

Memories and Post-Conflict:  
Latin American Migrants in Australia



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Natalie Estay Valenzuela (cover design)

### *Acknowledgement of Country*

*This zine was created on the unceded sovereign lands of the Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nation and the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation. We acknowledge the migration of Latin American people to Australia is embedded in settler colonialism and extend our respects to Elders, past, present and future.*

## **Editorial**

By Laura Rodriguez Castro,  
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LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA SPANS OVER FIVE DECADES. Despite a growing and celebrated Latin American diaspora in Australia, little is known about the difficult histories, desires and struggles that have shaped those who fled their countries. These stories remain largely untold in public spaces of our multicultural history and in understandings of Latin America in Australia. This zine is part of a larger research project that seeks to understand how difficult memories are felt, lived, remembered, forgotten; shaping past and present struggles for justice and belonging. It focuses on those memories that post-conflict migrants chose to remember and share, while also recognising the right to silence for healing and dealing with trauma. The memories narrated here emerged through dialogues that centred sensory and material encounters with images, objects, or places, which sought to transcend fixed ideas of borders and nation-states. They reveal our deeply entangled translocal difficult histories and our shared desires for belonging, joy, care, healing and social justice that are rooted in difference.

As a Colombian migrant who grew up in the context one of Latin America's most long-lasting internal armed conflicts – witnessing and participating in the continuing struggles (*luchas*) and 'living on' (*pervivencia*) of our communities – I feel deeply honoured and moved by the stories people chose to share with me over the course of this research project. It is my hope that this type of remembering that is politically grounded and beyond borders will lead to more dialogues, art, and actions about our shared and intergenerational responsibilities to build more socially just worlds.





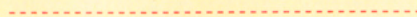
***On the project: 'Fostering South-South dialogues on difficult memories between Australia and Latin America'***


The aim of this project is to understand how people from the Latin American diaspora in Australia, who have had experiences of conflict, dictatorships, war and/or violence, construct, interpret and contribute to understandings of difficult histories, justice and belonging. This is a pilot study that aims to address a significant oversight in knowledge of the legacies of post-conflict and post-war experiences of the Latin American diaspora in Australia.

This zine contains excerpts from dialogues undertaken with 15 people through in-depth life story interviews in 2021 and early 2022 on zoom (during the covid-19 lockdowns) and face-to-face. The participants self-identified as having migrated due to conflict, war, violence, dictatorships from Latin America to Australia. This included people from Guatemala, Colombia, El Salvador, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. Some participants chose to remain anonymous, while others to be identifiable.

More information and outputs from the project can be found here: <https://southsouthdialogues.wordpress.com/>

This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Deakin University, Melbourne (2021-175).






## On the role of silence

On this page we take a moment to *respect the need for silence*. The ambivalence and contradictions of silence are an integral part of remembering. For many, silence is needed to avoid reliving traumatic experiences and/or for living on. Silence does not need to be absolute; it is layered through time and space. Silence in certain spaces points to the importance of deeply reflecting on the purpose of remembering (and forgetting) and how stories are recounted, narrated, and shared. In its ambivalence, we also acknowledge that silencing can be violent. In conflict and dictatorial contexts, silencing became a tactic of oppression that continued over time and hindered justice and reparation. Ultimately, it is up to those with lived experiences to choose how and where to remember and/or to remain silent.

**Reveka from Venezuela expresses the dynamics of remembering and forgetting in our dialogues:**


*When I am talking about «memories that I want to forget», it definitely has a negative representation. Like something that you do not want to remember, but for me, I do not really want to forget them, because they are part of something that happened, that I lived through, and I want them to remain there. I do not want them to hurt or maybe that they hurt in a different way... When I say I want to forget them, it's like that reaction: Why do you want to forget them?*



## A Brief Context

Since the 1960s, the Latin American region has seen significant socio-political conflicts including civil wars in Guatemala (1960-1996), El Salvador (1979-1992) and Colombia (1960-2016), right-wing dictatorships in Argentina (1976-1983), Chile (1973-1990), and Uruguay (1973-1985), and the more recent and continuing left-wing authoritarian regime in Venezuela (1999). These conflicts led many people to flee their homeland countries via humanitarian programs or other forms of migration. As a destination country for this emigration, Australia received at least one significant 'migration wave' of post-conflict Latin American migrants (from Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), in the 1970s and 80s with humanitarian and family reunion programs, as well as a more recent smaller intake of people as refugees from Central and South America including from Venezuela. The first group of Latin American post-conflict migrants arrived in Australia in the context of the end of the White Australia Policy and the beginning of a range of multicultural policies introduced by the Whitlam government in 1973. Thus, those who arrived in Australia's 'multicultural era', also had to navigate the legacies of the difficult histories of the colonial White Australia Policy which, while officially ended, continued to affect life in Australia. Many Latin American migrants and refugees who arrived between 1960s and 1980s, for instance, faced racial, linguistic and workplace discrimination, placing limits on their social and working lives. Many experienced down-skilling; having to work in factories to support their families despite established professional careers and qualifications.



