



Anti-subversive Repression and Dictatorship in Argentina: An Approach from Northern Patagonia

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INTRODUCTION

For a long time, it has been assumed that in the 1970s in Neuquén and surrounding areas, and in the Patagonia in general, “nothing had happened during the 1976 dictatorship”, except for some abductions or a few outbreaks of state repression. Still, nothing in comparison with what Buenos Aires had undergone during the so-called *proceso*. But this is far from the real state of affairs. Patagonia was also hit by the military dictatorship, and—notwithstanding quantitative nuances or differences in scale—repression in Patagonia had the same background logic and dynamics that it had in the rest of the country.

Patagonia is a region South of the Argentine Republic that includes five provinces (Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego), plus the Southern parts of the provinces of La Pampa and Buenos Aires. This analysis focuses on Northern Patagonia, which

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corresponds to the provinces of Neuquén and Río Negro. One of the most important cities of Northern Patagonia during the dictatorial terror was Neuquén, the capital of the province of Neuquén, 1200 kilometres away from Buenos Aires, followed by other cities of the province of Río Negro, like Cipolletti, General Roca and Cinco Saltos.

The Italian microhistorian Giovanni Levi (1991) has pointed out that certain phenomena, despite seeming fully accounted for and understood, still acquire new meanings when the scale of observation is altered. And he has noted that such procedure allows for much wider generalizations over topics that previously seemed sufficiently assessed and explained. In the last years, I have based my research on these premises, aiming to study the development of the repressive plan before and during the military dictatorship in Northern Patagonia. I therefore intend to contribute to the general panorama of studies on the state terrorism in Argentina in a more exhaustive and complex way. It is undeniable that in bigger urban centres such as Buenos Aires, La Plata, Córdoba or Tucumán the dictatorial terror was quantitatively more important; however, the studies that focus on these cities have arrived at generalizing conclusions that overlook particularities—some of which are quite substantive—proper to other regions.

The characteristics of the systematic repressive programme (*plan sistemático de represión*) implemented by the Armed Forces during the past dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983) allow us to approach the so-called *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Process of National Reorganization) not just from the point of view of the great urban centres, but from other spaces equally affected by state terrorism, such as Patagonia. In this sense, the advantage of focusing on the repression *dispositif*¹ in Northern Patagonia is (Águila 2008, 2013; Calveiro 2005,

¹My use of *dispositif* here follows the lines of Michel Foucault, signifying a heterogeneous set of discourses, institutions and buildings, legal decisions, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical and moral claims; a network of discursive and non discursive practices. “[a] species – so to speak – that is being formed and the main function of which is, at a given historical moment, to respond to an emergency” (Foucault 1984, 124). To what extent thinking about repression in terms of this conceptual framework alters our understanding of it? True, it does not do so radically, but it demands that we bear in mind that the execution of the repressive programme consisted of much more than a sum of institutions—which by the way were themselves repressive by nature. In a way it was a network, and its threads were not only these institutions—whose practices and knowledge had to be adapted to the function—but also discourses and meanings as well, a whole network of relations that, more than giving it freedom to, became part of its actions.

2006; Foucault 1984) that it provides evidence of aspects which throw more light on the dictatorship, thus making standing explanations more exhaustive than before. One of such aspects is the fact that the intensity and extent of repression were very much like those in large cities, despite the fact that Northern Patagonia was not considered by the military as one of the “hot spots”, where “subversion had developed its main potential”.² In this respect, it has been proved that there were intense intelligence activities, as well as meetings of the Informative Community (*comunidad informativa*)³ which were precious and essential for the raids in the regions; also the adaptation of police institutions as clandestine centres of detention and torture, and also the setting up of a concentration camp, which was found to have been fundamental in the overall repressive plan for the area. In this region of the country, there were also numerous abductions, worked out by previous intelligence tasks. Moreover, General Adel Edgardo Vilas was appointed the second commander of the “Security Zone” (this included Patagonia). Vilas was one of the most conspicuous repressors of the military dictatorship; one year before, he had commanded the “Operativo Independencia” in the province of Tucumán. Also, such figures as Raúl Guglielminetti⁴—who had a long repressive career so far—were destined to the area. These and other elements have provided a more thorough and complex understanding of the systematic characteristic of a repressive project that was carefully planned for the whole country, and despite its relative degrees of autonomy in Argentina, followed, as in the rest of the continent, the

²Cf. *Directiva del Consejo de Defensa 1/75* “Fight against subversion” Henceforth Directive 1/75.

