

**Criminal States/Necrophiliac Governments: Bishop
Gerardi's *Enemy of the State and Targeted for Elimination***

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My aim in this essay is to map out the contributions that cultural texts lend to the discussion on human rights, memory, and citizenship. To that end, I read Francisco Goldman's *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?*, paying attention to the notion of a criminal state that is developed in this account. With these three topics in mind, I unravel the processes constituting criminal networks of power and their logic of articulation. I also use two psychoanalytical notions: perversion and abjection. Both serve to navigate the meaning of a senseless psychotic history that produces phobic states of being. This is the way I interpret what Guatemalan people lived through at the end of the twentieth century and beyond. On the other side of abjection and perversion, there is "justice" and "truth." These two words are a compass for those who, with serenity, perseverance, and tenacity, decide to control radical evil and prevent the disruption of the social bond. It is axiomatic, as a policeman told the investigators of the crime that "there are some things that should be investigated and others not" (42).

From the get-go, Goldman's chronicle produces a sharp sensation of uneasiness, a general feeling of disturbance. As the narrative progresses, a psychotic, or at least perverse, atmosphere oppresses us.¹ The memory of that "time of fear and sadness—but also of unforgettable intensity—stayed inside me," says the author, "like a dormant infection that can sometimes be stirred back to life, even by a glance" (142). How does Goldman produce these sensations? He does so through hyperbole, which conveys exaggeration and exorbitance; through metonymy, which conveys the perpetual disorientation of the sign due to its incapacity to signify; and

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through anaphora, which reconstructs the memories of the narrated to ensure their reification. This urge to signify accounts for Goldman's repetitive style, and his repetitive style is a symptom of trauma, which is defined as a perpetual return to the event. In the Goldman quotation below, note the expressions "dormant infection" and "unforgettable" and appreciate how stylistics serves as a vehicle to transmit these sensations. Thus, rhetoric captures well the force of primal, archaic, irrepressible forces, both external and internal, before which the citizen-subject is at the complete mercy of evil; they produce a kind of perpetual phobic hallucination that generates fear and aggression and torments the subject even in her or his dreams. In his novel *El material humano*, Rodrigo Rey Rosa has his main character awaken "a eso de las cuatro, empapado en sudor, con un miedo intenso" (92) (at about four, soaking wet, with an intense fear) (my translation) due to the repetition of nightmares. On the flipside of this characterization, there is serenity, courage, and resolve, character traits indispensable to firming up the meaning of "truth" and "justice," ancillary signs that command credence and set up the direction of human rights for the citizenry.²

Of course, in Goldman's chronicle we are no longer discussing notions of failed or rogue states, if you will. The bar has been raised. We are now engaged with criminal states, where the will of serial killers, real or metaphorical, is in command. As Hugo Vezetti states, "[E]l asesinato de masas, que no es tan excepcional . . . requiere siempre del papel activo y decisivo de una minoría de jefes, un elenco de mando dominado por creencias bien arraigadas que no son susceptibles de ser deducidas en un cálculo racional de intereses o beneficios" (156) (Mass murder is not so exceptional. . . . It always requires the active and decisive role of a minority of superiors, a commanding cast dominated by well-rooted beliefs, which are not susceptible to being deducted from a rational calculation of interests and benefits). This accounts for Jonathan Littell's dictum that "there was a lot of talk, after the war, in trying to explain what had happened, about inhumanity. But I am sorry; there is no such thing as inhumanity. There is only humanity and more humanity." Only with this frame in mind can we understand the testimonials gathered in *Guatemala: Nunca más*, a text that comes to increase, augment, fatten the archives of necrophiliac governments.

