanent. Yet even exiles who returned found that the homelands they had imagined no longer existed or could not be created. Psychologically, this meant that modern exiles were permanent whether or not the victim made it back.

The formation of an imagined homeland based on memories of the past was particularly common for Chileans, as they had the recent example of the UP as a basis of future hopes for progressive, democratic politics. Testimonies of Chilean exiles in Montreal reveal the utopic nature of the UP in their collective memory: one referred to the three years of UP government as “a dream” and as “the time when it could be proven that the *pueblo* could lead itself”.<sup>24</sup> While providing a romanticized image of the past, the UP also gave Chilean exiles a concrete goal for political change upon their return. Although party alliances shifted over the years of Pinochet’s regime, many Chilean exiles still maintained the desire to “apply the strategy of 1970 without its

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<sup>24</sup> Del Pozo, *Rebeldes, reformistas y revolucionarios*, 285-86. My translation.

errors” upon the return to democracy, hoping to form a new coalition that could initiate a project something like the one begun under Salvador Allende, even if that meant more modest goals and more cautious change.<sup>25</sup> The imagined homeland of many Chilean exiles rested upon the foundations laid in the early 1970s by Allende and the UP. Despite its collapse and Allende’s death, exiles imagined a Chile that could restore the hopeful days when socialism through democracy seemed an imminent reality.

In comparison to Chilean exiles, Argentines were more likely to build imagined homelands based on hopes for novel change rather than a return to the past. Based on their long history of political chaos and the severe state terrorism of the Proceso, Argentines were justified in adapting their goals to generalized desires for democracy and an end to violence. Their imagined homelands often rested upon the ideals of human rights that informed their activity in exile. Increasingly apolitical exiles, like the victim in France who saw human rights as “the only bridge” leading to positive change in Argentina, imagined first and foremost an Argentina in which the government ceased to repress and murder its citizens—other political goals were secondary.<sup>26</sup> Particularly in France, the perception of Argentine exiles as victims of human rights abuses led to a sense of common identification with the cause of human rights; it became definitive of both Argentines’ activities and their hopes for a better homeland upon return.<sup>27</sup>

A consistent experience across the gamut of the modern exiles was the inability to truly come home, even after setting foot back on Argentine or Chilean soil. Ernesto López, an Argentine exiled in Mexico, identifies a sense of “*desfasaje*”—“discrepancy” or “incongruence”—between “the political-ideological atmosphere of exile and the scene of the return to democracy”.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 309. My translation.

<sup>26</sup> Franco, *El exilio*, 116. My translation.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>28</sup> Bernetti and Giardinelli, *México*, 13. My translation.

Returning exiles had to contend with the discourse of the “golden exile” issued by both Pinochet and the Proceso, together with a combination of official forgetfulness or denial of state terrorism and the notion that government violence was the combined fault of the far right and the militant left (i.e. exiles and *desaparecidos*) in the first place.<sup>29</sup> This “two devils” theory meant that returning exiles were often demonized among their own people and therefore could not always assume a leading role in defining the nation’s new priorities. Even when the returning exiles could take this role, as in the case of exiles’ involvement in the Chilean Concertación, they had to compromise with members of new coalitions who did not necessarily share the reconstructive goals that many exiles had formed while abroad. Some exiles influenced national politics and reached positions of power back in their home countries, but they did so in a context defined not only by their desires but also by the political necessities of transition.

Apart from the hardships of their cold reception, exiles also found it difficult to insert themselves into a cultural milieu that had changed without them. Even if the “simple desire” to return dragged them home, regardless of the practicality of the decision, they tended to find that they had been Otherized by their time abroad and that their home countries had become Other in their absence.<sup>30</sup> In 1980, Mempo Giardinelli coined a specific term to describe the newfound cultural difference of Argentines who returned from Mexico with new experiences and often with newly international families: he called them “*argenmex*”, and the name stuck.<sup>31</sup> Argentine exiles experienced national exclusion and cultural alienation that kept them from controlling the process of political change that was already underway when the Proceso ended in 1983. After returning to Argentina with an imagined homeland based on human rights and retribution for state crimes in

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<sup>29</sup> Yankelevich, *Ráfagas de un exilio*, 284-85.

<sup>30</sup> Franco, *El exilio*, 284-87.

<sup>31</sup> Yankelevich, *Ráfagas de un exilio*, 337.

mind, exiles were greeted not by swift reconciliation but by a long process of picking at their old wounds in an attempt to prosecute the offenses of their former government.

Chileans experienced similar difficulties in assimilation that prevented the realization of their imagined homelands. Former supporters of the UP exiled in Canada who were unable to participate in Chile's 1988 plebiscite were generally thrilled by the triumph of the "No" campaign, but they were disappointed by the victory of the Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin, a supporter of Pinochet's coup, in the elections of 1989.<sup>32</sup> Although the dictatorship was over, the socialist goals of the UP would clearly not be easily accomplished, especially while proponents of the more radical left lacked dominant positions in the Concertación. Some Chilean leftists were not even satisfied by the plebiscite, seeing a negotiated transition from the military government as an insufficient solution to a problem that required more radical change.<sup>33</sup> Such change proved hard to come by in the increasingly de-industrialized Chile that emerged following the economic crisis of 1982. Years of neoliberalism under Pinochet had undermined the industrial working class that many Chilean exiles hoped would give rise to the revolutionary improvements envisioned by Allende upon the fall of the dictatorship. The new political and economic nature of Chile was not conducive to these exiles' desires for their country.

