For Adriana: *con Respeto Duradero* (with enduring respect)

1

In browsing the Netflix documentary category a few months ago, I came across a series entitled *'A Sinister Sect: Colonia Dignidad.'* I was startled. I knew it had to be about the German-Chilean cult leader, Paul Schafer.

His name had first come up in a lengthy article read in the '*The Guardian Weekly'* back in the early 1990s. I clipped the page out and saved in a folder of unforgettable news stories.

Entitled '*Sympathy for the Devil',* by Malcolm Coad (Sept. 8th 1991), that article described the international Human Rights investigations into the crimes and abuses of Schafer. Until the late 1950s, he had been a charismatic preacher in Germany with a fervent following. When he was convicted for the sexual abuse of boys, he fled to South America.

In Talca, Chile, in the early 1960s he established '*Colonia Dignidad'.* The very naming ('colony of dignity') was cruelly ironic. Oddly modelled on a rustic Bavarian community, its acolytes were largely immigrants from Schafer 's German congregation who had followed him to Chile. Children from Chilean orphanages were also taken under the wing of Schafer and his cult. They had been entrusted to the commune by the right-wing Chilean president, Jorge Alessandri, whom Schafer befriended.

In its strictness and isolation from the outside world, Schafer 's *'Villa Baviara'* had chilling similarities with Jonestown in Guyana. Yet its notoriety was not as a place of mass suicide but principally as a site of secret torture. That was after the bloody coup in 1973 that overthrew the elected government of Salvador Allende. The military junta, led by Augusto Pinochet, immediately began rounding up supporters of the deposed socialist government and holding them in secret detention. Unknown to most of the colonists themselves, Schafer provided 'facilities' at *Colonia Dignidad* for that vile purpose. Bodies of some victims were buried on the property in unmarked graves.

That horror is particularly unforgettable due to a personal connection. One of the survivors of the *Colonia Dignidad* torture chamber became a dear friend. She was directly referenced in that disturbing *Guardian* article of 1991. For her, there is no need for a pseudonym:

'Adriana Borquez has shared this nightmare… Later she spent several years exile in Britain...'

When I clipped out that article, I had already lost touch with Adriana. Yet I knew from her previous letters that for several years she had been back in Chile from her exile in Oxford. I knew she was continuing her work to expose the crimes of the Pinochet era… Yet that was thirty-two years ago…

For all that, the Netflix '*Colonia Dignidad'* documentary leapt out at me... Released in 2021, the film covers Schafer 's notoriety from the 1950s up to his death in 2010. That dark history was fascinating in itself. Yet primarily, I was eager to hear possible references to Adriana.

She was a well-known witness to and victim of the atrocities committed by DINA, Pinochet's gestapo, in a bunker at *Colonia Dignidad.* Her testimonials to the trauma were well-documented. A six-part documentary on *Colonia Dignidad* would be incomplete without her story. But the German documentary, I noted, was only released in 2021. Was it too late for Adriana to have taken part?

When I met her in early 1980, she was in her mid-forties. We were both teaching at Weru-Weru girls' secondary school in the Kilimanjaro District of Tanzania. At the time, she looked frail and walked with a slight limp—possibly from childhood polio.

At the end of my first term at the school, she and her 14-year-old daughter, Selva, were preparing to leave. For the previous year, Adriana had been teaching French while Selva was enrolled in regular classes at the school. Yet due to health problems, Adriana needed to get back to England. Her elderly parents were also residing there in exile. A few years earlier, her family had taken refuge in Britain with the help of the Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile ('*Comité de Cooperación para la Paz'*), a Christian organization.

However briefly we were neighbours at Weru-Weru, we visited one another numerous times. Few opportunities for getting to know one's neighbours can be richer than the long evenings on a semi-isolated boarding school compound.

In visits with Adriana, I told her of attending a few Chile Solidarity meetings in Vancouver in the mid-1970s. I also told her a backpacking trip to South America in 1976 which included a brief visit to Chile. In the capital of Santiago, a seeming military omnipresence and palpable atmosphere of fear left an indelible impression.

In highlighting that, I told her my anecdote about meeting a girl called Patricia on the two-day bus trip from Arica in the far north, down to Santiago. When I later looked her up in her barrio, we took a little walk, accompanied by her brother. On that walk, I stopped to tuck in a shoelace startling a soldier guarding a government building. Probably thinking I was reaching for a

weapon, he jumped forward pointing his machine gun. Patricia pleaded with the soldier that I was a harmless *"tourista Canadiense.*" After a tense moment, he shooed us forward.

Ariana shook her head and said that at that very time— she was being held it detention…

In other conversations, she told me about her family background, her teaching and her political involvement before the coup. She usually spoke rapidly in fluent English— her third language. She often waved a cigarette in her gesticulating hand. She sometimes looked owlish in her thick glasses— but there was no mistaking the passion in her eyes.

Soon after Adriana's departure from Weru-Weru, I wrote down as much as I could remember about our visits over the previous weeks, starting with the last one in April 1980:

Selva was bidding goodbye to her schoolmates that afternoon, so Adriana came alone. She had already made rounds to the other teachers' places, leaving at each a few of her leftover household items. For me she brought a first-aid kit, a tablecloth and a light bulb. Given the local scarcities, her donations were gladly received. She also brought a half-jar of instant coffee. We had some of it at my living room table.

She was wistful about leaving Tanzania. Slowly stirring her coffee, she said she would have stayed longer but for her health. She needed to attend to complications from a hysterectomy. She had it done at the KCMC (Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre) which did not provide adequate follow up care. Still, she insisted that her Tanzanian experience had been fruitful. She was especially grateful that Selva had had opportunity to study at an African school, learn fluent Swahili and make Tanzanian friends.