In the following pages, a brief text explaining each of the dictatorial regimes and/or conflicts is introduced to give context to the stories that follow. Although, not comprehensive, these contexts seek to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of the political histories of the Latin American region, which continue to shape its present.



## GUATEMALAN CIVIL WAR (1960s - 1990s)

The Guatemalan Civil War grows from the Cold War ideological and political climate. In the mid-1950s a US backed coup removed the democratically elected Árbenz Government, which was set to deliver agrarian reforms for the country's rural and mainly Indigenous Mayan farmers and labourers. This event marks the beginning of deep socio-political, economic, and geographic divides that escalate into a 36 year-long Civil War, beginning in 1960 and ending with UN mediated peace accords in 1996.

During the conflict, successive Military led or backed state government regimes and their forces – including police, paramilitary, and civilian groups – combat leftist guerrilla groups (later forming the UNRG) and rural Mayan communities and organisations. The conflict is marked by well-documented incidences of state violence against guerrillas and civilians. State violence intensifies during the Arana Government in the early 1970s and then the Montt military dictatorship of the early 1980s, which included extra-judicial executions, abductions, torture, mutilations, and large-scale massacres, constituting genocide. Of the over 200,000 people killed during the conflict, most died in 1982 when over 18,000 state killings occurred.




Angel Calderón, San Pedro de Sacatepéquez,  
San Marcos, Guatemala




It reminds me because in front of my house ... our yard was a football field ... On one occasion when I was there ... there was a raid and they captured lots of people, I think mostly they would capture Indigenous people for military service. They would recruit them to take them to the conflict zones. So, this painting reminds me of that ... of the villages in Guatemala that were carted away, particularly in Quiché. There were almost more than 400 villages destroyed ... And the curious thing is that "After the Blood Letting", the title of this painting, life carries on, life continues...Even down to the colours in this painting, what you see there, are like small houses ... this reminds me of what happened to many of the communities that disappeared. And the interesting thing is ... it is years of conflict, but you still have hope that things will change.





One thing that impacted me a lot... was the day we left Guatemala with my wife and two children. We used to do tremendous social work at the primary school... Before leaving the house and catching the bus that would take us to the border between Guatemala and Mexico ... we had to go and farewell my children's' ex-school friends. The impact this had on us, because all the children were gathered with their teachers awaiting us, all sad, of course, because it was a difficult moment, having spent so many years helping one another... there everything was related [to the idea] of whether you were a revolutionary or a communist, and the parents knew all this...

... It was a very tender and lamentable farewell, because no one, no one, no one wants to leave the soil where we were born... there are those who leave in a normal way because they go and that's good, but our situation was quite grave... since we were known to a whole circle of people, it hurts a lot, a lot, a lot.



Ovidio Orellana, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala



I remember that obviously in our countries when you hear of Australia, which is so far, everyone thinks that it is all a desert and that kangaroos walk around in the houses... We even wondered, do kangaroos attack? ... In this photo, obviously we are touching the kangaroo ... I was there at a distance saying if it eats [humans], let it eat them ...

That's why I like this photo, because it was in those times that we began to get to know kangaroos and all that transition of arriving to Australia, of learning about Australian fauna, and Australian culture, the photo brings all those memories of that change we experienced.

Wacol Migrant Hostel, Brisbane, Queensland

## **SALVADOREAN CIVIL WAR (1970s-1990s)**

The Civil War in El Salvador begins in 1980 and ends almost twelve years later with parties signing the El Salvador Peace Agreement in Chapultepec, Mexico on the 16 January 1992.

The unrest starts a decade earlier, in the 1970s, when profoundly unequal structures of Salvadorean society are challenged by an increasingly active field of leftist groups and human rights defenders. The situation intensifies when in 1979 a Sandinista Revolution overthrows the conservative government of Carlos Humberto Romero and embarks on a suite of reforms targeted at the more equitable national distribution of land and wealth, as well as human rights guarantees. The reforms are violently resisted by radical leftist groups with a series of attacks on media outlets, and military targets, and by militarized ultra-right groups representing oligarchs who carry out a series of high-profile assassinations and mobilise Death Squads. The government is destabilised and the ultra-right take control, while five of the largest leftist guerrilla groups form a functional insurgent alliance, the FMLN.