Many Chileans arrived home only to encounter what they considered unpleasant changes in culture as well. After the passionate discourse of the UP and militant groups in pursuit of socialism, returning exiles found themselves among a generation that was "much more self-centred, worried about material things" rather than revolution; some described their return to post-Pinochet Chile as a "second exile".<sup>34</sup> The disappointment of the new Chile combined with the

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<sup>32</sup> Del Pozo, *Rebeldes, reformistas y revolucionarios*, 310.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>34</sup> Shirin Hirsch, "Chileans in exile: experiences of British interaction and return," *Oral History* 40 (2012): 54.

torturous memories of what had happened under Pinochet drove Ariel Dorfman to abandon his country for a second time in 1991. He aptly described the decision to leave in his diary. “Maybe it’s a shitty country, but it’s my shit”, he writes in an attempt to convince himself to stay, before acknowledging that he has no option but to leave the “impossible country”, where his idealistic goals of reconciliation and a return to the days of Allende have been exposed as unreasonable fantasies.<sup>35</sup> Upon arriving home, Dorfman realized, like many Chilean exiles, that his imagined homeland did not and could not exist.

Of course, return was not ubiquitous among Argentine and Chilean exiles. Families of mixed nationalities often remained far from Argentina or Chile with one parent in perpetual exile, and economic necessity sometimes made return impossible. Some chose to remain in exile out of a lack of “faith in the democratic evolution” of the home country, in the words of one Argentine who chose to stay in France.<sup>36</sup> Even after returning home, some exiles regretted their decision and decided to make a voluntary move back to their former sites of asylum. An Argentine archaeologist who returned home after living in Mexico affirmed, “it was much harder to return to Argentina than to leave”.<sup>37</sup> Individuals and families that did not return, out of choice or necessity, often let their imagined homelands fade into memory and generated new homelands in the countries where circumstance had deposited them. Exiles lived normal existences abroad despite their traumatic past.

Whether or not an exile came back to Argentina or Chile, the expulsions of the 1970s were permanent in that exiles could never return to the countries to which they imagined returning. Many exiles developed abstract ideas of home while abroad, whether based on idealization of past

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<sup>35</sup> Dorfman, *Entre sueños y traidores*, 349-52. My translation.

<sup>36</sup> Franco, *El exilio*, 278.

<sup>37</sup> Yankelevich, *Ráfagas de un exilio*, 333.

successes or on idealistic hopes for a new national reality. Yet as a result of discrimination from fellow citizens, cultural differences, or exclusion from national politics, exiles found that their imagined homelands were nonexistent and impossible to create. Shifts associated with modernity—the sluggish bureaucracy of government, a move toward neoliberal capitalism, and popular commercial culture—all drove nails into the coffin of exiles’ hopes for their homelands. The currents of modernity caused expulsions of the type and scale seen in Argentina and Chile, and at the same time they rendered exile psychologically permanent.

### *Conclusion*

The Argentine and Chilean exiles of the 1970s do not lend themselves to superficial analysis. They were characterized by heterogeneity, and no two cases of exile were exactly alike. Individuals lived varied experiences abroad—although all were victims of state repression, some managed to live happily and successfully in their new countries.<sup>38</sup> Marta Raquel Zabaleta, an Argentine writer who fled to the United Kingdom, describes her displacement as “a mixture of swings and roundabouts”.<sup>39</sup> Although it is necessary to condemn mass exile as a component of state terrorism, it is insufficient to assume that all exiles suffered equally; many adapted and lived fulfilling lives despite their trying circumstances.

The Argentine and Chilean *exiliados* (the people exiled) were heterogeneous in national origin, site of asylum, social class, political loyalty, and activities abroad. Despite this confusing set of factors, the *exilios* themselves (the movements of people into exile) share traits that permit their categorization as processes characteristic of a specifically modern paradigm of Latin American exile. Massification, in terms of the identities of the victims and large-scale state

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>39</sup> Marta Raquel Zabaleta, “Exile,” *Feminist Review* 73 (2003): 37.



implementation, characterizes the modern nature of these projects of exile. A consequence of their modernity was the impossibility of achieving the imagined homelands that exiles generated abroad. Exiles like Bolívar and Sarmiento were able to affect sweeping changes in their homelands upon return, reorienting their countries through personal political power. Yet for modern exiles, enclosed bureaucracies and cultural alienation made the project of forging a new *patria* based on imagined ideals all but impossible. The implausibility of the imagined homeland meant that modern exiles were psychologically permanent, whether or not victims returned to their old countries.

Although Argentina and Chile witnessed the most extreme manifestations of modern political exile in Latin America, the movements from Brazil, Uruguay, and Bolivia deserve more space than they have received here. An analysis of the heterogeneity of political exile based on gender differences would also be useful and deserving of a paper all to itself. For now, it is fitting to conclude with a general observation about the Argentine and Chilean exiles of the 1970s: like most stories from Latin America's past, they were more ambiguous, more complex, and more relevant to the region's present and future than a cursory glance might suggest.

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