She was also grateful for her year-long break from the dreary English clime. She said Africa had given her some distance from the worst of her memories. She felt more determined to continue with the anti-Pinochet campaign once back in Oxford.

She was also feeling the obligation to get back to her father, who was depressed in his exile. In mentioning him, she gave a brave smile and lit another cigarette...

In an earlier visit, she had spoken at length about her father. Her feelings about him were mixed.

Once she had referred to him as “that bloody bourgeois.” But she chuckled and added: “Yes, a bourgeois— but maybe not so bloody!"

She said her most enduring childhood memory of her father was of a silhouette bent over a tome in his darkened study. She said he was a self-educated anthropologist who lectured and wrote extensively on the Mapoche Indians. He also wrote poetry and for as time had been a friend of Pablo Neruda.

Adriana said her father never abandoned sympathies with the USSR— even through the Stalin era. In the 1950s, he guest-lectured at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. As a life-long communist, he was strongly opposed to the Catholic church.

In first hearing all that, I was baffled why Andriana would call her father a “bloody bourgeois.” She was herself an ardent socialist. As a Christian of the liberation theology mould, she also opposed the conservative establishment of the ‘mother church’. It appeared that on many fronts, she and her father had common cause.

She explained that the rift with her father was not ideological— but personal. For all his avowed sympathies with *revolución popular,* she said her father had a bourgeois morality. For her, that was evidenced when he was scandalized by her leaving a “respectable” marriage for her ‘*compañero*’ and lover…

In that same conversation, she went on to talk about her ‘*compañero,* Hector whom she sometimes called ‘Huara.’ It her poetry, which she sent me a few years later, she defined ‘Huara’ as an indigenous word for ‘*una estrella que guia’*, a guiding star.

Hector/Huara was a painter who had been a fellow activist with Adriana in MIR (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*), the party of Allende. His socialist creds were so pure, according to Adriana, that he was sent by the party to Bolivia in the 1960s to try to make contact with Che Guevara Himself. He was unsuccessful.

He was also captured by Pinochet's DINA (‘*Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional’*) during the 1973 junta. After three months of torture, with both legs broken, he was miraculously attended to by a *campanero* doctor who smuggled him out of captivity in an ambulance. He found refuge in the house of his aging mother in southern Chile.

Hector was also the father of Selva. Two daughters were from Adriana’s first marriage were back in Chile. They were in no immediate danger, she said, since they were not politically involved.

She said that her last communication with her old lover was a letter she received six months before. In it, he had apparently proclaimed: '*Nunca prostituiré mi arte!'* ['I will never prostitute my art!']

The impression was of a defeated man moping around his old mother's kitchen. But then, Adriana insisted: "He is not broken yet—no! He just needs to find his inspiration to get back to his art— back to his politics."

With that, she blew her nose and wiped her eyes.

In another visit, she said her greatest torment was being too old to be a militant revolutionary. She spoke of the million and a half *Chilenos* in exile. A few were *compañeros* so committed they'd had plastic surgery (in Havana) so they could secretly return to the underground in Santiago with faces unrecognisable.

"Oh God," she cried, "if I could be back there now my '*compañeros*!*'"* For a few moments she stared into the middle distance. If I was younger and healthier," she murmured. "I would gladly change my face!'

I attempted to console her. "But you don't have to be in Chile," I said lamely. "Working from outside— you can publicize the injustices to the wider world."

She sniffled and reached for another cigarette.

We had much more to talk about than the horrors of the Pinochet regime. Local corruption, religious hypocrisy and the cold war were just a just a few topics of our long chats. We also shared a few meals and even a few jokes. In spite of it all, Adriana had a playful side. Still, it was very seldom that the horrors she had suffered did not seem to be lurking just below the surface...

I do not recall her specifically mentioning *Colonia Dignidad* or Paul Schafer. Yet more than once, she spoke in detail of her torture. She had been savagely beaten, brutalized with electric shock and set upon by a sadistically trained dog…

"It was harder on the younger women," she said. "Later on, we older woman had to keep telling them that the guards had done those horrible things only to our flesh. It had nothing to do with our real persons."

Yet even subjected to unimaginable terrors, she believed she was never broken.

"I don't know what happened when I was under the drugs," she said. "But while I had my mind– – I didn't give the bastards a thing."

"How did you endure it?" I falteringly asked.

"I just sang to myself," said Adriana. "I sang every song I ever knew."

For one who could barely stand a dentist's drill, such physical courage was inconceivable...

It was a gloomy evening after the *'abrazos'* [hugs] of Adriana and her daughter upon their final departure from the school. I recall sitting alone, glancing morosely at her cigarette butts, still in the ashtray. There were other neighbours to visit— other fascinating conversations to come through the remainder of my stay at Weru-Weru. Yet none would be as riveting as those with Adriana.

2

Luckily, our conversation did not end at Weru-Weru. We remained in touch through the following decade. Apart from two brief visits with her in Oxford (the latter with my wife, T., just after our marriage) the friendship was sustained though our correspondence, in English. I still have many of Adriana's letters.

After hearing about the Netflix documentary, I brought them out and sorted them into chronological order. I reread them all, beginning with our correspondence between 1980-1981, when I was still in in Tanzania:

In her first letter, she asked a little favour: could I enquire at the bank in Moshi about remitting her final month's salary to her account in England? If not, she suggested the money be given to a needy student... I was sorry to inform her that my efforts at the bank were futile. The money had already gone back to the ministry. In her reply, she said not to worry.