³The “Informative Community” consisted of meetings of varying frequency in which representatives of all security forces (Army, Gendarmerie, provincial police, Federal Police and State Service of Intelligence—SIDE) exchanged the information that they had obtained.

⁴Raúl Guglielminetti was a fundamental piece of the repressive machinery in this region. His action illustrates the close link between the state and parastatal action of the repression *dispositif*, both before and during the dictatorship. During his stay in the region, while he worked for the Army as Civil Intelligence Staff (PCI Personal Civil de Inteligencia), in the Destacamento de Inteligencia 182 Neuquén from late December 1970 till May 1976, he played a multiplicity of roles. In all the country, he was known as a member of the Batallón de Inteligencia 601 and through his involvement in crimes against humanity in Argentina and in Latin America. Raúl Guglielminetti (or “mayor Guastavino”, as he used to be called) has now become one of the icons of the systematic repression programme in the region (Scatizza 2017).

dictators of the French School and its “theory of revolutionary war”, as well as the Doctrine of National Security. More than 30 people still disappeared (*desaparecidos*), plus more than 120 cases of abduction and torture reported before justice,⁵ in an area that the military themselves did not consider dangerous in terms of “subversion” are enough to claim that the plan of annihilation and terror had characteristics in Northern Patagonia that were similar to those in the rest of the country. Against the incorrect view that Patagonia in general was a region where the repression was less intense.

NORTHERN PATAGONIA IN THE SYSTEMATIC REPRESSION PROGRAMME

On 6th October 1975, the national government of María Estela Martínez de Perón enacted three decrees by virtue of which the Armed Forces were appointed to conduct direct intervention in internal security, the objective being to annihilate “subversion”. These were the decrees 2770, 2771 and 2772, later known as the “annihilation decrees”. The first of these stated the creation of the Council of Defence. The second submitted the staff and the means of police and penitentiaries of all provinces to the control of the Council of Defence. The third entitled the Armed Forces to carry out military and security operations that were necessary in order to annihilate the actions of subversive elements in the whole country. Days later, the Council of Defence enacted the Directive 1/75, “Fight against Subversion”, and the General Commander of the Army, Jorge Rafael Videla, enacted the secret Directive 404/75 on 28th October. In these documents, there were detailed instructions for the

⁵Even today—2018—in the city of Neuquén, trials are taking place for crimes against humanity in the region. The main trial—from which subsidiary trials have emerged—is the “Expte 8736/05, Reinhold, Oscar Lorenzo y otros s/Delitos c/la libertad y otros” in the Federal Court of Justice N° 2 Neuquén (henceforth Causa Reinhold). Some of these trials are complete, and others are standing. The main documentary corpus of my analysis is precisely this case. The trial began in 2005, based on previous juridical investigations from 1984, which were suspended by virtue of the Law 23492 called “Ley de Punto Final” in 1986. In 2005, the Supreme Court of Justice confirmed a sentence that declared this law and other “impunity laws” (such as the “Ley de Obediencia Debida”) invalid and unconstitutional. In many parts of the country, the federal courts advanced previous investigations, this time towards prosecutions on charges of “crimes against humanity” of the members responsible for the state terrorism.

execution of the annihilation plan. Also, the eighth item of the aforementioned Directive 1/75 presented a new map of the country in terms of security; it displayed a new division of the territory in which each Army corps commanded the execution of the plan. The strategy of dividing the theatre of operations into zones became thus enforced; it was one of the key elements of the repressive plan and also a legacy from the “French School” that the Argentine military imported from Paris. For the Revolutionary War Doctrine elaborated by the French Army after their defeat in the Indochina war, the division of the territory to be controlled was a main prescription, and this accounts for the measures taken by the Armed Forces in Argentina from the moment they became in charge of the “internal security”. The national territory was divided into five Defence Zones, coinciding with the four Army Corpses—1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th plus the Military Institute, and each was submitted to the respective commanders. In turn, each Zone was divided into Sub-zones and these into Areas. My analysis concentrates on the so-called Sub-zone 52, which included the province of Neuquén and most of Río Negro. It was part of Zone 5, and its headquarters were in Bahía Blanca (province of Buenos Aires). It controlled the whole of Patagonia and the Southern part of the province of Buenos Aires (Mittelbach 1987) (Fig. 3.1).