During the conflict, more than 75,000 Salvadorians were killed. Indiscriminate state-sponsored killing of civilians is worse in remote regions of the country, where whole villages suspected of FMLN allegiance are targeted. The conflict produces significant forced displacement, as Salvadoreans seek safety. By 1984 alone, more than 20 per cent of the country's population is internally and externally displaced.

When I went to process the paperwork...the one in charge of the [immigration] office, who was also Australian, told me "I need a photo of the family" and so I came back and then went to a studio and we had a family photo taken, standing ... So when I arrived back at the office, she said "did you bring the photos?" and I replied "yes" ... and she says "ah no but we can't use this, we need a photo of each of the family members for the visas"... so we went once more to take photos of each one of us and so I kept this photo... to remind us of the last day that we were in the country...

San Salvador, Salvador

Here migration is a difficult process and when you are here you realise that you have lost a lot and some of us forget why we made this sacrifice... so in those difficult moments I would look at the photo of the family to remind me why I was here facing this country. Why I was here wanting build what I had already built in El Salvador. I had a purpose, and it was my family.

Wilfredo Zelada, Brisbane, Australia



I remember that in my family we walked and then a bus took us to the airport, I remember that in one line was my grandmother, aunt Miriam, aunt Gloria, aunt Ana, my cousins... and we began to hug and farewell each other. It was as if no one spoke, I only saw the people's tears welling up, they said "well, we are here if one day you want to return, here are your homes"...

... And I remember that we were on our way to the airport, and I could see the beautiful mountains and everything green, and I saw the coffee plantations because coffee and sugarcane are principal exports of Salvador, I remember seeing the sugarcane plantations, which are exactly the same in North Queensland... And I began to say goodbye. And I thought, perhaps this will be the last landscape that I'll see of my country? ...

And I remember looking through the window as the airplane was getting further away, and I saw the mountains and the green, the farms... then the ocean...and I felt a horrible sensation in my stomach, not pain, but an emptiness... and I was sad, and angry, I felt very angry, thinking because of this war we have to leave... I felt something like fear of the future, wondering what would await me on the other side of the world, I would say, I can't speak English and I don't like English...

Adela Brent, Santa Ana y San Salvador, El Salvador





## COLOMBIAN ARMED CONFLICT (1960s-2000s)

Colombia's contemporary internal armed conflict, involving military, crime syndicates, paramilitary, state, business, international and guerrilla actors, has lasted over five decades (from 1964). The dispute for land has been a central axis of the conflict, which has resulted in the concentration of property in the hands of large landowners, the militarisation of the national territory, systemic violence, dispossession and forced displacement. This long-lasting armed conflict has left more than 9 million officially recognised victims and has caused the forced displacement of more than 8 million people.

During the late 1980s to 2000s confrontations between leftist guerrillas such as the FARC-EP and ELN, paramilitary groups and the military exacerbate due to drug trafficking and state-sponsored violence. For instance, between 1989 and 1993 Medellín becomes an epicentre of drug-related violence due to the presence of the Medellín Cartel with at least 15,000 deaths reported in the city during this time. The targeting, prosecution and murder of union and social leaders, and human rights defenders also become a tactic of war.

In November 2016, the Colombian government signs a historical Peace Accord with the FARC-EP bringing a symbolic end to the conflict, which then reconfigures. Today, violence continues with more than 900 social leaders massacred since day one of the Accord.

There was a moment as a child, I was probably 12 years old... I was riding a bus and I saw an airplane and said, "one of these days, I am going to have to get on one of those planes and leave here, I don't know where to". Because I was so tired of having to carry all of this... That is a moment I remember vividly, in which I made the decision and from that moment on I planned to not live my adulthood in Colombia, my mind was made up.

Medellín, Colombia



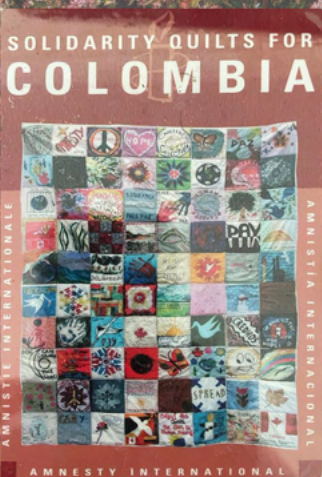
It is a place where I am surrounded by nature, the community where I live is absolutely beautiful, calm and for the first time in my life I've experienced peace. I have felt as though I am living, that I am no longer in that survival mode, where you are being pursued and they can grab you at any moment... instead for the first time I feel completely calm, free.