She went on to describe unexpected challenges of readjusting to her exile in Britain: '*The English people are not my brothers nor my comrades,'* she wrote. *'But they're quite decent people...'*

Still after her year in Africa, she said she found the materialism of her host country hard to bear:

'They complain they can't afford a new car or a new television! They haven't been somewhere in Africa to see the black man pulling a cart full of goods with the muscles of their legs and arms nearly bursting out of the skin… They haven't seen the men queuing at the entrance of a hospital waiting to sell their own blood! They haven't seen a girl dying with kwashiorkor… Sometimes I hate this society and I do not know whether I have a right to.'

Her African experience, she admitted, had even set her a little apart from other Chileans in exile:

'*My horizons are wider but it's not possible to communicate that to all my compañeros... They think I'm forgetting Chile. But for me the homeland is much more than the cordillera de los Andes, 'empanadas' or 'cueca' dancing… More than even the old slogans from Allende's campaign... Chile is not so cheap! Wherever one lives it is constant struggle to keep one's principles and not be swallowed by prejudice… I love life, F.!'*

In my letters to her that first year, I gave her updates on the school and about her former colleagues. I told her of my visits to the Simanjero Mission with Padres Pepe and Miguel, the *simpatico* Spanish missionaries to whom she had introduced me.

I also admitted to growing frustrations. Routines such as filling in official forms for every lesson plan and queuing up for basic necessities, I said, were souring me on *Ujamaa* [Tanzanian socialism]. Still, I knew that Adriana, of all people, did not care to hear petty complaints. I tried to balance the negative reportage with whimsical insight or homages to the ethereal beauty of the Kilimanjaro setting ... Indeed, in standing amid two hundred African girls singing at morning assembly while the snow-capped dome of Kibo emerged from the mist— shortage of cooking oil never came to mind…

In her reply, Adriana wrote:

'It is so interesting to read your letters! Maybe it is because I know about your surroundings, or because many of your worries are the same restlessness which pressed upon myself so much when I was there in Tanzania...

It's strange how things become so mixed up in Africa. And one side, I see the terrible misunderstanding of some universal values (solidarity, respect, love etc.). On the other, one can feel this genuine vibration of the African soul… Oh no, F. I feel I cannot express myself in the right way in English. You should learn more Spanish, guy!'

She went to say that she was writing creatively. Her first project was a book about her "clandestine life" in Chile upon release from Pinochet's secret police. She was also writing poetry. She promised to send me her books, if any were to be published...

While that letter was upbeat—the mood of the next one (at least among those kept) of 1981 was despairing:

'I have to say that this is being a bloody year. Health problems, economic problems, family problems political party problems, housing problems, problems, problems... Anyway, that's life, no?'

There was never an impression that Adriana was clinically depressed. It rather seemed that her gloom— and her rage— were in the disappointment of the painfully slow arc of history towards social justice. In response to my expression of alarm about the belligerence of the new Reagan administration, she wrote:

What I ask myself is: is the socialist world prepared to take the chance now and fight capitalism in this situation of danger? It seems it's not. 'Pole' [Swahili for sorry]. *And what is happening there in Africa? Do you know how the dream a building a just socialist society is going to hell? The leaders there—they really* [*'shit'* crossed out] *defecate on dreams...*

So, F., that's my state of mind and spirit… I face this with passion, you see. I can't do it in any other way, I can't forgive the betrayal of dreams! I think is better for you (and for all of us) to be out of that. Better we are here, in the heart of capitalism. At least we know we are in the enemy territory….'

In October 1981, I returned from Tanzania to 'enemy territory'... When I wrote Adriana with my new address in Vancouver, I was still in culture shock. I longed to be back in the tropics. I told her that the gloom of the northwest autumn felt as oppressive as the politics of Tanzania. She replied:

'*I can imagine you miss African sunshine…. Last summer I spent many hours on the banks of the river— painting, watching, listening. Sometimes I tried to read, sometimes I tried to write, but most of the time I was simply there like a sponge— trying to absorb light, air and warmth for this long tedious hibernation ahead...'*

She then turned to my critique of '*Ujamaa'*. I had opined that the policies of *Ngugu* [comrade] Nyerere and his bureaucratic elite were miserably failing ordinary Tanzanians. She addressed that in a broader context:

'I have come across quite a lot of articles about Tanzanian policies– economic, social, political. There is deep awareness of what has happened there and strong criticism. The disgraceful thing is that this will be used by the western world to support its positions—not just against African socialism—but against any socialism. The bad image is also muddying progressive movements—not to say anything about the liberation movements… I have met some interesting people from Dar Es Salaam, very clear in their positions, very aware of the whole problem. I am committed to write something for them...'

I was not surprised that Adriana had faith that purer African socialists could guide erring brethren on a more righteous path… I was tempted to make some cynical point in response— but thought

better... Fortunately, in my next letter I had good news to share: that I had signed on to teach in a secondary school in newly independent Zimbabwe.

My first letter to Adriana from Zimbabwe in early 1982, must have dwelt on the anxieties of turning thirty without future direction. In response, she wrote:

'*You're a lucky person F., being able to fill your thirst for experience and knowledge. I agree with you that the value of your job is the learning and the human contact in new cultures and surroundings. You do not need to justify yourself or to convince me…. If you say that you haven't achieved the goals expected by society at 30– I can say absolutely the same about myself having reached my 46th birthday!'*

In reading that decades later, I wonder how many other friends for whom she provided such support and reassurance... At the same time, I feel honoured that she had trusted me as a sounding board for her own hopes and fears. In the same letter, she described her work:

'I have been in poor health during the whole winter and also doing a lot of work concerning human rights: going to conferences, touring around England, giving talks...'