It is then evident that, from the regulatory framework that was prepared even before the 1976 *Coup d'état*, Northern Patagonia was organically included in the systematic plan of dictatorial repression. Not only in terms of territorial organization, but it was also part of the conflict hypothesis on which the Armed Forces grounded their institutional intervention. Indeed, the aforementioned Directive 404/75 stated that the main effort of the military offensive was to concentrate on the large urban centres and nearby areas along the axis Tucumán—Córdoba—Santa Fe—Rosario—Buenos Aires and its suburbs—La Plata—Bahía Blanca. These had been rated as “hot spots” by the Council of Defence in the Directive 1/75. It was also decided that the actions in the alleged fight against subversion should likewise involve control of rural areas in order to prevent the emergence of guerrilla fronts there. This included, among others, the *mountain/forested* (my italics) area of Neuquén and Río Negro. Consequently, the Andes Range became more a focus of attention than the urban centres of Neuquén and Río Negro. The reason was the constant “infiltration” of social and political Chilean militants fleeing the Pinochet dictatorship, and also the conflict hypothesis between Argentina and Chile that was generated around 1978 over the



Fig. 3.1 Security Zones, Argentina, 1975–1983

Beagle Channel. In addition to this, The *Order of Operations 5/75 (Fight against Subversion)* “Operación Comahue” stated that, so as to avoid “rural fronts”, control was to be extended to Villa La Angostura (Neuquén), El Bolsón, Bariloche (Río Negro) and the rest of the mountain/forested area. It also recommended that “when convenient, and when ordered by this Command”, operations were to be carried out “in maximum integration and coordination with elements fighting against subversion from the republic of Chile”. This was to be possible provided that “permanent and active links with military staff or elements of Chilean customs police (*carabineros*) are established” (Order of Operations 5/75, 4). For certain areas which were rated as “potentially apt”, where the subversive activity was “limited”, intense repression was decided to an extent that would be enough to discourage any initiative to articulate such activities. Additionally, this would turn these areas into “secure zones” thus “hindering their use as rest or re-organization spots for the subversive elements” (Directive 404/75, 3). One of these was the Area 521 (a subdivision of Sub-zone 52, focus of the present discussion, which included the city of Neuquén and its surrounding areas). Repression was to be more intense here, and here were the most important clandestine detention centres—such as “La Escuelita”, the Comisaría 24° Cipolletti, and the local delegation of the Federal Police—as well as the places where political prisoners were detained, such as the Unit 9 of the Federal Penitentiary Service.⁶

But the regulatory measures, or the setting up and institutionalization of repressive spaces such as the various clandestine centres of detention that remained operative through to 1978, were not the only evidence of the design of the Armed Forces to suppress any opposition political action in the area. For instance, the largest repressive operative in this period, designed towards the elimination of the PRT-ERP⁷ in the region, took place two months after the *Coup d'état*. The development of the

⁶Henceforth U9.

⁷The Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Workers Revolutionary Party) and its armed branch, the ERP Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army) was a revolutionary Marxist group. Together with Montoneros (connected to *peronismo*), they fought for control of power between late 1960s and early 1970s. Their structures were practically decimated by the time the Armed Forces assumed power in March 1976 and annihilated in the first months of the military government. (There is abundant literature about both organizations, most of it in Spanish; Mattini 1995; Gillespie 1982; Plis-Sterenbergh 2006.)

operation shows the intense intelligence work conducted in the area by the Army, months before the military takeover, with precise hypotheses about the activities of the enemy to confront. Indeed, the victims were connected with each other either directly or indirectly, and they were all abducted during one single repressive raid. This took place from the 9th to the 15th of June 1976; it included six Patagonian urban centres and had some thirty men and women victims, most of them under 25. Nine of these people are still disappeared.

A look at the first targets of the repression, from the earliest days of the dictatorship, gives similar evidence: they were all militants and political activists well known in the region—most of them from the Peronist Party (*peronistas*)—who were abducted or illegally arrested from the earliest hours of 24th March onwards.