Queensland, Australia

The way in which they began to hinder the organising of the Central [Central Unitaria de Trabajadores: Headquarters of United Workers] was through assassinations, disappearances, threats, displacement. If a union was to be established in X place, they would remove the leaders who intended to establish it. This wasn't being reported. Almost ten years after the CUT was established, there was no national reporting system, nor international, there was no organised information on these types of crime. In 1997 I made that my mission and sought international cooperation.

There were very grave consequences. A year after we began this work, they assassinated Jorge Ortega García, vice president. They assassinated him in Bogotá the 20 of October 1998... He was but a young person, the same as me, we were very young unionists.

Jesus Antonio Gonzalez Luna, Bogotá, Colombia







For me, learning about the problems in Argentina, on top of all Chile's problems, getting to know the lives of the Mapuche, has certainly been a transcendental form of education... So, you really learn about their struggles and that of the peasantry and ethnic groups against multinationals so that these don't destroy the planet with the extractivism that today is gaining so much power ... So, this work with Latin Americans but also with Australians that participate and meet with us, shapes you, it makes you bigger each time, that's for sure. And for me, it gives me more of a reason about the fact that I've risked my life, but that what I have done was really worth it.

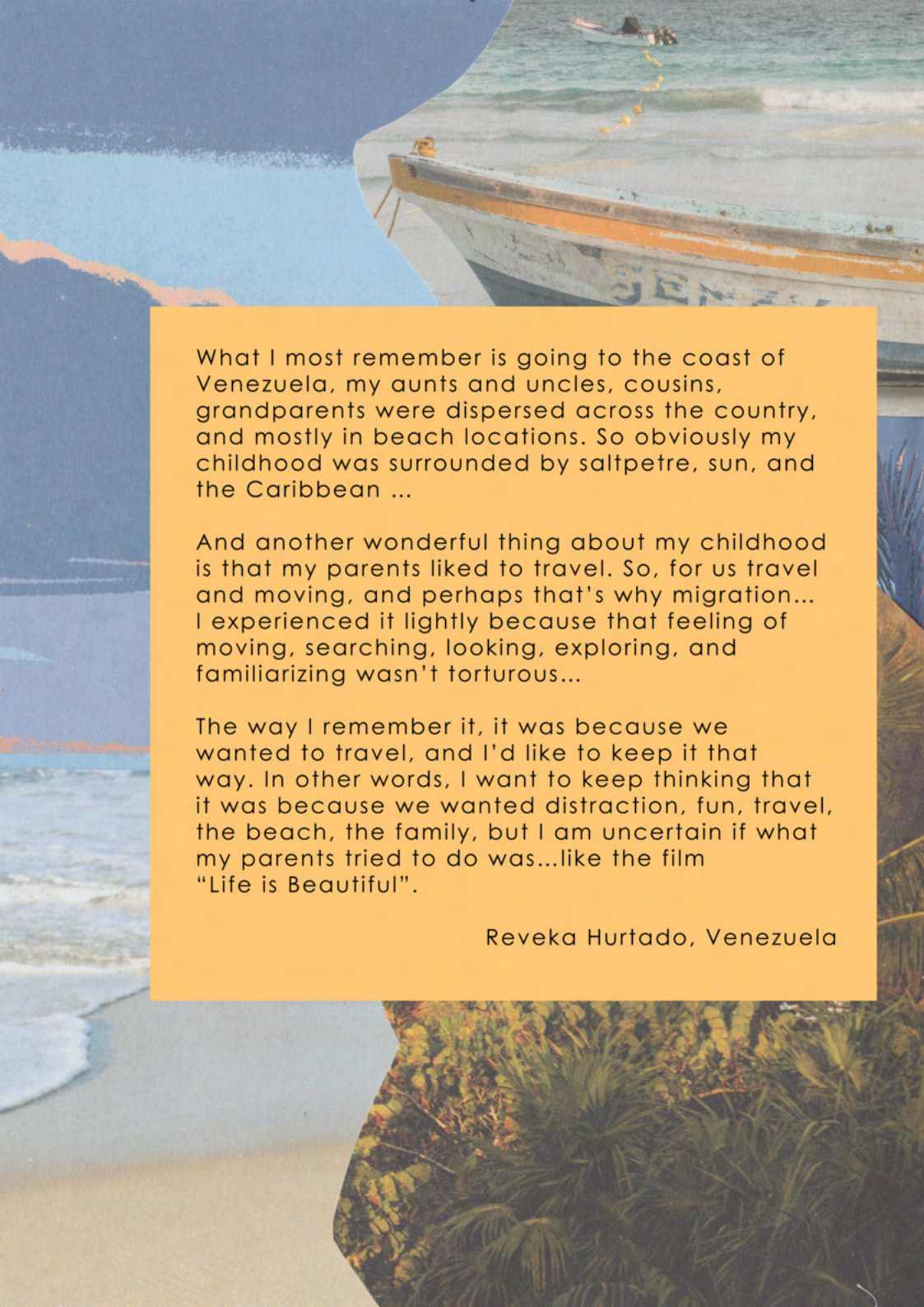
Jesus Antonio Gonzalez Luna . Melbourne, Australia



