



PRESERVING MEMORY: MILITARY DICTATORSHIP & ATROCITIES IN ARGENTINA

CHRISTOPHER TUCKWOOD | AUG 2011

A few weeks ago, I had the great experience of attending a conference of the International Association of Genocide Scholars in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This was an excellent opportunity to meet and connect with a lot of the leading thinkers addressing the problem of genocide, and I will be sure to write another post on the outcomes of the conference itself soon. Right now, though, I want to reflect on an experience that we had before the conference officially started.

Those of us fortunate enough to arrive a couple of days early were invited to participate in an excellent tour of two key sites from Argentina's recent history. These were two prisons, Olimpo and the Navy Petty-Officers School of Mechanics (known by its Spanish acronym, ESMA), which stand today as living reminders of the nature of state terror. These detention, torture, and killing centres in the capital represent the many more established throughout the country during what is known as the Dirty War. As a time of harsh military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s during which many opponents of the regime "disappeared" and are still unaccounted for, this period is a defining feature of recent Argentine history.

Estimates vary, but somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 people are thought to have been killed by the government, many of their bodies never being found. The types of atrocities carried out during the Dirty War share some parallels with those often witnessed during genocide. Perhaps the greatest similarity is in the overt use of violence and fear in order to destroy social bonds and control a population for political purposes. The military rulers of Argentina sought to destroy what they saw as a communist threat to national security by killing activists in such a way that other citizens - both sympathizers and neutral bystanders alike - would be frightened into submission. The establishment of Olimpo was an important milestone in this effort because it was the first place that dissidents were not merely imprisoned but also tortured and murdered. It also represented a shift in policy from persecuting just the opposition leadership to people at all levels of society.

Olimpo was a temporary detention centre that only operated for six months but despite this relatively short period of operation, an estimated five hundred people were abducted and suffered there.

INSIDE

RESEARCH (1-3)

- NEW Report on the situation in Kenya
- Research Team Receives ThreatWiki Training

TECHNOLOGY (4)

- ThreatWiki on Github
- Canadian Undergraduate Technology Conference 2011

OTHER SP NEWS (5-6)

- New Advisory Council
- Our First University Chapter
- Henry's Birthday Wish



PRESERVING MEMORY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The regime must have considered this an effective testing ground for these new tactics of state repression, because once Olimpo was shut down many of the guards, torturers, and intelligence officers who had worked there moved to other prisons - some secret - that were established throughout the country.

The really remarkable thing about Olimpo is that it was located right in the middle of a residential neighbourhood; there are homes and shops all around it. Not only did the perpetrators lack any fear of being discovered, they actually wanted everyone to know what was happening inside those walls. The physical violence happening inside was a form of psychological violence against those outside. The most striking example of this was the bricking up of windows in some cells and torture rooms. They were not completely sealed but rather left open at the top. Our guide explained that this had a dual purpose so that the people outside could not see in but would hear the screams of agony inside and be afraid while those suffering inside would be reminded of life going on without them in the world outside and so despair further. Apparently this had the desired effect because people nearby did not protest the prison. One neighbour even bricked up his own window in order to more easily ignore it.

Aside from torture and unlawful imprisonment, one of the most disturbing aspects of these prisons was how the “detained-disappeared,” as they are known in

Argentina, were killed. Not wanting to use more typical methods of killing such as shooting, the military and police officials showed a sort of evil ingenuity. When prisoners had been condemned to die, they were sedated and taken on “death flights” to be dropped from helicopters into the sea. Most of the bodies were never found.



View of a room at Olimpo, similar to those used for torture. Notice how the window is bricked up enough to block the view from outside but open enough for sound to leave.