This shows that the military never disregarded the potential and ongoing activities of political and social organizations in this area, despite the fact that it was not one of the “hot spots” characterized in their directives and regulations. In particular, their main target was the actions of the organizations connected to diverse branches of the Revolutionary Peronism (Montoneros, among others) and to Marxism–Guevarism such as PRT-ERP. The importance of the region in the overall repressive display of the dictatorial government is further illustrated by considering both the Army’s decision to set up a “concentration camp” in this Sub-zone and the intensity of the abductions in the first two years of the dictatorship. It should also be noted that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the region had become increasingly rebellious, in particular the city of Neuquén and its influence zone. Between 1968 and 1975, the political militant activity in the region was particularly intense, and it is unlikely that the military ignored this evident fact. There were *puebladas*,⁸ workers strikes and student movements. These are not the topics of this analysis, but I would still mention the popular uprisings (*puebladas*) in the cities of Cipolletti in September 1969 and General Roca in June 1972 (known respectively as the “Cipollettazo” and the “Rocazo”); the strike of the workers at the Chocón dam (“Choconazo”) between December

⁸ *Puebladas* (from “pueblo”, people in broad sense) is a term meaning a series of massive popular uprisings in different parts of the country in this period, usually led by sectors of the local bourgeoisie, supported by middle classes and popular sectors. Not necessarily of a revolutionary character but meant to preserve the statu quo, these uprisings lasted a few days or even a few weeks.

1969 and February 1970; the great student movement over the nationalization of the Universidad de Neuquén (thereafter Universidad Nacional del Comahue), which emerged in the early 1970s and extended to the beginning of the military government. These were all moments of great social unrest, witnesses of the origin and gradual consolidation of political militancy and fight for the defence of human rights as an *ethos* of this Northern Patagonian region, in particular, of the city of Neuquén and its surrounding areas.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF AN ANALYSIS FROM A DIFFERENT SCALE

As mentioned before, a change in the scale of observation has provided a more accurate account of the systematic plan of repression and also enabled to confirm or adjust current hypotheses concerning its characteristics. One of these has been dealt with: the common sense view that “nothing had happened in Patagonia during the dictatorship”. Also, it has been possible to bring to the fore one pattern of clandestine detention which was particularly specific. Such specificity had been, if not overlooked, at least minimized in comparison with the “clandestine centres of detention” (or “concentration camps”), without which it would be impossible to comprehend the logic of the repressive *dispositif*. Additionally, different degrees of relative autonomy of certain forces or police/security institutions during the repressive actions of the Armed Forces in command have been brought to light from this change of the scale, as we will show below.

Centres of Clandestine Detention

What follows are advances of a working research based on three hypotheses. First, the different centres of clandestine detention responded to different logics in the time span when they were active, and they did not function similarly in different regional spaces. Second, even in the same geographic space, these repressive ways were multiple and not uniform. Third, such functioning was dynamic, and it changed in time. I endeavour to analyse the historicity of these spaces, their changes and mutations as well as the tensions that could have taken place inside them, among the victims as well as among the perpetrators. I also intend to discuss comprehensively Pilar Calveiro’s notion of “concentrationary experience” (Calveiro 2006), which constitutes the basis of her research; a

notion that has justly become *mainstream*. In this sense, I shall reflect on the *other spaces* which articulated with the “concentration/extermination camps”. Spaces that served purposes other than those analysed by Calveiro, and thence did not function in the same way; still, without them it is impossible to understand the repressive dynamics of the dictatorship in which the “concentration camps” became iconic. To go a step further in her analysis, I think it is substantial to turn the attention to certain places that I have named “Centres of Clandestine Detention”.⁹ Focusing on North Patagonia, I shall deal specifically with the way these functioned, and how they articulated with each other, and with the only Clandestine Centre of Detention¹⁰ of the region (“La Escuelita”) and with the U9, where political prisoners were held. As will be seen, the difference between centres of clandestine detention (CDC, from the Spanish *Centros de Detención Clandestina*) and clandestine centres of detention (CCD, from the Spanish *Centros Clandestinos de Detención*) is more than a semantic distinction.

I actually intend to point out here how a different scale of observation has allowed us to distinguish between two different fashions of clandestine detention, which combined their repressive action in this period. And even if the focus is here on Northern Patagonia, the two are likely to have been put into practice in most of the country. They did not aim at the same objectives, nor did they function in the same manner. There were substantial differences between those public institutions that were turned clandestine so as to be inserted in the repressive scheme of the dictatorship (those I called here CDC), and those which were thought and built as clandestine from their origin, such as “La Escuelita”, erected in a backyard of the Battalion of Constructors Engineers 181 (*Batallón de Ingenieros de Construcciones 181*), commonly called “concentration camp”.¹¹ This is interesting because not only academic productions but also judicial sentences and documents group them all indistinctly as CCD (Clandestine Centres of Detention), or as CCDT (Clandestine Centres of Detention and Torture; in Spanish *Centros Clandestinos*

⁹Henceforth CDC.

¹⁰Henceforth CCD.

