

Pine's theoretical sophistication and accessible writing style make this a book that is difficult to put down.

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LEIGH A. PAYNE: *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth Nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008.

For a scholar who studies torture in the context of state-sanctioned violence, Leigh Payne sustains great faith in democracy. In fact, the resiliency and resourcefulness of transitional democracies to confront, process, and utilize horrific "confessions" is a major theme in her valuable book. Payne positions her argument squarely between two competing schools of thought: that the full, graphic accounts of evil-doers (in controlled settings, such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC]) ultimately lead to healing and reconciliation; and the belief that "too much truth" undermines, even endangers, the return to civility. Payne argues for what she terms "contentious coexistence." Rather than aim for consensus about traumatic past events and criminal actors, Payne believes it is healthier and more realistic for societies to allow different interpretations not only to co-exist, but to openly compete.

She develops this argument by focusing on Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and South Africa, countries that have dealt with their most recent repressions in illustrative ways. Her case studies offer differences as well as similarities, both in the nature of the violent regimes and in subsequent efforts toward remedy. Payne structures her volume according to the terms she has devised to name the nine major elements she finds in perpetrator confessions: Performance, Remorse, Heroi[sm], Sadism, Denial, Silence, Fiction and Lies, Amnesia, and Betrayal. She offers close readings of confessions so graphic of deeds so horrendous that, even for a reviewer who spent many years on primary research into these matters, it can be shocking. Payne is to be commended for her clear thinking, rhetorical composure, and grounded language.

Each chapter focuses on a confession of towering importance in a particular country; that confession is then compared with similar ones from different societies. The approach works well, affording both immersion and breadth. It is also a structural means for supporting the overall argument: the sheer range of personality types, circumstances, and social backgrounds that produce agents of state violence mitigates against a homogeneous societal response to their past crimes and present narratives.

Payne astutely calls attention to the theatrical elements of confessions: their “staging” and “performance” in courtrooms, truth commissions, the media. She doesn’t shrink from the fact that perpetrators easily hold the room (as well as the page): they use an array of devices to counter, mitigate, share, justify, and even laud what the new regime considers as their “guilt.” “Doubling” is one such technique: the perpetrator calls up alternate selves—loving son, loyal soldier, patriotic servant to the cause. Narratives of the “born again” genre serve to sever the perpetrator from his past: he has seen the light, repented, is devoted now to humble good works. How then (goes the implicit question), can forgiveness be withheld? Would that not be cruel, unchristian, indecent? Confessions can be diabolically intimate, heightening their power to manipulate. They can tap into past societal complicity to establish an uncomfortable bond with their audience. Past political fears, convictions, and satisfactions are exposed, even put to the test. What did the generals really mean by “security” and “order?” Could *apartheid* ever have equaled *purity*? What really was the price we were willing to pay (or have someone else pay) for our prosperity, safety, “peace of mind”? The confessional arena is one where the spotlight inevitably travels back and forth between the perpetrator, the audience, and the rest of the cast (prosecutors, judges, defense attorneys, witnesses, et al.). The confessional “stage” naturally gives rise to conflicting perspectives, reactions, and desires for the dénouement; there can be no denying and little containing the high and often raw emotion. What do we owe to our beloved dead? To our martyrs? For recovering societies, this is a necessary and lacerating question. Payne argues that efforts to sanitize that which was “dirty” (as in *la guerra sucia*), to suppress hurtful information, and to censor conflict are misguided. Rather, she holds that the very burden of having to *process* these confessions (which are often full of lies, inconsistencies, and double dealing), to *think through* the whole messy, complicated history of the repression, is what transitional democracy is all about.

Let me isolate a perpetrator, South Africa’s Eugene De Kock, whose story contains virtually every complication Payne writes of. “Prime Evil,” his own former death squad colleagues called him; he’d landed in jail on the testimony of one such, who got witness protection. De Kock got two life terms plus 212 years for having run the Vlakplaas, and only appeared at the TRC in the hope of gaining a reduced sentence. He had never intended to participate in what he considered to be a circus. But then a former *askari*, a black criminal who had worked for Vlakplaas as an informant, tried one last time to evade hanging for having murdered a white farmer: as earlier he had made protective deals with the death squad, he now parlayed his testimony against De Kock in an effort (ultimately successful) to escape the noose. The convicted De Kock had nothing to lose; he could now take others down with him. For Payne, “betrayal” is

the hallmark of his “script.” He accuses specific superiors of selling him out to the new democracy.

So instead of being the blue-eyed boy who would be the next general, I’m the leper they must dispose of. ... We at Vlakplaas, and in the other covert units, are by no means the guiltiest of all. That dubious honor belongs to those who assembled us into the murderous forces that we became *and which we were intended to be all along*. And most of them, the generals and the politicians, have got off scot-free.

Even De Kock, who made listeners ill with his descriptions of killing, had some difficult truths to impart. Not that it was enough to get him any reduction for “good behavior.”

Leigh Payne has written conscientiously and well. At times I wished for more nuanced close readings of the texts in question; there is perhaps an overinsistence on discrete categories. But let me not carp. This is an excellent book and its high quality, given the brutal material, was hard earned.

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**EMILIO CRENZEL: *La historia política del Nunca Más. La memoria de las desapariciones en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2008.**

¿Cómo abordar el *Nunca más* argentino sin proponer una mera aceptación de las estrategias discursivas que el informe consolidó respecto al pasado de la dictadura, ni caer en una simple demonización de su complicidad con un tipo de discurso que ha marcado una forma de ‘decir’ sobre el pasado hasta el presente? Esta pregunta es fundamental para abordar *La historia política del Nunca más. La memoria de las desapariciones en la Argentina*, donde Emilio Crenzel realiza el primer estudio detallado del proceso de elaboración del *Nunca Más* en tanto *historia política*. Sin dejar de cuestionar las limitaciones del tipo de ‘verdad’ generada por dicho libro, el estudio enfatiza el *Nunca Más* como espacio político en el que se dio por primera vez una conjunción entre el Estado y los grupos de Derechos Humanos desde los años represivos. Esto remite al modo en que la CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas) fue transformándose y transformando sus relaciones con los organismos de DDHH: la alianza entre la comisión y los grupos de defensa de DDHH, la atribución informal de un derecho de acceso a la información a dichos grupos