ESMA took the lessons learned at Olimpo and expanded them to a much larger and more elaborate operation. Continuing what seemed to be a recurring theme of “hidden yet open” repression, the authorities made no serious effort at secrecy here despite also being located in a residential area. In this case, an estimated 5,000 people passed through the centre, of which only 200 survived. Shockingly, this is actually a higher survival rate than at detention centres in other parts of Argentina. Demonstrating yet another unique twist of depravity, pregnant female prisoners were kept alive until they gave birth and then killed while their children were given away to

military families. Our guide explained that about 400 Argentines are known to have been raised this way and only a handful have been able to recover their true identities.

As with genocide, Argentina’s experience was an example of a regime seeking to spread fear and destroy the spirit of a population (if not physically exterminate the population itself) by committing atrocities against a portion of it. In the process, the perpetrators dehumanized their victims and committed incredible cruelty against them while maintaining clear consciences. As one of our guides explained, the actual job of torture itself was reserved for officers of the Argentine military and police rather than enlisted men because this “duty” was actually considered to be an honour worthy of gentlemen rather than a brutal crime. Also like many instances of genocide, the perpetrators of atrocities during Argentina’s Dirty War largely escaped justice thanks to the destruction of incriminating documents and other evidence. Some of the most senior leaders were placed on trial following the end of the dictatorship, but the majority of the people who committed abductions, torture, and murders did so with impunity. Fortunately, some are now being arrested and 16 who worked at Olimpo were sentenced last year to life in prison for their crimes.

Some friends and I were fortunate enough to attend a trial related to dictatorship-era atrocities the week after the conference and observed the process of justice at work.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



RESEARCH TEAM RECEIVES THREATWIKI TRAINING

RAHMA ADNAN | SEPT 2011

During one of our recent work sessions, the Sentinel Project team was trained on how to use the platform. Along with this training, a few members of the team are creating a manual that will help make training new research analysts more efficient and ensure that they have a quick reference during their future work.

We learned how to input data from reliable sources to track the situations of concern (SOCs) with the help of a visual timeline. When I first looked at the tool, I was a bit nervous because it looked so complicated and high-tech, but once we started inputting data points, it was surprisingly quite simple!

I think this is an amazing tool to be able to track the SOCs more closely. You are able to see exactly where events such as arrests, arson, or raids have taken place. And the data is not just a vague point on the map; we are talking about cities, towns, latitude, and longitude of the area where the incident occurred.

Under the correlations tab, you can see how the incidents are related to one another according to how analysts tag them. Looking at the Iran SOC, the map, and the correlation tabs are getting very crowded, but I think that magnifies the situation, and makes it seem more real. Soon improvements to Threatwiki will make these visualizations even more interactive and informative. Iran is always in the news for one reason or another but I have never once heard about the discrimination against the Baha'i community in that country. To be honest, I didn't really know that Baha'is live in Iran because all I see in the news is the government's desire to obtain nuclear weapons.

I am extremely glad that I have been given an opportunity to work with the Sentinel Project, and to be able learn more about the communities at risk of genocide. Hopefully, the Threatwiki tool will bring us one step closer to preventing the heinous crime of genocide.

PRESERVING MEMORY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Perhaps the most inspiring contribution to the national healing process that I saw in Argentina was that of the young people who worked as guides at Olimpo and ESMA. All of them were born after the military dictatorship ended and yet they feel a strong need to preserve the memory of these crimes so that they would not happen again. During our tours, they made frequent references to small acts of resistance which took place in the detention centres and explained how the detained-disappeared maintained their humanity this way. At the same time, this was contrasted with reports of many people in Argentine society, including public figures, who still today advocate for a return to the supposedly better times under the dictatorship. It seemed as though the guides told these stories as a way to continue the struggle for human rights and inspire their own generation and those after them to participate in their relatively new democracy without fear of repression so that the crimes of the past would never happen again.

NEW UPDATED REPORT ON THE RISK OF GENOCIDE IN KENYA

CHRISTOPHER TUCKWOOD | SEPT 2011

In May 2011, the Sentinel Project released a report on the risk of genocide in Kenya. We are now pleased to announce the release of a revised version of this report ([click here for a PDF of the report](#)), which better reflects the conditions in Kenya and why we have declared it to be a situation of concern. In light of recent developments at the International Criminal Court, the report now contains a new annex profiling the "Ocampo Six" - Kenyan politicians and media figures accused of organizing and inciting the deadly post-election violence of 2007-08.