At that time, she was working with a project called '*Buscada.'* Its aim was to investigate '*los desaparecidos'* [the disappeared] in repressive regimes throughout Latin America.
Its primary focus was on Argentina, where the 'dirty war' against leftist opponents of the right-wing military dictatorship of General Videla was as bloody as that of Pinochet in Chile in the 1970s... That work must have been draining— both physically and emotionally. She wrote:

'My reading nowadays is framed into the needs of 'Buscada'... No literature no philosophy no novels no sociology nor theology! I am only putting my eyes on disappearances. Quite depressing I must admit... I feel I have to do it in spite of my own little traumas. And my own little sensitiveness. Or perhaps I do it because of them.'

In a subsequent letter that same year, our conversation turned to the subject of loneliness...
I wrote that despite not really caring about prosperity or advancement in a conventional career— I was tired of solitude. I said that I had no illusions about finding a 'soulmate'— but still hoped for a companion. Sharing a common interest in raising a child, I suggested, could be an endurable bond. Still, I wondered whether for someone my age, that ship had already sailed.

Adriana replied:

'*I think I understand your worries about loneliness. I know, loneliness is the price one pays for independence and unconventionalism.... Maybe what is lacking in your life is something beyond*

new experiences and new people and new cultures. Knowledge that serves nothing outside itself is empty, I think. Forgive me for saying what I believe F..— I am not criticizing you. I'm just trying to explain…

It was by your age that I also felt the lack of a steady company and a feeling of belonging. I thought that the remedy was to get involved in a sentimental relationship. It wasn't…

But then I met somebody else. We shared the political struggle, the risks, and the satisfaction of knowing that together we could achieve many things. But then I was arrested. Later I had to flee the country… He stayed in Chile taking my place in the fight.'

She was plainly referring to her '*compañero'*, Hector, of whom she spoke in our conversations back at Weru-Weru. She went on:

'So now I am alone and sometimes I'm lonely. But this solitude of ours is now what keeps us belonging to each other. We did not live only for ourselves as you stress, but for a cause– for the ideal of building justice and love among our fellow humans. We still do so— and this unites us in spite of time and distance...

This is what I remind myself when I feel lonely. I feel that I belong to the struggle of my people– –and still to him in some way. Sorry I'm getting mixed up, I can't explain well in English. OK, you're right— loneliness is shit!'

That would not be the last time she would provide solace— without patronization…

In January 1983, I moved to another school. I discovered later that some letters from other friends went missing in that transition. The first letter received from Adriana was in April. She wrote passionately of her continuing research into '*los desaparecidos'*:

'…It is an extremely interesting subject. From the political point of view it is important, and from the human side it gives you both the dimension of the incredible potential of cruelty of man, the amazing capacity of survival of human beings, and of an unimaginable depth of suffering… The work is life and death together and it involves love, love and love— along with unavoidable lightnings of hatred. Sometimes it takes over my whole existence and being.'

In rereading that letter, there came to mind the folk song, '*Guantanamera'*, with the lyrics of the famous poem by Jose Marte: '*Con los pobres de la tierra/ Quiero yo mi suerte echar.*' [With poor people of the earth, I want to cast my fate]. It seemed that the celebrated father of Cuban independence could not have felt any greater passion for his cause than Adriana did for hers.

Adriana concluded that same letter with an update on her youngest daughter, then sixteen:

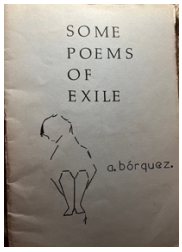
'Selva's getting independent and more mature. She has a boyfriend.... She's sweet as ever and we have a nice comradeship between us. She sends her love to you the same as I do. I hope this letter will reach you and that you will answer...'

In my reply, I told her of my plans for a vacation trip back to Canada. I had booked my return journey through London. In acknowledging her open invitation, I said I would try to visit her in Oxford. Before I left in early August, she sent a post card informing she would be expecting me.

That two-week trip in August 1983 was hectic and unsettling. On the return from Canada, I landed in London so dazed that I lost my passport on the tube from Heathrow. Meanwhile, my jaw was badly swollen from a staph infection incurred in shaving in the grungy bathroom of boyhood friends in Halifax.

With the need for an emergency passport (along with medical attention) from the Canadian embassy, the visit with Adriana in Oxford was brief. I took few notes but recall the gracious hospitality she squeezed into that short visit. She provided a mini tour of historic Oxford: guiding me through Tom quad, Christ Church and a lovely path along the Thames. All the while, Adriana peddled her adult tricycle and I walked beside. Back in her frugal flat, a few of her young friends studying in the Africa Studies Centre, dropped by to say hello...

I missed seeing Selva. Adriana said she was visiting a friend, but it was plain that her daughter had given up her bed for my visit... Upon departure, Ariana pedalled beside me back to the Gloucester Green station. Along with parting *abrazos,* in her comradely (and slightly maternal) way, she chided me to be more careful.



A few months after that visit she sent me, as promised, two self-published chapbooks of poetry. One entirely in English was entitled: '*A selection of poems of the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo'*. The poems were mostly those of Argentinian women whose children were among '*Los desaparecidos'* of the Argentinian junta's dirty war. In the accompanying letter, Adriana wrote:

These books are a part of the 1000 different things I am involved in... I am as usual working in 'Buscada'. Also, interviews, talking to women the problematic of exile, the Christian thing, organizing meetings, activities and retreats and 'preaching'! I feel tired and drained. I would like to stop one day— but there is always something exciting on the horizon.'