¹¹I shall insist on this idea, even though I have in mind the need to discuss and critically approach the concept of “concentration camp” for the case of Argentina, in comparative historical perspective with other historical experiences such as Nazism or Franquism. Such discussion, however, is not the topic of this article.

de Detención y Tortura), or as CCDTYE (Clandestine Centres of Detention, Torture and Extermination; in Spanish *Centros Clandestinos de Detención, Tortura y Exterminio*). This overlooks the nuances among the fashions in which each of these functioned within the systematic repression project.

Lets now take a look at some aspects of these detention places I called CDC. Unlike the so-called concentration camps, these were public places, known and identified by all the community. Therefore, they were not clandestine, as it was “La Escuelita”. The victims were taken into these places through the main doors, handcuffed and without a mask at all, so that they could see everything around. The daily routine did not seem to be altered even despite the illegal and clandestine actions that took place there. The ordinary movement of the employees did not seem to be interrupted or altered; they simply carried on with their everyday administrative tasks, even serving customers or public. Many of the members of the task groups in charge of abductions worked in such institutions, and after their liberation, the victims were able to identify them.

In this region, in particular, the towns where these centres were erected were relatively small. Not surprisingly, the repressors were often neighbours of the victims. From the moment they entered these places, the detainees and hostages were taken to an office, backyard or basement, and they were interrogated about their political activities or about people connected to some organization while they were brutally hit or tortured, without exception. Their entry was not recorded, and they were likely to remain there for a variable length of time, from a few hours to some days, when they were eventually freed, or transferred to the U9, or destined to some other centre of detention. Families invariably got the same response to their inquiries about the prisoners; it was denied that they were being held there. Still, on some exceptional occasions, it was hinted that they were there, and that they were soon to be liberated. In contrast to “La Escuelita”, which was indeed clandestine—there were rumours about it, but apart from the staff working there, no one had access to it—these other centres of clandestine detention were clearly visible to all the community. The surviving victims knew exactly where they had been detained, and sometimes who had been in charge of the interrogations and tortures. For that reason, it was easier for them to produce witness of all that. But even so, they were clandestine, terrifying and crucial for the repressive networking of the dictatorship.

In other words, the difference between CCDs and CDCs was much more than a mere question of scale, of size or of relative importance in the repressive programme. This is undeniable when comparing such places as ESMA (School of Mechanics of the Navy, in Spanish *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*), “El Olimpo”, “La Perla” and other well-known “concentration camps” with any other detention place in regions far from the large urban centres. In this sense, a close view of the specific roles of all those places, their situation and the people in charge in each one of very kind of them suggests that there was a hierarchy of these detention places. On the lowest rank were the police or military stations far from the Zone or Sub-zone Commands; these were used to hold detainees previous to their transfer to other more important centres, but they played no active or outstanding role in the dynamics of intelligence of interrogation. On the highest level were the CCD in the Zone and Sub-zone Commands of all the country (Sub-zone Commands one level beyond Zone Commands). In the middle of the pyramid were this places that I here label “centres of clandestine detention”, where contribution to the objectives of the repressive display was so decisive that it would be impossible to understand the logic of the repressive *dispositif* without consideration of the dynamics of their functioning.

It has been possible to register more than half a dozen such detention places in the Sub-zone 52, including “legal” detention institutions which were used in clandestine fashion to hold (i.e. to temporarily “disappear”) and to torture, plus other places that served as “transit”, before the victims were transferred to another CCD or CDC. It is then possible to distinguish three different types of detention centres within the repressive dynamics of the period being studied. They give evidence of the hierarchy behind the functions that they served. Police and Gendarmerie stations in which prisoners were held for a few hours, not submitted to torture or interrogation; the aforementioned centres of clandestine detention and clandestine detention centres such as “La Escuelita”. In terms of both of their relative importance as part of the systematic plan and of the characteristics of their functioning, the CCD La Escuelita was not the same as the Neuquén Delegation of the Federal Police. Nor was the latter the same as any local police station where people were held for a few hours before their transfer. In my opinion, it is necessary to pay attention to these differences.