Two other texts accompany Goldman's chronicle: Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez*, which narrates the moment previous to the assassination of Bishop Gerardi on April 26, 1998, and Rodrigo Rey Rosa's *El material humano*, which narrates the processes of recollection, reconfiguration, and investigation in archives after the event. If Moya places us at the moment of terror previous to the assassination, Rey Rosa locates us in its aftermath, in the total absence of meaning. In Moya, it is still possible to tell a story, to narrate history; in Rey Rosa this possibility has been foreclosed—archives no longer hold the memory of the past because they have been tampered with. If Moya's world is paranoiac—that is the protagonist's primary

sensation—then Rey Rosa’s is totally drained. Fear and emptiness, or fear and aggression, constitute the pillars of abjection. Goldman’s, Moya’s, and Rey Rosa’s texts constitute a trilogy that render testimony of the events and bear witness to the effective dismantling of liberal citizenship, documenting the absolute violation of human rights. These three writers are what Elizabeth Jelin, quoting Howard Becker, calls “‘moral entrepreneurs,’ enterprising moral leaders or social agents who, often out of humanitarian motivation, mobilize their energies for the sake of a cause they strongly believe in” (33). Here I concentrate on Goldman’s text and use the other two as counterpoints.

The social universe narrated by these three “moral entrepreneurs” is psychotic or at least perverse—and here I want to emphasize that I am using these terms in the strict sense proposed by psychoanalysis. That is, I am using them to signal a world without law or with invented, fantastic, or phantasmagoric laws, where meaning is in perpetual catachresis—a term we know underscores the contradictory use of a sign, a twisted or disturbed meaning. For psychoanalysis, the discipline that has explored the constitution of the human psyche in depth, perversion is a mental structure, not a type of social behavior. Nonetheless, I want to propose that this type of mental set-up, dismissed if not entirely disdained by social scientists up to now, completely interferes with and disturbs the constitution of the social link, or at best produces a distressed and capricious one.³ For Freud, perversion consists of rejecting the rule of law and abandoning oneself to pleasure, so-called *jouissance*. For Lacan, the term signifies the enjoyment produced in and through the transgression of the law or, if you fancy a more complex elaboration, a psychological mechanism that invokes the law to let the law be and thus constitute the Other into law. The pervert resists the law, and the only law he accepts is a set of fantastic rules that he creates himself. Perverts enjoy transgressing, and only transgression accounts for their enjoyment. The law of the pervert is imagined and, therefore, imaginary. Let’s hear Moya:

Yo no estoy complete de la mente, me repetí, impactado por el grado de perturbación mental en el que había sido hundido ese indígena cachiquel testigo del asesinato de su familia, por el hecho de que ese indígena fuera consciente del quebrantamiento de su aparato psíquico a causa de haber presenciado, herido e impotente, cómo los soldados del ejército de su país despedazaban a machetazos y con sorna a cada uno de sus cuatro pequeños hijos y en seguida arremetían contra su mujer, la pobre ya en shock a causa de que también había sido obligada a presenciar cómo los soldados convertían a sus pequeños hijos en palpitantes trozos de carne humana. Nadie puede estar completo de la mente después de haber sobrevivido a semejante experiencia, me dije, cavilando, morbosamente, tratando de imaginar lo que pudo ser el despertar de ese indígena, a

quien habían dejado por muerto entre los trozos de carne de sus hijos y su mujer y que luego, muchos años después, tuvo la oportunidad de contar su testimonio para que yo lo leyera y le hiciera la pertinente corrección de estilo, un testimonio que comenzaba precisamente con la frase *Yo no estoy completo de mente* que tanto me había conmovido, porque resumía de la manera más compacta el estado mental en que se encontraban las decenas de miles de personas que habían padecido experiencias semejantes a la relatada por el indígena cachiquel y también resumía el estado mental de los miles de soldados y paramilitares que habían destrozado con el mayor placer a sus mal llamados compatriotas, aunque debo reconocer que no es lo mismo estar incompleto de la mente por haber sufrido el descuartizamiento de los propios hijos que por haber descuartizado hijos ajenos, tal como me dije antes de llegar a la contundente conclusión de que era la totalidad de los habitantes de este país la que no estaba completa de la mente. (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 13–14)