## VENEZUELAN BOLIVARIAN REGIME (from 1998)

In 1998 Hugo Chavez is elected President of Venezuela, which is a victory for the leftist military-civilian coalition of Bolivarianos. Chavez's Venezuelan Bolivarianism is a populist and nationalist expression of anti-capitalism and anti-neoliberalism; emerging from the clandestine "Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200" (MBR 200) that he founded in 1983. Aside from a brief interval, Chavez will govern Venezuela in four successive governments until his illness in 2012, and death in 2013. "La Era Chavista" is characterized by radical economic and social reforms, including the nationalization of major industries with increasing authoritarianism and the dismantling of oppositional politics. Initial optimism and social equity gains, give way to economic mismanagement, corruption, and elitism as well as international sanctions and isolation. By 2010, decreasing oil production and prices, hyperinflation and food, goods, medicine shortages escalate into a humanitarian crisis.

Shortly after Chavez's death the Vice-President and Chancellor Nicolas Maduro is elected President by a slim and contested margin. Consequently, the new presidency is entangled in a crisis of legitimacy and responds by instituting more forceful and violent means of suppressing social protest movements and oppositional politics in the country. Among the violence and unrest, all aspects of the humanitarian crisis worsen and from 2017 onwards large numbers of Venezuelan are forced to flee to neighbouring countries and further. As of 2021, there are 5.9 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide, though the majority of these are settled in Latin American and Caribbean countries.