Centres of clandestine detention in the North Patagonia were, in the province of Neuquén: police stations in Neuquén Capital (*Alcaldía*

Provincial) and in Cutral Có (Comisaría 4°); the local branch of the Federal Police (*Delegación de Policía Federal*); the Squadron 33 of National Gendarmerie in Junín de los Andes and the aforementioned prison U9. In the province of Río Negro, the police station in General Roca (*Alcaidía provincial*) and in Cipolletti (Comisaría 24°); the School of Mountain Instruction in San Carlos de Bariloche (*Escuela de Instrucción Andina*); and the Unit 5 of the Federal Penitentiary Service. From November 1975, and by virtue of the “annihilation decrees” of the previous month, the U9 also became a jail for political prisoners. In the case of the police station (Comisaría 24°) in Cipolletti, it had been used for the same purposes even before: such practices can be traced back at least to September 1975.

Some details of what went on in the Cipolletti police station may be illustrative of my hypothesis. It is relatively simple to work out a pattern of behaviour of the perpetrators and the way how this police station functioned by observing the thirty cases reported in the last years in the Federal Justice, in the standing processes for crimes against humanity. *Prima facie*, a common element is that all the inhabitants of Cipolletti and surrounding areas (in the province of Río Negro) that were abducted or arrested were temporarily held in the police station, with only one exception: one detainee who was transferred to the province of Entre Ríos, 1500 km away from this Sub-zone 52. It is true that this station was the headquarters of the Command of Sub-area 5212, which was in control of the security area, and also that the then Sub-commander of the Zone 5, Adel Vilas, declared in Court in 1987 that “it was strictly forbidden to interfere in the areas of control of others”.¹² However, many of the victims either worked, or attended school/university, or politically militated or had permanent links with people living in the city of Neuquén, merely 5 km away, which—both then and today—makes it difficult to think of Neuquén and Cipolletti as spaces so sharply differentiated. Consequently, so strict a jurisdictional division of both cities appears hard to understand. Actually, the two cities form an urban whole, though politically and administratively they are part of two different provinces; Cipolletti is in Río Negro, and Neuquén is the capital of the province of Neuquén. Moreover, numerous cases in the whole Sub-zone 52 show that the statement of Vilas was not always too strict;

¹²Cf. Inquiry statement by Adel Vilas before the Federal Camera in Bahía Blanca, 1987.

it can be hypothesized that the zeal of each Command over their respective areas could be loosened when the target to be apprehended lived or acted in a given defence zone but was detected in another zone. Another common element resulting from the analysis of documents is that agents of the police station of Cipolletti took part in all arrests and abductions, though not in autonomous fashion or without support from the Army. This is coherent with the military regulations,¹³ but it is peculiar to observe a group of policemen from that institution themselves in charge of abductions, or of interrogations and tortures. These procedures were often particularly cruel, the much more so because in many instances victims and perpetrators knew one another before. Additionally, this made later identification of repressors easier.¹⁴

Even though my analysis focuses on what happened in Northern Patagonia, I shall contend that it is possible to extend to the whole country, if not its provisional conclusions, at least its main hypotheses. This, I believe, will allow us to discuss Pilar Calveiro's notion of "concentrationary experience" from the perspective of a shift in the observation scale and a deeper analysis of the processes that were part of the same systematic plan described by the author as "one of its creatures, perhaps the most covert: the concentration camp" (Calveiro 2006, 13). It is not simply a question of refuting Calveiro's statement; I endeavour to make it more comprehensive and complex.¹⁵ For that reason, it constitutes my point of departure; starting from it, I shall pose the necessary questions to approach units of analysis that are not in Calveiro's work.

¹³Not only did the annihilation decrees determine the subordination of the police forces to the Armed Forces, but the later Directive 404/75 was even more precise in this respect; it stated that "the police means taking part in an operation shall remain under direct control of the military authority", and that "in the course of their specific missions, the police force shall execute such actions against subversion [...] that the corresponding military authority require" (14).

¹⁴Clear examples are the cases of the Pailos siblings; Juan Domingo, Julio Eduardo and Jorge Adolfo, as well as the case of Ricardo Novero, Raúl Sotto and Oscar Contreras. They were repeatedly tortured and permanently threatened with death by the police agents Antonio Camarelli, Saturnino Martínez, Miguel Angel Quiñones, among others. These policemen were finally found guilty of these crimes (cf. "Causa Castelli", Tribunal Oral Federal en lo Criminal Neuquén, September 2016).

¹⁵Santiago Garaño and Werner Pertot (2007) have contributed to this comprehensiveness and complexity. In their *Detenidos-Aparecidos. Presas y presos políticos desde Trelew a la dictadura*, they analysed the connection between prisons and clandestine centres of detention, which together shaped the "concentrationary experience".