(I am not complete in the mind, I repeated to myself, stunned by the extent of mental perturbation experienced by this Cakchiquel man who had witnessed his family's murder, by the fact that this indigenous man was aware of the breakdown of his own psychic apparatus as a result of having watched, albeit wounded and powerless, as soldiers of his country's army scornfully and in cold blood chopped each of his four small children to pieces with machetes, then turned on his wife, the poor woman already in shock because she too had been forced to watch as the soldiers turned her small children into palpitating pieces of human flesh . . . and also summed up in the most concise manner possible the mental state of tens of thousands of people who have suffered experiences similar to the ones recounted by this Cakchiquel man found themselves in, and also summed up the mental state of thousands of soldiers and paramilitary men who had with relish cut to pieces their so-called compatriots, . . . though I must admit that it's not the same to be incomplete in the mind after watching your own children drawn and quartered as after drawing and quartering other people's children, I told myself before reaching the overwhelming conclusion that it was the entire population of this country that was not complete in the mind.) (*Senselessness* 1–2)

This mental structure differs little from the actions undertaken by the uprising prisoners in Goldman's text who screamed, "We want Lima" and then

hacked off the top of Villanueva's skull with a machete. Psycho scooped up Villanueva's brain matter with his hands and flung it into the faces of

the cornered Sector 7 prisoners. . . . They seized on a felt soldier doll that Lima kept by his bunk. The cholos decapitated the doll and shoved its head inside Villanueva's decapitated head, in through the neck and up, so that the doll's face showed through the brain matter. (Goldman 284)

Julia Kristeva understood events such as this all too well when she claimed that literature was the gateway to the anxiety of times, the place where the social code is destroyed and renewed! How well she expressed it when she said that psychoanalysis becomes the place of extreme abjection and the refuge of private horror, which could be appeased through an indefinite displacement of speech and its effects. For her, the limit of writing becomes the symptom upon which the new theoretical discourse on language as a subjective experience is constructed.⁴ Under this gaze, let's underscore in the Moya quotation the expressions "scornfully" and "with relish," which constitute the symptom that inscribes in this excerpt of the text the indices of *jouissance*, the horror of the times. And let's be aware that we might instead use terms such as *bio-* or *necro-politics* as an instrument of analysis, terms that enjoy greater epistemological prestige and circulation; however, these two terms presume consciously elaborated politics worked through and mediated by reason, and as such they are located within the political ideology of liberalism.⁵ In criminal states, in contrast—and this is my claim—what dominates is the lack of reason: that is to say, a drive—impetus, spasm, viscera. Here, I cannot help going back to the idea of Freudian instinct cited by Bernard J. Bergen as "a primitive kind of mental activity, which would later be dethroned and overlaid by human reason, when that faculty came to be acquired, but which in some people, perhaps in everyone, would retain the power of drawing down to it the higher mental processes" (46). Bergen's thesis is that instinctual forces exert a kind of magnetic power of attraction, animating a return to the original starting point, to a condition of asociality typical of the "primitive horde," or pre-social humans—what Jonathan Littell does not want to label inhumanity but "only humanity and more humanity."

Considering these postulates, Goldman's investigation demonstrates that the criminal state is a perverse, criminal, necrophiliac state, one lacking the regulatory function of authority, that social "NO" signifying a public space of order and law (signified as "truth" and "justice" in the text) that collectively governs subjectivities and fosters the constitution of social subjects as responsible citizens capable of establishing social connections for the benefit of the common good. We know that the social universe is a universe of limits, limits that perversion negates. Without an operating "NO," drives are in command and civility returns to the position of the primordial horde and archaic forms of libidinal cathexis. Perversion is connected to drives or impulses without norms. We witness this in the

military practices imposed on the Guatemalan population, narrated by the survivors of massacres, by memory holders who witnessed scenes that we have seen only in horror films. Take a listen to Moya again:

