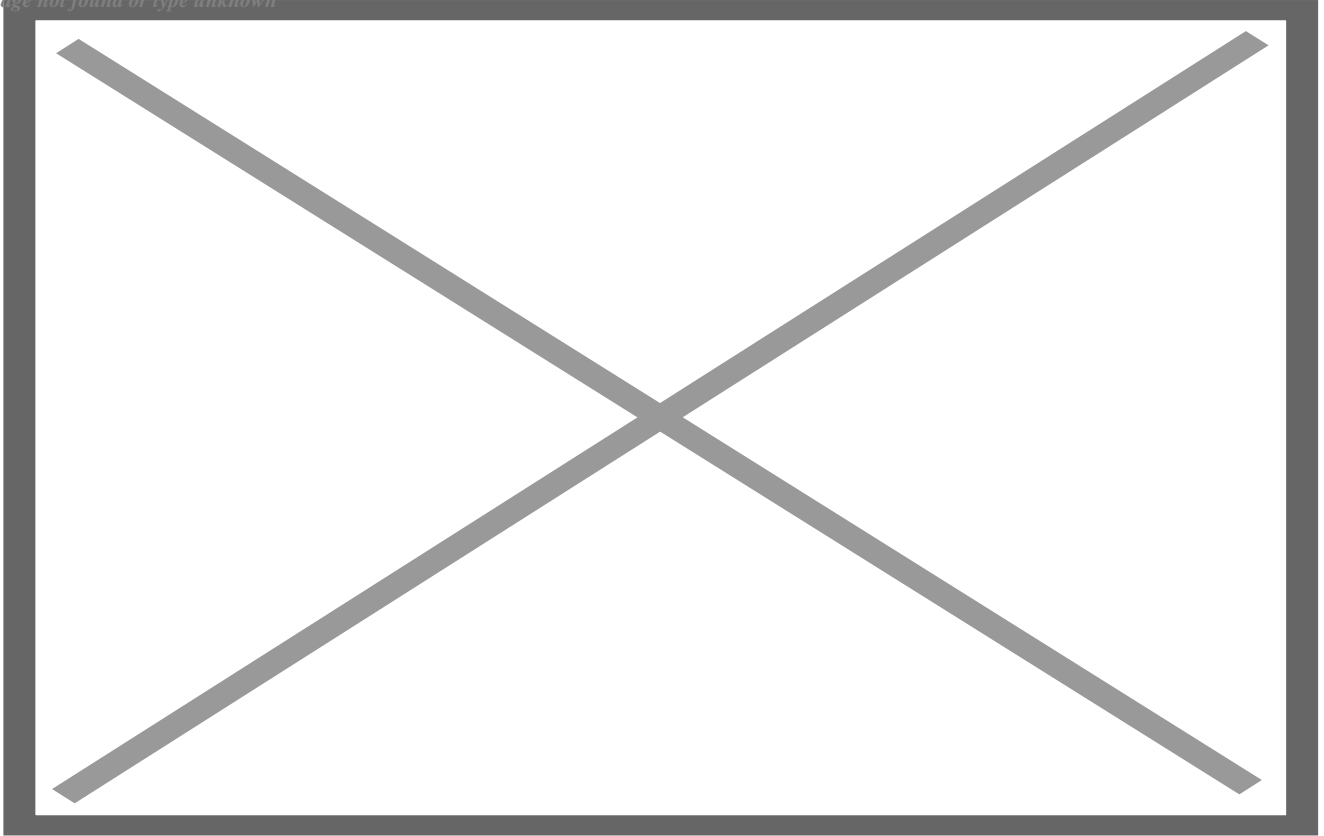


Crimes under the dictatorship

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By Guillermo Alvarado

Chile's military dictatorship, headed by General Augusto Pinochet, who ruled the South American country with blood and fire between 1973 and 1990, in addition to practicing state terrorism against the population on a daily basis, is guilty of other little-known horrendous crimes.

Although there are some records of cases from the 1960s onwards, it was after the bloody coup d'état against the President of the Popular Unity, Salvador Allende, that illegal adoptions of children born in public hospitals accelerated.

This did not happen because the parents of the infants voluntarily decided to place them under the care of American or European families, far from it. In reality, it was the kidnapping of newborn children from mothers with scarce resources or a low level of education.

This is how Sara Emilia Díaz, one of the women who was one of the victims of the theft of her baby, told the story. She went to the capital's Barros Luco hospital to give birth to her first child when she was only

16 years old.

After the delivery she was informed that her baby had been stillborn and was given a strong sedative to keep her asleep until the following day.

When she claimed her son's body for burial, she was told that it had been destined for studies and as she insisted, "someone" advised her not to ask any more "because it could be very bad for her". It was 1974 and State crimes were the order of the day.

Hope returned to Sara Emilia's body when she met the group Hijos y Madres del Silencio (HMS), which in a decade managed to identify, without any help from the State, more than 300 children stolen and given in irregular adoption.

According to estimates of the organizations created to investigate these events, some 20,000 children were stolen during the Pinochet regime and given to foreign families in exchange for a lot of money. Numerous members of the coup government or their relatives, as well as doctors, nurses, clergymen and lawyers, participated in this shady operation.

The Chilean Minister of Justice, Luis Cordero, acknowledged that in the last 50 years no government had faced this challenge and only now are legal and technological mechanisms being put in place to find the whereabouts of children stolen from their real parents.

A novelty in this aspect is the use of artificial intelligence to try to obtain a current image of the stolen babies based on the genetic material of their parents, but the task will be slow and laborious.

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