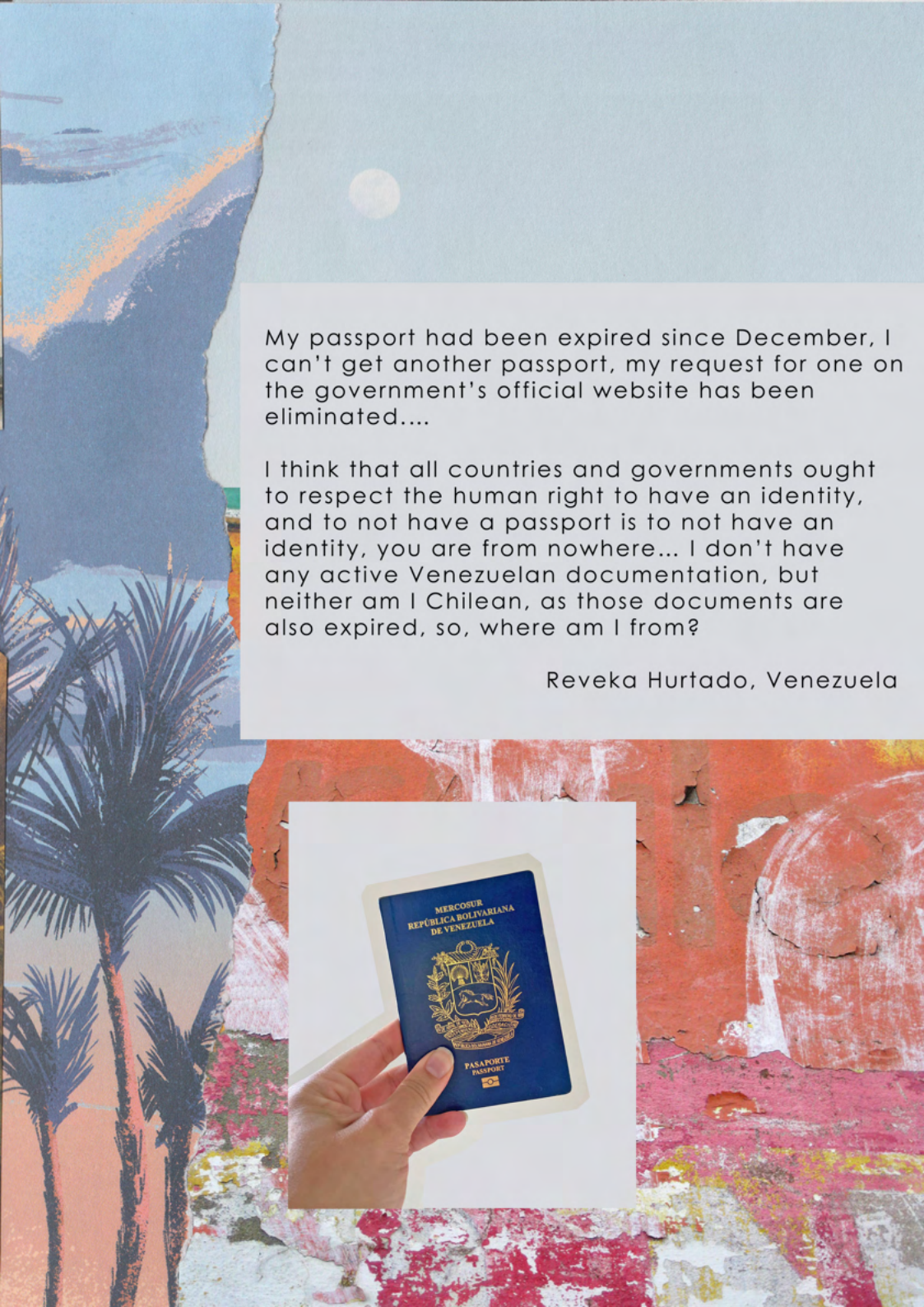


What I most remember is going to the coast of Venezuela, my aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents were dispersed across the country, and mostly in beach locations. So obviously my childhood was surrounded by saltpetre, sun, and the Caribbean ...

And another wonderful thing about my childhood is that my parents liked to travel. So, for us travel and moving, and perhaps that's why migration... I experienced it lightly because that feeling of moving, searching, looking, exploring, and familiarizing wasn't torturous...

The way I remember it, it was because we wanted to travel, and I'd like to keep it that way. In other words, I want to keep thinking that it was because we wanted distraction, fun, travel, the beach, the family, but I am uncertain if what my parents tried to do was...like the film "Life is Beautiful".

Reveka Hurtado, Venezuela



My passport had been expired since December, I can't get another passport, my request for one on the government's official website has been eliminated....

I think that all countries and governments ought to respect the human right to have an identity, and to not have a passport is to not have an identity, you are from nowhere... I don't have any active Venezuelan documentation, but neither am I Chilean, as those documents are also expired, so, where am I from?

Reveka Hurtado, Venezuela



## CHILEAN PINOCHET DICTATORSHIP (1970s-1990s)

The night of the 11 of September 1973, a Military Junta overthrows the constitutional socialist government of Salvador Allende, installing the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, which would rule Chile for 17 years until 1990. The coup was backed by powerful conservative coalitions nationally and internationally, including the US, acting out an anti-Marxist agenda for Latin America.

The Pinochet military regime sought to eradicate "the Marxist cancer" from all areas of life in the nation and presided over the neoliberalisation of the national economy; a mandate that enjoyed significant support among sectors of a polarized Chilean society. The regime criminalized any form of leftist opposition ushering in an era of brutal state terrorism. During the regime, 40,018 Chileans experience serious human rights abuses, including forced abductions, imprisonments, sexual abuse, and torture, and 3,065 were victims of extrajudicial killings or state-orchestrated disappearances. A further 200,000 Chileans were exiled; some forcibly expelled, others seeking refuge.

In 1998 Pinochet was arrested in London charged with crimes against humanity but died before being judged. In Chile today, victims' families and human rights groups still pursue justice for the state's crimes against their loved ones and fellow citizens.

# AL PASO

I never received much education, politically, I was just an activist, I was someone who could come up with slogans and encourage others... I am not an intellectual... I went into politics, not just because of intellectual conviction or the books I was reading at home, but also because of having lived experiences ... And I know many people who had completely different experiences but arrive at the same conclusions through other pathways... and in my case it was that...it helped me to understand that I was part of something bigger.

Gonzalo Miranda,  
Santiago, Chile



At the airport the day we were coming... someone must have gifted us a pair of tracksuits, we called them *buzos*, which we thought were comfortable for travel. I had never been on an airplane, I had never travelled anywhere... for some strange reason we flew with Air Canada that took us to Toronto... arriving at Toronto in the terrible cold, then from Toronto, the same day arriving at Honolulu which was, so humid, tropical heat... it was like a 24-hour flight through all the climates.

# LUCHA Y ORGANIZACION

Well, if you lived within the law imposed by the dictatorship there was no problem, but to organise was complicated. That is to say, to organise publicly, or organise activities or actions in the street was very complicated... but we would do it, and we achieved it safely without government monitoring...

You learn to detect if you are being followed, you learn to detect how to protect yourself from the security apparatus. For example, we would listen to Silvio Rodríguez hidden in drums, so that our neighbours wouldn't hear... So that's how we came to know Silvio Rodríguez with some friends. We would fit ourselves into those large oil drums...to listen to music, because headphones were too expensive.