Porque al pobre mudito le tocó en suerte que los militares lo interrogaran sin saber que él era mudo, le tocó comenzar a recibir golpes para que confesara los nombres de los colaboradores de la guerrilla, delante de los demás habitantes del poblado el mudito recibía sin decir palabra los golpes que seguían a cada pregunta hecha por el sargento que comandaba la patrulla, sin que nadie de la población se atreviera a decirle al sargento que el mudito no podía responderle aunque lo amarraran a ese árbol de la plaza y el sargento comenzara a infligirle incisiones en el cuerpo con el yatagán, a los gritos de “¡hablá, indio hijo de la gran puta, antes de que me calentés los huevos!, pero el mudito nada más abría desorbitadamente los ojos de tal forma que parecía que saldrían de sus cuencas a causa del terror, sin poder responderle al sargento, claro está, quien interpretaba su silencio como un desafío y fue desenvainando el machete para hacerlo hablar como locutor deportivo y para que ese hatajo de indios que presenciaban la escena despavoridos comprendieran que lo peor que podía ocurrírseles era desafiar a la autoridad, un sargento bastante bruto si consideramos que destazó al mudito sin darse cuenta de que esos gritos no eran sólo de dolor sino de un mudito para quien ésa era su única forma de expresión . . . después del mudito fueron pasando a machete a cada uno de los demás pobladores . . . (*Insensatez* 28–29)

(Because the poor deaf-mute had the misfortune of being interrogated by soldiers who didn't know he was deaf . . . in front of the other inhabitants of the village and without saying a word the deaf-mute was beaten . . . without anybody in the village daring to tell the sergeant that the deaf-mute couldn't answer . . . and the sergeant began to make incisions on his body with a saber to his shouts of “Speak, you Indian sonofabitch, before I really get pissed off!” but the deaf-mute just opened his bulging eyes so wide that it looked like they were going to pop out of his sockets from terror . . . and unsheathed his machete . . . so that this herd of horrified Indians watching the scene would understand that the worst thing they could ever think of doing was to defy authority, a sergeant who was pretty stupid if we consider that he cut the deaf-mute to pieces without even realizing that his screams were not just screams of pain but also the only means for the deaf-mute to express himself . . . after the deaf-mute every single other inhabitant of the village was worked over with the machete.) (*Senselessness* 16–17)

Chopping people into little pieces, transforming them into bits of palpitating flesh, was part of the Kaibiles' training in learning the perverse practices of evil. Rubén Chanax, a crucial witness/collaborator in the assassination of Bishop Gerardi, describes this training during his testimony.

These all-too-human bestial practices confirm that a perverse body, the body of the army that has criminalized public policy, has occupied the space of the law. From the place of law they become unlawful, acting as serial killers, filling social life with abjection. For Kristeva, living in the abject-perverse is like living in permanent self-revolt. There is a sense of threat, a threat that at times is visible but at times is impalpable and hallucinatory. There is a feeling ensuing from an exorbitant interior or exterior, the utter terror of extreme cruelty that moves beyond the possible, tolerable, and thinkable and shuts down the semiotic system.⁶ This threat is within but cannot be assimilated. Psychotic states form subject-citizens who live under a continuous spasm and in a situation of perpetual misery. Rodrigo Rey Rosa articulates this situation thus: “[E]n el archivo yo veía un lugar donde las historias de los muertos estaban en el aire como filamentos de un plasma extraño, un lugar donde podían entreverse espectaculares ‘máquinas de terror’ como tramoyas que habían estado ocultas” (Rey Rosa, 84) (In the Archive I saw a place where the stories of deaths were in the air like filaments of a strange plasma, a place where ‘spectacular terror machines’ like props that had been occult could be guessed) (my translation). Abjection conveys the visceral sense of those haunted by an undefined object, by a ubiquitous presence, like that of God, evil, or the army. Abjection has only one quality: that of being opposed to the I. To dodge this abjection is a miracle; few transcend it, and transcendence is predicated on character, people endowed with resiliency, such as Mynor Melgar, legal team coordinator of the Office of Human Rights of the Archbishopric (ODHA), or the team known as the Untouchables. Here is an example of what I mean:

