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## The chosen one: 1367 José Domingo Cañas

In the district of Ñuñoa, 10 kilometres from the CBD of Santiago, stands a former House of Torture known by its street address '1367 José Domingo Cañas'.

Our exploration of the memorialisation of this site turns, far more than any other, on the relationship between the only person known to have been tortured to death within its walls, and the maternal aunt of that victim. She was Lumi Videla Moya and her aunt, Dr Laura Moya Diaz. The museum and display located on the site of what was, before the coup, a substantial suburban house is very largely the product of Laura Moya's unshakeable dedication to the memory of her niece.

This discussion also takes in, for the first time, the Chilean housing estates known as *poblaciones*.<sup>1</sup> Industrial unemployment following the decline of the saltpetre mines after World War Two, then rural unemployment in the 1960s, brought large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled workers to the capital. Generally they settled in shanty towns (*campamentos*) anywhere there was available land, often enough on the edge of canals, but apt to be washed away during the Andean springwater melt. In answer to the mushrooming urban

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1 Laura Moya, Ricardo Balladares, Claudia Videla, Akison Bruey, Hervu Lara, Andres Carvajal, Mario Aballay, Marcelo Alvarado, *Tortura en Poblaciones del Gran Santiago (1973–1990)*, Colectivo de Memoria Histórica Corporación José Domingo Cañas, Santiago, 2005, p. 131; see also Jorge Ojeda Frex, 'Las Batallas de La Legua', *Alterinfos*, 5 June 2008.

slums, President Frei in the late 1960s accelerated a program by which the state resumed or bought sizeable areas near the declining factories to establish officially recognised encampments called *poblaciones*. Here the immigrants were settled with a minimum of state-provided amenities – perhaps half a dozen working taps, street lighting and communal ablutions, even if individual dwellings went unconnected.



Poster, 1367 José Domingo Cañas, featuring Laura Moya Diaz (left) and Lumi Videla Moya (right).

Source: Photograph by Peter Read, editing Con Boekel.

The excitement of the anticipated Allende victory, then the Allende social program itself, introduced more positive associations than the drugs and delinquency with which the *poblaciones* had been habitually linked by the Santiago upper classes. For many of the residents, *poblaciones* offered the chance of exciting workers' collectives confidently predicted by Che Guevara. Here was a chance to remake Chilean society in Cuban-style worker-livings. Such hopes and dreams were not, of course, unnoticed by the conservatives. The North American correspondent James Whelan overstated the reputation of *poblaciones* as 'lawless bastions of armed terrorists',<sup>2</sup> but they certainly stood high on the military's hit-list at the moment of the coup. And at the top of that list was the *Población Nueva Habana* (New Havana).

New Havana was established in 1969, and during the Allende years took a decidedly radical direction. Instead of the disorganisation usually associated with the *campamentos*, the ad hoc stop-anywhere settlements, the *poblaciones*, like New Havana, were self-constructed blocks composed of 60 families under a delegate who represented the residents in the directorate, the legislative body for the whole *población*. Above the directorate stood a body of seven officials elected in rotation by universal suffrage. The 'General Assembly' was the body of directors who defined the major projects.<sup>3</sup>

Middle-class Santiagans feared and avoided the *poblaciones*. Allende applauded them while his opponents despised them as seedbeds of Latin American communism, if not a precursor to a new Cuba. Plans were laid to strike at them even earlier than the assault on Allende himself. Very early in the morning of 11 September 1973, two war planes made low-level flights over New Havana; all day helicopters flew about menacingly and at night shone their powerful lights into the *población* dwellings. Troops arrived on the 13th to systematically kick in the doors and seize workers and leaders known to them; during the night, patrols shot their guns into the air to intimidate the residents.<sup>4</sup>

2 James R. Whelan, *Out of the Ashes*, Regnery Gateway, Washington, 1989, p. 580.

3 Moya et al., *Tortura en Poblaciones del Gran Santiago*, p. 131.

4 *Ibid.*, evidence of José Moya Paivo, director of the founding group of New Havana, pp. 131–32.