For more information on current events in Kenya, visit the [SOC page](#) and consult Threatwiki. Be sure to watch for future reports on Kenya, as we will be releasing regular situation summaries and forecasts while our monitoring efforts increase.



THREATWIKI SOURCE CODE REPOSITORY NOW LIVE ON GITHUB

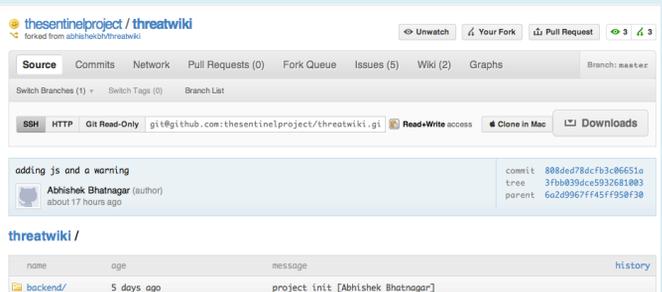
ABISH EK BHATNAGAR | JULY 2011

In May, the Sentinel Project [launched](#) the first prototype of Threatwiki to start actively tracking two situations of concern: [Kenya](#) and [Iran](#). We've learned a lot from the initial monitoring process that we've build around the system, and we're currently doing a lot of brainstorming, design work and prep ahead of a second round of feature development and bug-fixes.

As part of the process, we're currently working on making Threatwiki an Open Source project. After looking at a variety of alternatives, we ultimately decided to host the code on Github. So the Sentinel Project's Threatwiki official repository is now available at:

<https://github.com/thesentinelproject/threatwiki>.

This code is in no way ready for re-use, and we haven't yet attached a proper open source license to it. However this is where we will be centralizing all of our code and development efforts from now on - if you're interested in helping out, why not check out the prototype code we've got on there so far, and then [send us a message!](#)



THE SENTINEL PROJECT AT THE CANADIAN UNDERGRADUATE TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE 2011

TANEEM TALUKDAR | JULY 2011



The CUTC (<http://cutc.ca/>) conference is a major event that draws students interested in science, technology and entrepreneurship across Canada each year. This year we were invited to set up a table at the Tech Expo part of the event. We don't usually do a lot of group outreach like this, so we had fun going out and talking to people about what we do.



INTRODUCING OUR NEW ADVISORY COUNCIL

CHRISTOPHER TUCKWOOD | SEPTEMBER 2011

Genocide is a complex issue and predicting and preventing it is definitely an ambitious task. Here at the Sentinel Project, we know that we don't have all the answers and that it's going to take time and a lot of work to solve this problem. This is why we enthusiastically collaborate with other organizations and experts who share our goals. To help guide our efforts, grow as an organization, and tie us into the larger genocide prevention community, we recently started to assemble an [Advisory Council](#). The members are currently drawn from the fields of genocide studies, which will help with our research and early warning work, and non-profit development, which will give us the direction we need to grow through effective governance, management, and fundraising. Soon we will be adding advisors from the technology development field as well.

It is my pleasure to introduce you to our new advisors.



Gregory Stanton, PhD

Greg is the president of [Genocide Watch](#) and a past president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. He has a long history of working on human rights and humanitarian causes, including time spent with the Peace Corps and the US Department of State, as well as teaching as a university professor. He has been involved in setting up criminal tribunals for Cambodia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia. Most notably, Greg developed the [Eight Stages of Genocide](#) model which was the inspiration for the operational processes used to structure our [Threatwiki](#) timelines.