That night, I asked my young friends how they would feel if the sentence was revoked and the Limas were set free. After having invested such a large part of their lives in the case, would they feel all their work had been in vain? Would they believe they had wasted their time in a futile battle? Not at all, they responded. . . . To work on Gerardi's case had been the most important and transforming experience of their lives up that point. And it was worth every bit of it regardless of the consequences. (Goldman 396)

In fact, Goldman writes, “if they lost the appeal and had to build a new case from scratch, they would be ready” (365). This conviction accounts for their distancing from abjection.

Using psychoanalytic language, which for me is the most appropriate for understanding these social limits, we could ascertain that to belong to the

army, the oligarchy, or to put into practice what is asked for by ungovernance demands a perverse personality, capable of establishing a social bond of the same tenor; that is, it demands a type of personality centered on the I—narcissistic, perhaps—for whom the only important thing is personal satisfaction, *jouissance*. Take a listen to the speaking subject: *Cuando los cadáveres se quemaron, todos dieron un aplauso y empezaron a comer* (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 48) (*While the cadavers were burning, everyone clapped and they began to eat*) (*Senselessness* 36); *Agarraron a Diego Nap López y agarraron un cuchillo que cada patrullero tenía que tomar dándole un filazo o cortándole un poquito* (*Insensatez* 38) (*They grabbed Diego Nap López and they grabbed a knife, each officer giving him a stab or cutting off a small slice*) (*Senselessness* 27). To state that this type of behavior is cruel without using the adjective to refer to the psychological structure established by a discipline that has studied it in depth does not do justice to the damage inflicted on the social realm. As Moya establishes,

Las frases que tanto me conmovían . . . como aquella que decía *Para mí recordarlo siento que estoy viviendo otra vez*, cuya sintaxis cortada era la constatación de que algo se había quebrado en la psiquis del sobreviviente que la había pronunciado . . . *eran personas como nosotros a las que teníamos miedo* . . . el ejército había obligado a la mitad de la población a que asesinara a la otra mitad, que mejor que el indio matara al indio y que los vivos quedaran marcados. (*Insensatez* 149–50)

(Those sentences that moved me so much . . . like the one that said, *For me remembering, it feels I am living it once more*, whose broken syntax was the corroboration that something had snapped in the psyche of the survivor who said it. . . . *They were people just like us we were afraid of* . . . the army had forced one half of the village's population to kill the other half, better that Indians kill Indians and that the living remain as marked men.) (*Senselessness* 135–37)

“To be marked,” as the students of trauma would put it, signifies to remember with the body, to feel the passing of history in your very skin and bones.” Would you be able to forget?⁷ We do not need to rehearse all the variables of perversion to gauge how fear and terror keep citizens in a perennial state of suspension. But we can understand how fear is tied to the necessity of “truth” and “justice” and, simultaneously, to a sense of aggression and frustration. Let's remember a simple fact: the Kaibiles were experts in imitating jungle birdcalls. Hearing a jungle birdcall on the phone becomes a form of intimidation and triggers states of phobia—phobia being that with which one does not want to engage, something one wants to avoid at all costs. In this context, hearing a jungle birdcall on the phone puts the

subject in direct proximity with a lack: state defense is absent; “justice” will not be served. There are also more explicit threats, such as hearing somebody say that they are watching and “know everything. We know where your wife works. We know where your parents live. We know where her parents live. . . . We’re going to do other things now that you won’t notice” (Goldman 206).