Santiago, Chile





She [sister] was about 8 or 9 years old and saw that they were going to shoot me, they did all that so that I would say where the others were, where the guns were and all that, and surely, I had a tenant who was also a person in the organisation, and he unfortunately had the bad idea of hiding the guns in the back... So the police... well, entered with 20 guys, all with rifles or machine guns, etc., armed to the teeth... So my sister and I left that house...

Since late in 1983, I could not return to that house, never again. Until before the trip [to Australia], I went for a couple of hours to collect the few things I could take.

Santiago, Chile







## **ARGENTINIAN DICTATORSHIP (1970s-1980s)**

In late March of 1976, a Military Junta headed by General Jorge R. Videla overthrows the government of Isabel Perón and will rule Argentina until it steps down following the Falklands War in 1983. The coup comes after more than twenty years of intermittent conservative military interventions into Argentine politics with a concomitant militarization of its Peronist opposition groups (the most well-known are Los Montoneros and the ERP). The Junta launches a 'Dirty War' against these and the "subversion" more generally – anyone who thought or acted differently to them. What the Junta refer to as the "Dirty War" entailed the institutionalization of a cruel apparatus of state terror against its citizens, supported by the US State and its intelligence agencies. This included clandestine detention and torture centres across the country, and acts of kidnappings, extrajudicial killings, harassment, rape, and torture.


Reports suggest that close to 30,000 citizens were disappeared during the Dictatorship, most at risk were students, professors, journalists, people involved in labour movements and human rights. As of 2017, 2,979 people had been tried for their role in the dictatorship, with more cases pending.

I brought the most hateful thing I have. This is called cedula de identidad. I hate this object but it also breaks my heart because look at that photo. I am 12. At 12, you have to get that, that is your ID. You cannot go anywhere, not even to school without an ID... Now, if you lost that you were dead.

We lived through toque de queda the whole time, from younger than that [12] until I left Argentina the first time at 19...The police and the army have the power to stop you at any point and ask for this. If you did not have that you'd automatically go inside [detained]. And if you have it you'd automatically go inside too because they did not have computer. They would take you into the night to find out if this was true and this was who you say you were.

Rosario, Argentina





On the very hard days, I used to walk on the park with [daughter] and always concentrate on this flower and on that flower, and on the shape of that leaf and on that little bird, and the sound of that bird. When I couldn't come up with any happy things, in the black days, when I couldn't come up with happy memories or happy songs, I would always go for the tiny. You always go with the small. And I am also a big believer that you fake it until it is real, until you make it. So, if I had a very very bad day, or worry about money I would start showing [my daughter], a tiny little flower. You know in the middle of winter it would just be a tiny little flower so I would concentrate on that or even the grass. I just wanted [daughter] to have a positive outlook...

Melbourne, Australia

## **URUGUAYAN DICTATORSHIP (1970s-1980s)**

At dawn on the 27 June 1973 a group of generals, colonels and the chief of police enter the Legislative Palace in Montevideo and begin to dismantle the mechanisms of legislative democratic governance. They had been invited by the then elected President Juan María Bordaberry, following a year of instability and violence in the country marked by the attempted suppression of leftist political coalitions (as well as the urban guerrilla, MLN-T).

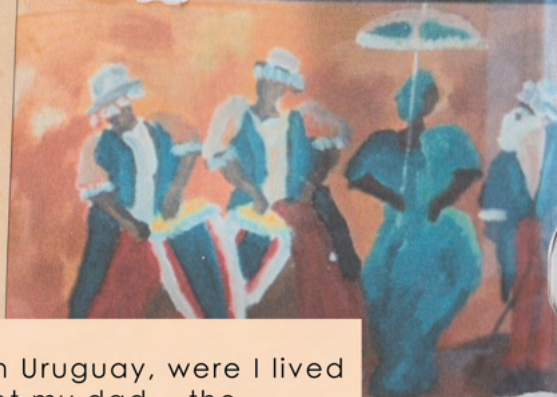
The Military Dictatorship, with Bordaberry as the figurehead, rules for twelve years until 1985. The dictatorship embarks on the political oppression of civilians; characterized by mass incarceration of opponents to the regime. During the regime, Uruguay will report the highest number per capita of political prisoners in the world. There are also documented accounts of state violence and human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and abductions. The dictatorship produces significant Uruguayan emigration, with over 14 per cent of the population leaving the country during its twelve-year rule.