The second chapbook was of her own poetry. Entitled '*Poems of Exile,'* the poems were in Spanish with English translations on the facing pages. In the English introduction, Adriana declared:

'I am afraid that this poetry of mine has no literary value but these poems are a testimonial of my soul when separated from my country my people and my loved ones... I also desire to undermine the dangerous myth that political activists are human robots that have no emotions.'

Several of the poems were about her '*compañero',* Huara. A short one called '*Amor'* in English translation, reads:

Huara—
Love is
tearing myself internally
every time the thought of you
bruises my spirit
love is
living in death!

Her poetry revealed what I had always assumed— and admired— about Adriana. The Catholic warrior for social justice had a wild heart...

A few months later, Adriana wrote with the news that she was thinking of returning to Chile.

Pinochet was still in power, but the democratic opposition to military rule was strengthening. Meanwhile, *La Vicaría de la Solidaridad* [the Vicariate of Solidarity], a Catholic human rights organization based in Santiago, was documenting abuses and actively challenging repression. Under the protection of her church and international human rights organizations, Adriana felt she could return in relative safety.

In her letter of May 1984, she wrote: '*Everybody says it is not prudent to do back to Chile now— that I should wait a little bit. In September, I will present a project proposal to the World University Service in order to have some work for me there. I'm still trying to make up my mind.'*

In my reply a couple of months later, I also had exciting news: I was engaged to a Zimbabwean woman and expected to marry by year's end. I told Adriana that at the beginning of the following year, we might be able to visit her on our way back to Canada. She sent her congratulations.

I cannot remember details of my follow up letter, but it must have sounded gloomy…

I had just concluded the 'traditional' Shona engagement. I had assumed that the gifts bought for my prospective father-in-law satisfied the requirement for '*lobola'*, or bride price. The dress suit, shoes and accoutrements given him were from Meikles, Zimbabwe's fanciest department store. As it turned out, those gifts were regarded to have only met requirements for the *'Vhuramuromo'* [opening of the mouth] preliminary to *'lobola*' negotiations...

I must have told Andriana that I respected the traditions of my wife to be— but felt that that in recent times, the '*lobola'* tradition had been corrupted by greed. I told her that the father of my fiancé, T., assumed that a prospective '*mrungu'* [European] son-in-law had to be a goldmine.

Adriana gave a lengthy reply:

'I'm writing back so as to catch you before leaving Zimbabwe. I really look forward to seeing you and to meeting T. She looks so lovely and loving in the pictures!

F., I will allow myself an opinion: You have trusted me with your confidence in telling me the sad story about your father-in-law to be. Don't be cross! Look, it's OK that African societies ask for a bride price as long as you agree to pay whatever you can afford, as a gesture of respect for their traditions. But when it reaches a level of actual abuse— enough is enough.

I can see it as the painful confrontation of two cultures. Which one should win? But no— it's not a matter of winning. It is just that you are taking T. to your world, to live with your values. She will keep everything good of her culture and you will have to modify many of your own habits and adopt some of her values, also... But you have to reject what is wrong and backwards. And this buying a wife is wrong! If you pay, you become part of this abominable slave trade. It's a question of principle…

T. is in her majority of age, right? Your father-in-law may wish you in hell if he wants— but you must not buy your 'compañera'! Both be confident and get on the plane without regrets, my friend…

I ask your pardon for speaking out my feelings so strongly but I had to do it. I look forward impatiently to seeing you both very soon, love, Adriana.'

On December 31st 1984 my wife, T., and I arrived in London via Harare and Rome. We headed straight to the Canadian embassy to get her visa before taking the afternoon bus up to Oxford. We had to head back to Heathrow the next morning for the flight to Vancouver. We had only a few hours to visit Adriana.

She was delighted to meet T. and hugged her with tears in her eyes. We talked at the kitchen table long after supper. Unfortunately, T. and I were too tired to stay up to greet the new year with Adriana. I vaguely recall her opening the bedroom door at midnight to wish us '*un feliz año nuevo'…* She accompanied us to the bus station the following morning. After *abrazos* of farewell, she padded my shoulder.

"Now, you take good care of that girl, F.," she said. "You promise?"

I was a little disappointed that she had the impression that T. was so vulnerable. I also wondered whether she was gently chiding me for marrying someone so young. Still, in that last time we would ever see one another in person, I gave her that promise.

Decades later, I doubt Adriana would have considered that promise to have been kept…

All of Adriana's subsequent letters were addressed to both my wife and I. In her first letter to us in Canada in 1985, she directly addressed my wife: '*Courage T., try to get the best from the west. There are good things here also. Do not miss and waste this experience. it could be a very valuable one for you. Lots of love!'*

I had mentioned that T. was expecting and often felt homesick. I had also said that we were intending to return to Zimbabwe where we might permanently reside. Meanwhile, I knew that Adriana was returning to Chile and would be preoccupied with her resettlement. She had said that her letters would probably become more infrequent. She gave us a London address from which her letters would be forwarded to Chile.

In August 1985, T. and I were back in Zimbabwe for the birth of our first daughter. Through the entire year following, the correspondence with Adriana lapsed.

Concerned about her safety, I wrote her in early 1987. I told her we were expecting a second child. A few months later, we received a response from Adriana, mailed from a Blackfriars, London, address. She was back in England for medical treatment:

'*Your letter came just when I was arriving back in England from Chile…. It really warms my heart to realize that old friends can keep attached by links of caring through time and space. On July 7th I'm leaving again England going back to my commitment in Chile...*

My work is halfway between public and clandestine. They [the Pinochet government] *know why I'm home but they have not disturbed me in an open way. Things are not looking too safe in Chile and I know it is a risk to be there, struggling for democracy. However, I feel that I can't stay away. So that's it.*

I feel I'm contributing to the liberation of my own people. There's so much to do. Any activity towards that end is worthwhile. My health is.... Well, I can manage! The legs are not as well as they should be. I must learn to accept my limitations at this age— and I do.