My contention is not only that the centres of clandestine detention were part of the repressive *dispositif* that was set up in all the country, but that the latter is not conceivable without these centres.

In her work, Calveiro thoroughly describes the “concentrationary logic” that was a distinguishing feature of the dictatorship, and she argues that the method of *disappearing* people—as technology of instituted power—correlated institutionally with the concentration/extermination camp. A myriad of empirical works provide proof enough of the correctness of this claim. Still, if we hold to the contention that there was a systematic plan extending all over the territory, how does the claim hold in the case of locations in which the repressive dynamics obeyed a logic that was not exactly a “concentrationary logic”? And furthermore, how does it hold in those places where the technology of dictatorial power was imposed not so much on the concentration/extermination camps but on those centres of clandestine detention that have been analysed dealt with so far?

I do not deny the importance or the relevance of the CCD “La Escuelita” in the development of the dictatorial repression in the Sub-zone 52. Taking its characteristic features and its working dynamics into account, it corresponds to what Calveiro classes as “concentration camps”. I shall argue, though, that more attention should be paid to the role of the CDCs in the work of the annihilation power for a better understanding of the fashion in which the repressive *dispositif* was put into practice. In particular, into those places distant from the capital of the country. In such regions as Northern Patagonia, elements of the “technology of instituted power” (Calveiro *dixit*) were erected and started functioning as such few months before the military takeover and were for some time exclusive places of the repression *dispositif*. They were exclusive in the Sub-zone 52 up to the moment when “La Escuelita” started functioning in June 1976, and they continued once the latter stopped being used.

Autonomy and Systematicity

Another aspect that has resulted from the shift in observation scale concerns the relative autonomy that some of the repressive forces enjoyed in this period. More specifically, the tension between the characteristic systematicity of the repressive *dispositif* during the dictatorship—and previous years—and the different levels of autonomy of some of its repressive

agents. It is doubtlessly impossible to make generalizations including the actions of all the forces at work during the *Proceso* because each had its proper and distinctive dynamics and because they played specific roles in the different areas of the country. However, it has been possible to go deeper in the analysis of the different levels of autonomy that, when they applied, characterized certain repressive institutions.

By autonomy, I refer precisely to the degree or the levels of independence from the Armed Forces that certain police and security forces enjoyed for the organization and execution of their repressive actions, as well as those between some Army officials and their higher Commands.¹⁶ In spite of being under the operational control of the Armed Forces from October 1975 on account of their belonging to a repressive network that acted in a systematic way and followed a previously devised plan, these forces acquired a certain degree of “freedom” in the anti-subversive actions.¹⁷ This does not imply, however, absolute independence or complete freewill within the repressive dynamics. For this reason, “tension between autonomy and systematicity of the repressive *dispositif*” is in my view the appropriate approach to this issue.

Focusing on Northern Patagonia also results in bringing this tension to light. An example is the local branch of the PFA. The Federal Police played a fundamental role as the protagonist of the repression from one year before the *Coup d'état*, and it remained so along the months when state violence was more intense in the dictatorship. From early 1975, the incorporation of some key actors in the PFA marked the integration of this institution to the repressive dynamics. This is the case of some people who had long experience in intelligence tasks and had good relations with the Armed Forces, as is seen in their personal files (like Raúl Guglielminetti, see n. 4). They took part in abductions, illegal arrests, retention of detainees, interrogations and other repressive actions, and they fulfilled their tasks in two connected levels. On the one hand, they enjoyed relative autonomy through the actions of their own staff in certain cases (not only in the production of information and its analysis

¹⁶Cf. Prudencio García (1995) for further possible degrees of autonomy that the repressive forces could have acquired (or not), such as “economic autonomy”, “institutional autonomy”, “doctrinal autonomy” or others.

¹⁷Gabriela Aguila’s pioneering work (2008, 2013) concerning similar tensions in the city of Rosario and its surrounding areas constitutes a valuable contribution for the study of this aspect of the *dispositif*.

but also in the actual operations as well). On the other hand, and at the same time, they coordinated the analysis of their information and certain specific actions with that of other state and parastatal agencies. The PFA enjoyed a relative degree of autonomy from the Armed Forces even after October 1975, when the latter became in charge of the operational control of all “fight against subversion” by virtue of the annihilation decrees.¹⁸