Montevideo, Uruguay

I think for me, what is gratifying now is life, um because, in the end, we always lived it in a special way because of what I went through, and always thankful that I am now 69 years old. I never thought I would reach 60. I always thought, also I had recurring dreams, normal given the situation one is living, of running in the dark and without an escape climbing a wire fence and being shot to death... I had that recurring dream for years. So, for me the fact... of those moments of living life, I don't know, all those things... sharing things and with friends, which is what we try to do, right? To live life as normal as possible...



Elbio Carlos Baldovino, Melbourne, Australia



This is the market at the port in Uruguay, where I lived with my family, I used to go get my dad... the paintings of the Candombe families, I was raised in this cultural space. These works were given to my people, during the dictatorship the children of political prisoners were unable to work because no one would risk employing them, so they became artists... And I brought them with me with lots, lots of affection... They accompanied me throughout my entire time in Parliament [Australian] why? Because they were a point of conversational reference when the delegations would come in absolutely every day and every week, scores of them, they would ask me what these works signified and it would give me the opportunity to explain first who I was, frankly, the Uruguayan Australian who came from this country...

Telmo Languiller, Mercado del Puerto, Montevideo, Uruguay



I resented having to migrate, but beyond that I understood the reasons. My father always told us, "I prefer to be... a coward who is alive than a martyr who is dead". He knew that if we would have stayed. I mean things were getting worse and worse, and well, the dictatorship had been established – the violation of human rights, the missing people. So I was aware that there weren't options, we had to leave, but it took a toll on me.

I found refuge in the hostel... it was our little world... and we found other Uruguayans, Argentinians, children our age... we created our own little world....

Patricia Papsis, Montevideo, Uruguay



Midway Migrant Centre, Maribyrnong, Victoria,  
Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia.  
NAA: A12111, 2/1973/22A/44



## WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY (1901)

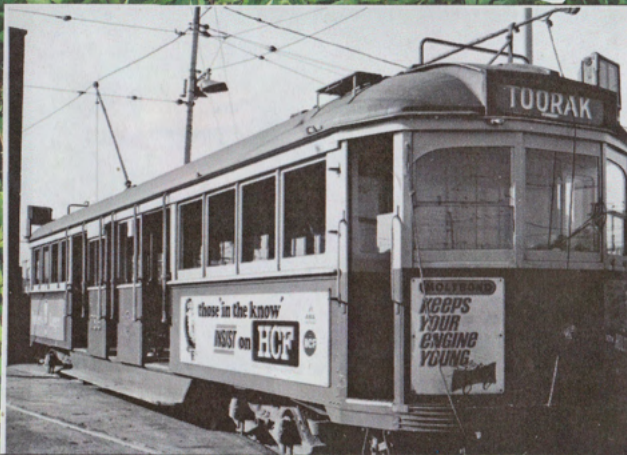
The "White Australia Policy" refers to Australia's Immigration Restriction Act, governing immigration to Australia from 1901 to 1958. The Act was a vital instrument of the colonial project: designed to replenish the white British settler population and the longevity of the settler nation. It resolved a tension between the new colonial nation's increasing need for labour and social immigration and its policymakers' racialised anxieties about protecting the Anglo-Saxon and Judeo-Christian character of the nation against large-scale immigration from the Asia Pacific and Southern Europe.

The Act was an outgrowth of racialised understandings of migrant integration, wherein non-White and non-English speaking populations were understood as incapable of "successfully assimilating". It was implemented differently by successive Australian Governments, yet generally allowed free passage to "British" immigrants, while subjecting all other immigrants to ad hoc restrictions. With economic pressures Australia eventually accepted an increasingly diverse pool of immigrants, first from Europe, and later from other regions. From the 1960s this more multiethnic society forced a rethink of earlier assimilationism. Eventually giving way to the multicultural model of migrant integration in the 1970s.



One day my little brother and I were on the tram. My little brother was tall and skinny... in those times you would buy the ticket. So, I was speaking with my little brother in Spanish and the conductor stopped and said, "Stop that gibberish!" ... my brother, little man, no, he shrunk into the corner. And I looked at the conductor, I had the ticket, I handed it to him like this, and said: "I paid!" A little later when we got off the tram my brother told me: "No, no you can't do that. And he is the driver". I told him: "and what do I care? Don't be like that". Um well, it was different, it was difficult.

Melbourne, Australia



Victorian Tram 1969, Wikimedia Commons.

Miss England, well known in Myer in those times, said to me this is not for you, you are on another level, you have to do something... this would be around Easter of 1965-66... and it was as if she was reading me... I think Miss England did not know me much. Just a couple of conversations and she said, "this is not for you, you work well, but this is not for you. You have better things to do". And I needed that confirmation.



City of Melbourne and Heritage Collection



## References

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