I believe Goldman’s text is a text on perversion and terror, a text about something to fear, a text about the criminalization of state policies. It is also a meticulously written and researched chronicle of enthralling events that offers a profound, honest analysis and a riveting read. It is an exhaustive investigation of the hidden mechanisms and maneuverings of the army, the police, and the Guatemalan president and their perverse ways of administering the *res publica*. Published as a journalistic chronicle, the genre documents that which must be placed on the stage of public discussion. We know that events like this either are buried in secret archives, classified as secrets of state pertaining to the institutions mentioned above, or are mistreated by the media at the hands of capitalist moguls and well-established corporations with sufficient power to establish their own sense of “truth.” In Guatemala, Goldman says, “the media was owned and run by conservative elites, people sympathetic to the military and to former president Arzu” (266). The chronicle, then, is a kind of testimonial genre that maintains the memory of past events. It serves not the dead but the living: so that they may understand the logic of those dead whom they remember and have borne witness. In Bishop Gerardi’s case, his death trial reveals the operative mechanisms of the Guatemalan army in charge of killing thousands of people. Moya provides samples of such testimonies:

Frases contundentes dichas por indígenas para quienes seguramente recordar los hechos que ahí relataban significaba remover sus más dolorosos recuerdos, pero también entrar a una etapa terapéutica al poder confrontar su pasado, orear a esos fantasmas sanguinarios que acechaban sus sueños, como ellos mismos reconocían en esos testimonios que parecían cápsulas concentradas de dolor y cuyas frases tenían tal sonoridad, fuerza y profundidad que yo había apuntado ya algunas de ellas en mi libreta personal. (*Insensatez* 30)

Sentences spoken by Indians for whom remembering the events they told about surely meant bringing back their most painful memories, but also meant entering the therapeutic stage of confronting their past, bringing out into the open those bloody ghosts that haunted their dreams, as they themselves admitted in those testimonies, which seemed like concentrated capsules of pain and whose sentences had so much sonority, strength, and depth that I wrote down some of them in my personal notebook.) (*Senselessness*, 18)

Bishop Gerardi was a human rights activist, and he had just presented the book *Guatemala: Never Again*, a text that was the result of the investigation carried out by ODHA under his leadership. He had undertaken this task at the same time that he organized a Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI). Moya claims that his citations come from the abovementioned text. Gerardi was invested in personifying crime, in giving the names of all the people affected by it. Such a project culminated with said book, which was formally presented in the cathedral on April 24, 1998. Gerardi was murdered two days later. The 528 pages of Goldman's text, which places us within the logic of the abject, are devoted to laying out the procedures used to obscure the criminals who participated in his assassination. The seductiveness of the text for the reader lies in its articulation of the different organizations implicated, the number of people participating in the assassination, and the unraveling of who killed the Bishop. We have seen this type of plotting in action movies, police thrillers, and horror films. I say this to remember the close association between culture, memory and citizenship. It is through suspense that the case is faithfully reproduced. In truth, the focus of the book is on a crime, an investigation, and a trial—an event that continuously unfolds in a labile narrative that underscores the commitment of the author and his solidarity with the Untouchables—so called because the name both evoked a young spirit of adventure and underscored the joyful irony of the group's ambitions. The relationship the name of the Untouchables establishes with Elliot Ness and his struggle against Al Capone is no coincidence. A rapid narrative pace feeds our desire to know what transpired. We are betting on "truth" and "justice." Perfection is achieved in the characterization of Rubén Chanax Sontay, a soldier, army informant, and witness in the trial—a character who, like Borges's Fergus Kilpatrick, is a traitor and a hero and, like his Funes the Memorious, remembers everything. He tells us the same story, always adding a bit more and making us eager to know who killed the Bishop so that "truth" and "justice" are served. Let me tell you, in conclusion, that after reading these books, I pronounce myself not against but for literature, because this text puts the power of language at the service of the citizenry to safeguard the memory of the murder of Bishop Gerardi and the crimes committed against indigenous Guatemalan people.