Adam Jones, PhD

Adam is a professor of political science at the University of British Columbia as well as the executive director of [Gendercide Watch](#), an NGO dedicated to countering gender-based mass killing. He travels extensively, sometimes in his role as a photojournalist. Adam brings to the team his expertise on genocide-related gender issues and genocide studies in general. Of the several books that he has written, the most recent are the second edition of *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* and the forthcoming *New Directions in Genocide Research*

Amanda Grzyb, PhD

Amanda teaches in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario. Her research interests include commemoration of mass atrocities and media reactions to genocide. She teaches several courses on race, media, and social movements as well as guiding a trip to Poland each year during which students learn about the Holocaust by visiting death camps. Amanda's most recent publication was [The World and Darfur: International Response to Crimes Against Humanity in Western Sudan](#), which she edited. She will be advising us on media strategy.

Henry Theriault, PhD

Henry is a professor of philosophy at Worcester State College, where he has taught since 1998 on topics including human rights, genocide denial, long-term justice, and reparations. He is also the co-editor of the journal [Genocide Studies and Prevention](#). He has also served as the coordinator of the Center for the Study of Human Rights based at Worcester and has lectured widely both in the United States and abroad. He will be advising us on both general issues related to genocide as well as genocide education and building relationships with the academic genocide studies community.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



OUR FIRST UNIVERSITY CHAPTER

LISA LEONG | SEPTEMBER 2011

As summer draws to an end and students make their way back to school this September, the Sentinel Project will be rolling out its first University Chapter.



As you may or may not know, the Toronto SP team has been working hard all summer developing new programs to increase awareness, expand SP reach, and raise funds. One way we are doing this is through our University Chapters. We hope that through this channel, the Sentinel Project will continue to grow, reaching broader demographics and bringing together groups of inspiring young people looking to make a difference. While chapters must align with the core values of

the Sentinel Project, they are encouraged to explore areas and activities that reflect their own interests and we can't wait to see what shapes and sizes different chapters will take.

We are proud to announce that our first-ever University Chapter will be at the University of Waterloo! This chapter holds special significance since the Sentinel Project itself was founded at UW by a group of graduating students in 2008. Led by a strong team of innovative, enthusiastic, and experienced co-directors (Ajandan Sivam, Edward Philip, and Thiv Paramsothy), 2011-2012 promises to be a very exciting year for the Sentinel Project at UW!

If you are interested in joining the UW chapter, starting a chapter at your own school, or learning more about the opportunity, please contact Lisa.

lisa@thesentinelproject.org

ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Program, the Public Policy Forum, Imagine Canada, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Paddy has written extensively about community investment and civic engagement, volunteer methodology, law enforcement, and global safety and security.

Isabella Smejda

Isabella is a consultant focused on performance support and instructional design for corporate clients, but also includes financial and management consulting and some unusual items, such as the production of two films, *Pontypool* and *Mariachi Gringo*. Her early career was in banking and finance, culminating in the position of Vice-President of Central Capital Corporation. Isabella is also a trustee of the [Gardiner Museum](#), where she sits on several committees. She recently completed the Institute of Corporate Directors course "Not-For-Profit Governance Essentials" offered at the Rotman School of Management.

HENRY'S BIRTHDAY WISH

LISA LEONG | SEPTEMBER 2011

This year, for Henry Dambanemuva's 21st birthday, he asked his friends and family to support the Sentinel Project and share his dream of a world free of genocide. In a matter of weeks, Henry raised over \$1000! On behalf of Henry and the rest of the Sentinel Project, we thank you for your kindness and generosity in supporting Henry's birthday wish.

"Genocide is both predictable and preventable but most of the time, we simply choose not to. Of course the cost of prevention is high, but the cost of doing nothing is much more higher. Unlike the past century, we can avoid the 21st century from being written in the blood of innocent civilians, which is why the Sentinel Project needs your help" - Henry, SP Research & Technology Analyst

Have an upcoming birthday? If you would like to give your birthday wish to the Sentinel Project or learn about ways in which you can support the Sentinel Project, please contact Chris. chris@thesentinelproject.org