Intelligence was regarded as priority in military regulations and directives and previous to any other operations of the “fight against subversion”. It involved a multiplicity of actions including the collection of all sorts of information concerning the enemy, their actions, their internal organization and movements. It was considered as fundamental importance because without it no operation could be carried out.¹⁹ In this respect, the intelligence work conducted by the local delegation of the PFA enjoyed a relative degree of autonomy from the Army, more precisely from the D2 (Division 2) of the Command of the VI Mountain Infantry Brigade (*Comando de Brigada de Infantería de Montaña IV*). The latter was in charge of the whole repressive programme of the Sub-zone 52. The PFA was also relatively autonomous from the Intelligence Corp 182 (*Destacamento de Inteligencia 182*), which was located in the same block as the Command and depended directly from the Battalion 601 in Buenos Aires. The central role of the Army notwithstanding this relative autonomy of the PFA in certain respects makes the whole picture more precise and highlights the need to give it proper attention. The PFA had certain autonomy to obtain information and to base its actions on such data. In this respect, it has been proved that far back in 1975, the Neuquén Delegation of the PFA had started intelligence tasks in a systematic fashion and for the fight against subversion. This was done on a double level. On the one hand, autonomously with the work of its own staff, in production as well as in the analysis of the information. On the other hand, by coordinating the analysis of information with other

¹⁸This relative independence of the PFA also existed in relation to the Judicial Power. For instance, people whom they intended to arrest or to interrogate for some reason were falsely accused of storing and using drugs, or they were unjustly incorporated in standing legal processes for drug-related crime (Scatizza 2017).

¹⁹Directive of the General Commander of the Army N° 404/75, “Fight against Subversion”; Directive of the Counsel of Defence N° 1/75 “Fight against Subversion”; Regulation RC-16-5-“Unit of Intelligence” (1973).

agencies within the so-called informative community. The production of information concerning “subversion” was so substantial that the delegation had a “Technical Office” especially devoted to that kind of task, with specially trained personnel.²⁰

Summing up, my claim is that the tension between autonomy and systematicity that was evident between the PFA and the Armed Forces adds complexity to the overall picture of the repressive *dispositif* in all the country. Even if it has been possible to prove all that has been said here about the eventually “independent” work of the PFA, such degree of independence has not been evidenced in the case of other police and security forces in the region. At least not up to the present. Proof did appear in other Defence Zones where the police force seems to have displayed their repressive activities with considerable autonomy from the Armed Forces, not only in the actions themselves but also in the planning as well. An instance of this is the case of the Chief of the Province of Buenos Aires Police, Ramón Camps. “... [u]nder his direction the so called “Círculo Camps” was established, made up of more than 20 clandestine centres of detention in nine municipalities of the outskirts of Buenos Aires and in La Plata” (Águila 2013, 113). A similar instance is that of the commander of Gendarmerie (retired) Agustín Feced; he was in charge of the provincial police, from which he created an efficient task force and carried out intelligence work that was indispensable to the realization of the repressive activities in the province of Santa Fe (Águila 2008).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By stressing the use of different observation scales in Northern Patagonia during the dictatorship, it has been my intention to pay attention to nuances and meanings that make standing accounts of the dictatorship more complex and exhaustive. Most of the available studies of this period have focused on the large urban centres.

One of the conclusions resulting from the present research is that the repressive *dispositif* also functioned in the region, and that despite the different quantitative aspects, the fashion in which it was carried out was the same in Northern Patagonia as in the rest of the country. This

²⁰Fiscal request of Trial in the “Causa Reinhold”, 2011.

reinforces evidence of the existence of an extermination project that was elaborated to be instantiated in all the national territory.

Another conclusion points at the relevance of distinguishing between diverse ways of clandestine detention, and of throwing light on the way different spaces of detention, torture and (in certain cases) death and/or disappearance, the CCDs, were connected to one another. It was shown that in certain regional spaces such as the Sub-zone 52, there were institutions characterized not just by their clandestine character but by the clandestine way of detention and retention in public places of detainees after abduction; these are the “centres of clandestine detention” (CDCs).²¹ The peculiar dynamics of such centres make it necessary to count on more complex notions than Pilar Calveiro’s “concentrationary logic”.

Finally, this shift in the observation scale has allowed us to distinguish the relative degrees of autonomy of certain repressive forces with respect of the Armed Forces, which had devised and commanded the extermination plan. These different levels of “freedom” do not contradict the systematicity of the plan, but contrariwise they reveal its actual power. This power permitted the enjoyment of different degrees of autonomy and action by certain repressive forces and agencies displayed all along this period.

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²¹I thank my colleague Fernando Lizarraga for an illuminating discussion on this issue.

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