I leave you this forwarding address in Chile… I must ask you to be cautious with what you write. As mail goes all of it goes through censorship. This is one more of the things one has to learn to

live with. I feel sometimes very isolated and lonely— but 10 years abroad aren't in vain. I'm different now from the average Chilean so communication with old friends is kind of a lifeline.

A big 'abrazo' to you two— and to your babies (in case they are there!) love Adriana

A few months afterwards, our second *niñita* was born. I sent Adriana a photo of our girls to her Chilean address. In February 1988 we received a postcard of a sunset over Valparaiso harbour. On the back, Adriana wrote: *'We may never see one another again, but friendship is like a magic bridge.'*

In a follow up letter, I told her that we had decided to move back to Canada. With conditions in Zimbabwe deteriorating, I said, I did not see a good future there for our daughters. A few weeks before out departure, we received her reply:

"Why do you intend to move with your family to Canada? With the climate, the culture— your children will be forever strangers. But there in Zimbabwe they can make their unique contribution to the new Africa of the future…'

Amid predeparture anxieties— that message was undeniably disheartening. But it was understandable.

In exhorting for our contribution to a "new Africa", I wondered if Adriana had in mind our former headmistress in Tanzania. 'Mama' Kamm was a Tanzanian married to a German doctor. Mrs. Kamm was not only a powerful voice for the education of women in Tanzania but was a friend of then president, Nyerere. Her husband, Dr. Kamm, was the country's leading anesthesiologist. Plainly, their 'calling' was in Africa. At the same time, the future of their three biracial children was secure— whether in Africa or in Europe.

But for the mixed heritage children of parents with no such connections—and of rather more modest gifts— a future in Canada seemed a better bet than one in Zimbabwe. In my reply to Adriana, I tried to explain that.

We had been back in Canada for several months before we received Adriana's next letter. By early 1989, our situation was improving— I was working and upgrading my teaching credentials… Yet my previous letter to Adriana in the fall of 1988 was written in the gloom of joblessness, T.'s unhappiness and an eczema flare up…

In her response, Adriana seemed upbeat about her resettlement back in her home city of Talca. At the same time, she assumed we needed cheering up about ours. She addressed her letter to all four of us:

'Sorry, sorry, for the long silence. I apologize my friends! Life here is like a rushing train. I never seem to catch up… The experience of living back in my town is a real adventure. Good things, bad things, creative days and dead days… Rain and cold in winter and an oven now in summer... Hopes and inspiration. Struggle and emptiness sometimes. People around some days and other days of solitude. However, I could say this is happiness– it is life!

Very rarely I write letters now. But I always remember the people I've met before and I care for– – like you, for example.

I can see your stay in Canada is not an easy business. But I know you will overcome difficulties. I'm sure you're there for the right reasons— that is for your girls.

I hope F. has got a good job by now and that T. has finally adjusted to the new country. As you said in your letter, it is much easier for niñitas than a grownup immigrant to learn to love their new surroundings.

Keep courage my friends. Do not be cross because I don't write often enough. I do remember you and love you all. It would be wonderful to meet all of you one day again I can imagine the thousands of things we would talk about!

Abrazos y carinas, Adriana

I am not sure whether the letter from Adriana, dated August 14th, 1990, was her last one to us— or just the last one kept… The letter to which she was responding must have had relatively good news. By 1990, I had steady work. Our girls were healthy and well-adjusted. T. was beginning to work towards her provincial teaching certification and Canadian citizenship. Still, judging from Adriana's reply— I must have mentioned grave bouts of depression– and nostalgia for the vibrancy of Africa left behind...

At the time of her writing, she was in England where she temporarily returned for medical treatments:

I've been here [in London] *since May 1989 waiting to get an operation on my hips. In April, I was operated on in one hip only. I am feeling frustration in trying to recover.*

In September I shall be traveling back to Chile. I will stay in Santiago with my elder daughter and my grandson for a few months. I must look for a job. So you see, life goes on!

F., I hope you have achieved stability in your job by now. I hope T. has been able to take some part time work while the kids are in preschool. And have you moved to the bigger coop housing you were telling me about in your letter of November last year?

I cannot judge your decision of going to Canada. But you can now see how your niñitas are developing. As for your longing of Africa— I believe that one leaves part of one's heart wherever one goes...

I often think of how it is for T. For me, the time away from Chile was always difficult. You say that she feels lonely. That is unavoidable. One always belongs to the land of one's birth!

However, when she feels unhappy, you need not feel a sense of guilt you were talking about. She went with you to Canada on her free will. She's not a child, F.!

We women do take our own lives in her own hands in full consciousness of what we're doing, you know… I think I can understand a bit of T.'s longing. For me it only went away when finally, I was able to go back to Chile. But it left me with this strange emotion towards my own country. In many ways, the feeling of exile still lives with me. The gap produced by separation cannot be filled back...

Thank you for your beautiful picture of you and your niñitas, TE and MT. I do hope life will be much happier for all of you soon. I'll be permanently in Chile now. My love to all your women, F. Keep in touch.

Love Adriana

As always, she was encouraging and wise. I vaguely remember responding to that letter but afterwards, worrying about some little comment I'd made. Was it a bad joke or some cynical remark about politics? I can't remember.