Epilogue

In his book *Pasado y presente: Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en la Argentina*, Hugo Vezzetti analyzes the role of the army during the so-called Dirty War in Argentina. Although he clearly states that he wishes to concern himself not with the psychopathology of army personnel (for him, as for

most social scientists and cultural critics, a psychopathological approach is a slippery one) but to a structural analysis of military organization, he touches the issue sufficiently for me to latch on to his argument.

Vezzetti's main points are that (1) a weak and degraded state is incapable of enforcing the monopoly of a normative orientation in the use of violence, (2) the entire Argentine population was responsible for what ensued, and (3) the army was the only institution with the bureaucratic capacity to plan along temporal and spatial lines. The army's organizational structure and ideological and doctrinal composition were perfectly suited to carrying out the task of exterminating "internal enemies" and ensuring "national and regional security." The army's well-honed bureaucracy was capable, through time and space, of planning and executing terrorism without taking the brunt of the responsibility. Although the scale of murder was industrial and supported by a technological-administrative apparatus, the machinery, characterized by routine, obedience to orders, respect for hierarchy, and opportunities for advancement, accounts for the normalization of the criminal behavior of its members, excusing them from any responsibility in their illicit acts and exterminating enterprise.

But there is more to Vezzetti's argument that I want to tease out. He recognizes that the Argentinean army was motivated by a desire and a political vision nourished by the representation of war. Both enabled the transition to the act of social revenge, something that exceeded all institutional and corporative reason, something that leaves us gasping miles behind. In this excess resides the psychopathology of army personnel. Something was definitely afoot, and that was the army's imaginary, a tripartite structure composed of (1) the construction of an enemy—a human being, "bare life," without the right to live and against whom everything was permitted; (2) the threat of a world war; and (3) national and hemispheric security. Testimonials provided by the victims reported that army men often experienced dramatic mood swings, transitions to brutality and sadism alongside a search for friendly relationships and even efforts to protect the victims, often displaying an omnipotent, megalomaniacal, and messianic disposition.

Although Vezzetti's structural argument is absolutely persuasive, within his wager there is a seminal dictum. He says, "En términos muy generales la criminalidad de las acciones reside fundamentalmente en el sistema terrorista o reside en las características y las motivaciones de los perpetradores" (149) (In very general terms: the criminality of actions either resides fundamentally in the terrorist system or it resides in the characteristics and motivations of the perpetrators). Actually it resides in both. Under conditions of terror, people comply and move from legal, moral, and decent behavior into iniquity—what Hannah Arendt called the "banality of evil." Eichmann was a normal man of habit and motivations, but so was Andrei Chikatilo, the famous Russian serial killer. Perversion is defined as a

transgression of the law. But chance so has it that humans transgress with much more intensity and refinement if given permission—as demonstrated in Stanley Milgram’s experiment on obedience without punishment. All that is required is a change in rationality: from bureaucratic to instrumental.

The Argentinean army, like the Guatemalan army, could not be managed by a weak and degraded state incapable of enforcing a normative orientation in the use of violence. They therefore maintained an autonomous will with respect to political power and operated with impunity. They also relied on the complete complicity of civil society. This system constructed menacing forces and abhorrent, dejected humans deprived of the right to live. Counterinsurgency was the means to defeat this evil enemy within, bypassing all legal mandates. Given these circumstances, army men are those who recoil at nothing. My point is precisely that structural circumstances coupled with an imaginary of war sustain the criminality of states and account for their necrophiliac forms of governance.

Notes

1. See Rothenberg, Foster, and Zizek (eds.), *Perversion and the Social Relation*.
2. See Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*.
3. One of the social scientists who take this discipline into account is Benjamín Ardití. See *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*.
4. See Kristeva, “The Speaking Subject Is Not Innocent” and “My Memory’s Hyperbole.”
5. Amply documented by Agamben, Foucault, Mbembe, and Mignolo.
6. See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.
7. See Calveiro, “Testimonio y memoria en el relato histórico.”

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