In any case, the months of silence grew to a year and beyond. I wondered whether my last letter had been delivered. Much more taunting was the thought that I had stupidly caused Adriana some offence. Most probably was that she was still working on her *'1000 things.*' Back in her native idiom, maybe it became too tiring to write much in English. Yet I could have written again— even in my wooden Spanish. I did not.

We fell permanently out of touch...

3

It was about a year after her last letter that I came upon the *Guardian* article about '*Colonia Dignidad.'* However shocking, it at least evidenced that Adriana was strongly engaged. Telling her horror story to the world at large, seemed to have become her *raison d'etre...*

Though the years that followed, every news report about Chile made me wonder how Adriana would be reacting to it…

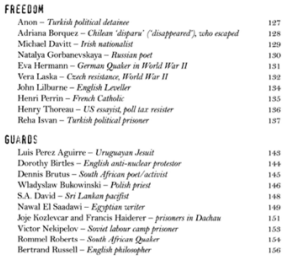
I knew she would be celebrating the end of Pinochet's dictatorship and the ascent of democratically elected governments, even that of Aylwin, the Christian Democrat. I knew she would be keenly following the news of Pinochet's arrest in in Britain and attempts to extradite him to Spain for crimes against humanity… I especially wondered how she would have felt about his death in Chile under house arrest in 2006. (Would satisfaction in just retribution have been tempered by her deep-seated Christianity?) Yet always with her infirmities in mind, I wondered how much of that she had been around to witness...

The first time I took note of Googling her name was in March 2015.

I had come upon an on-line review of '*Conscience be my Guide, an Anthology of Prison Writings* (1992) by G. Bould. In it was a reference to Adriana Borquez. She was described as '*a Chilean disparu who escaped*.' The reviewer quoted lines from her essay in which she describes her immediate reaction to having been tortured with electric shock:

'I freed myself then because I felt bound to my principles of honor and decency, and because I felt afraid of the idea of having to assume the shame of treachery…'

Her reflection was included under the theme of *'Freedom.'* Particularly moving was seeing that her testimonial was anthologized among such contributors as Soyinka, Koestler, Dostoevsky and Thoreau. How proud she must have been! It also occurred in reading that review that if she were still alive, she would be seventy-nine. Were she so— I had no doubt she would still be fighting for social justice…



In March 2022, I dug through her letters for the first time in many years. Admittedly, on that occasion I was not initially intending to read hers. I was rather looking for the single letter I'd received from the dark-haired girl called Patricia, whom I'd met in Chile in March 1976. It had been forwarded to a friend's address after I'd left Canada for Africa. Although I didn't get it until a year later (sadly, too late for a reply), I'd kept it.

After rereading Patricia's plaintive letter in Spanish, I looked again at some of Adriana's in English. Touched by what a treasure they were, I Googled her name for the first time in seven years.

I was surprised by how many more webpage hits there were for Adriana Borquez since the previous search. The one that jumped out was that of '*Colonia Dignidad Asociación por la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos'*. It was an obituary.

On the webpage, the text was in Spanish followed by an English translation. Dated July 21st 2019, it read (in part):

'The demise of our dear comrade, Adriana Bórquez Adriazola, represents a tremendous loss for our Association. Adriana was a distinguished academic and a persistent fighter for truth, justice and memory in the city of Talca, where she currently resided…. Following her detention and kidnapping in the ex-Colonia Dignidad… she went into exile with her family, where she began to share her testimony of political imprisonment in order to denounce the crimes against humanity…

She continued her struggle for justice… Conscious of the importance of sharing the events of forty years ago with new generations, she began to write, among other texts, two books which addressed her life experiences: 'Un exilio' [An exile] *and 'Colonia Dignidad: La vivimos, la conocimos'* [*Colonia Dignidad:* we lived it, we knew it].

Today we remember her as a brilliant intellectual, a tenacious and committed woman, a comrade who will always be present in the memory of all the members of our Association. May the earth rest lightly on you, dear Adriana!

- '*Colonia Dignidad' Association for Memory and Human Rights*

It was both in sorrow and in gladness that those details were taken in. As for the latter, I was happy to find out that Adriana had lived to eighty-three, which was probably a greater allotment than she would have expected back in her forties. She had outlived both Pinochet and the diabolical Paul Schafer .

At the same time, it was wonderful to see that had garnered such accolades. I found several other tributes to her including a eulogy on the Chilean literary website, '*Letralia*, *Tierra de Letras'*. In it she was lauded for her poetry, which she must have continued writing well into her seventies.

The sadness was in having missed twenty-nine years of staying in touch. She probably would have been disappointed to hear that T. and I divorced. But she would have loved to have been assured that our three children fared well.

Deepening the sadness was the reminder that in 2016 my (second) wife, C., and I were briefly in Chile on route to Bolivia. Although we were only in Arica, we could have flown down to Santiago and bussed from there to Tacna. As Adriana said in one of her last letters: '*It would be wonderful to meet all of you one day again. I can imagine the thousands of things we would talk about!'*

Had I only known then that she had been so very much alive!

It was with these thoughts that I prepared to watch the Netflix documentary on '*Colonia Dignidad*.' It was released two years after Adriana's death. Had she been consulted— or even filmed for the project?

I noted that the only episode of the six-part series that dealt directly with the 1973 coup and its aftermath was part # 4, '*A Pact with the Devil'*. Skipping the rest of the series until later, I jumped directly into the dark history in which Adriana was directly involved...

'A Pact with the Devil' is interspersed with archival footage of the colony and its environs. It shows resident youth in Bavarian costumes performing for an audience of military officers and shadowy DINA operatives. There is even a scene of excited colonists greeting the visiting Pinochet, himself. Much of the episode is taken up with interviews of ex-colonists, speaking in Spanish and German (subtitled in English). Along with describing their own abuses by Schafer, they claim to have been only vaguely aware of what was transpiring in the concrete bunker under their meeting hall.

About fifteen minutes into the hour-long episode, is an interview with an elderly woman in a blue sweater. She is identified in a subtitle as having been a '*militante izquierda en Talca'* [leftist

militant in Talca]. Her hair is grey and her face puffy. I immediately recognized Adriana—decades older...

She is sitting in what appears to be her living room with flowers, curio cabinet and a desk lamp in a soft-focus background. Through her interview, she speaks rapidly in a gravelly Spanish. Her hand gestures are vaguely familiar.

She begins with a description of her arrest in the middle of the night. She says she caught glimpses of the DINA agents before she was blindfolded. "*They looked ridiculous,"* she says. *"Everyone wore sunglasses at three in the morning!"*

Trundled onto a bus, she tried to peek under her hood through the journey that followed. "*I knew we were near the mountains*," she says. "*I could smell the cordillera*." She also smelled the countryside, but had no idea where she was being taken...

Upon arrival at the clandestine site, she was locked in a concrete cell. She was brought food by a silent guard but for weeks did not know where she was. The stifled cries from nearby cells confirmed that she was not alone in detention.

She then speaks of her torture.

At the beginning of her ordeal, her interrogator told her she was being hooked up to a lie detector. He said if she answered truthfully, it would go easy for her. The 'lie detector', in fact, delivered electric shocks.

"*Since I'm stubborn*," she says, "*They had to increase the electricity. They went higher and higher. Very high…"* She pauses. "*I forced myself not to think about anything. I didn't think about colleagues, the party structure— nothing*." She holds up her hands. *"Nothing!"*

She then speaks of her endurance over the longer term: *"To keep my sanity, I began to sing. I sang all day long. I sang ballads, I sang 'rancheros'; I sang opera. I sang songs from my girlhood.* With her left hand she mimics moving lips. *"I sang and sang and sang!"*

The scene cuts to the colony boys' choir in white sashes singing 'the Lord is my Shepherd'…

It was eerie hearing again what the much younger Adriana spoke of my living room in Weru-Weru nearly four decades ago. Yet the elderly Adriana in her *'Colonia Dignidad'* interview reveals shocking new details:

She said that music often drifted down through the floor into the detention cells. Over the weeks, certain pieces of music were played before particular detainees were taken out for further interrogation and torture.

"When it was my turn," she says, "*they played Mozart's 'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik.'* She pauses and shakes her head "*I cannot listen to that music ever again!*"

The interview with Adriana continues in a later segment of the episode. *"When I was locked up there for several weeks,"* she touches her eyes, *"I wondered who is going to help my little girl? Who is going to protect her?"*

It was heart-rending to realize that when Adriana was held at *Colonia Dignidad*, Selva was only eight years old.

At the point in the interview, she reveals how she came to suspect some German connection to her location. Almost from the beginning of her detention, she wondered why she sometimes faintly heard voices speaking German as well as Spanish… Then one day, the guard who brought her food told her to be careful of a plate that had a golden rim with a tiny inscription in German.

"I knew I had to be somewhere within a German culture," she says. "*So, from then on I was like a little dog look sniffing around for evidence so that if I got out— I could tell my friends that this prison existed.*"

That scene of Adriana speaking in her living room cuts away to a view of a tree-lined country road leading away from the colony. In voiceover, the narrator intones: *'After weeks of brutal torture, Adriana Borquez was finally released… The junta authorities continued to harass her, but she was able to escape with the help of the Catholic church...'*

For the last time in the episode, the voice of the elderly Adriana is heard in the background of a photo of her travel document. *"I had to give testimony to the human rights committee,"* she says, *"in order to destroy the evil that was the colony..."*

The passport photo shows a beautiful young woman with haunted eyes— nearly a half century before…

The *Colonia Dignidad* documentary was, of course, not primarily about the Pinochet era but about the evils of Paul Schafer. In that context, the 1970s comprised only one of six chapters.

Adriana had not lived to see the film's release. But before she died, she must have known that the documentary was aimed at an international audience—much wider than any she had previously reached though her testimonials and writings. Of course, her testimonials over the years were not about bearing witness to her own victimization — not even only about illuminating a dark chapter in the history of Chile. Her broader aim, as I once heard her say, was to serve a universal warning about the fragility of democracy.

Her fifteen-minute appearance in a Netflix documentary is certainly not a cumulation of her life's work, any more than many Human Rights committee testimonials or even her poetry… But it

must have been gratifying to her, in her final years, knowing that her message was reaching a wider— and younger—audience…

Apart from her politics— and apart from all her achievements lauded in obituaries— Adriana was a sweet person with a gentle sense of humour… Among the '*thousands of things'* I would love to have talked to her about was the hopes for 'liberation theology' amid the rightward lurch of Christianity… I can imagine her righteous anger in denouncing the likes of Franklin Graham or Steve Bannon!

Though it was only for a decade, I am deeply grateful to have been in conversation with a person of such extraordinary courage and integrity. Although her circles of friends no doubt encompassed hundreds, I would like to think that our friendship endured, even after the loss of contact.

In one of her letters, she wrote: *'Go ahead exploring the world... Of course, one has to settle down someday— maybe forced by rheumatism and a longing for rest! But in that future old age, you will be able to sit down to recollect all your experiences. Don't think that time will never come to you— it finally reaches us all….'*

Well, that time has certainly come for me— so now, I offer this recollection. *Abrazas y carinas amiga querida— para siempre!*

1980-1990; 2024

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Oxford, August 1983