Linking the House of Torture 1367 José Domingo Cañas and the *poblaciones* is the redoubtable figure of the Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Chile, Laura Moya. She had helped to plan and develop the poblaciones, she had applauded and encouraged them, she had worked with their residents, and during the dictatorship, she had suffered with them.

## Laura Moya Diaz

A convinced and unreconstructed Marxist, Laura Moya was fond of displaying her hand ‘that shook the hand of Fidel [Castro]’. Though positioning herself firmly within the intellectual vanguard of the workers’ movement, as a psychiatrist she sought ways to give the community of workers ‘tools and capacities to communally confront health issues, including mental health’.<sup>5</sup> Though she published books on ‘peoples’ doctors’ murdered by the regime, the last 15 years of her life were directed almost obsessively at preserving a personal memory of her niece Lumi, the memorialisation of the site where she was tortured and died, and in seeking justice for those who had killed her.

In the 10 years before her death in 2013, Laura Moya wrote four short books. The first, *1367 José Domingo Cañas: An Experience Not To Forget*, related the story of the site and its victims, detailed the history of the centre, the role of the DINA and brief biographies of 42 ‘Detained Disappeared’ known to have spent some time within its walls. The second, *1367 José Domingo Cañas: More Memories*, provided interviews with survivors, more biographical information and future plans for the memorialisation of the site. The victims were presented not in the random order of the first book but now under categories beginning with ‘Married People’. So Lumi (and her husband Sergio Perez Molina) came first, as she had in the first book. Moya’s third book was most unusual in stressing the relationship between a House of Torture and its local community: *The Repression in the District José Domingo Cañas During the Dictatorship (1973–1990): Memories of the Neighbourhood*. Its epigraph announced the guiding principle

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5 ‘Chile: Fallece Laura Moya, ejemplar luchadora de los DDHH’ [Laura Moya dies, exemplary fighter for Human Rights], *Kaos en la Red*, 26 October 2013.

‘To incorporate the repression of the suburb in collective memory is the best homage to those who suffered at the hands of the DINA for fighting to make a better world’.

Moya’s fourth book was dedicated to Lumi herself: *Lumi Videla Moya: Her Life, Her Struggle, Her Heroic Death*. Very shortly after this labour of love in 2013, her homage complete, Laura Moya died.

There is no doubt that although the people of the nearby *poblaciones* contributed much energy and passion when they climbed over the wire barrier fence of José Domingo Cañas for the first time in 1995, it was Moya’s Marxist passion that brought the site to what it is now. Her social connections with the political elite, her understanding of how to work the bureaucracy, her persistence and her considerable wealth very largely saved the site from being turned into a factory. Her dominating personality won her admirers, but not many friends and not a few enemies. At the time of her death, she had driven away many of her former supporters, but acquired others. Her insistence on advancing the particular memorialisation of her niece above the detained-disappeared believed held in Cañas was at times resented, but in the end Laura held the trumps. The third book in the series, on the repression in the whole district, presents a striking 1995 photograph on its front cover. There stands the house in ruins, burnt, and in process of demolition. A man returning after illegal entry jumps back over the gate. The poster signage reads:

Former Torture Centre 40 Detained Disappeared  
For 21 years we’ve been after the truth and justice.  
Yesterday terror protected the killers. Today the justice system does the same.

I don’t forget. Do you?

A large named photo of Lumi completed the signage outside the house. Did anyone object? It was Laura who had conceived the topic, researched and written the book, paid for the printing and, in all probability, supervised much of the signage on the day of the demonstration.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Carlos Espinoza, dir. and prod., *Las Luciernagas* [The Glow-worms], DVD, 2006.

Some Chilean left intellectuals, while paying lip-service to the needs and desires of the working classes, can be dismissive of their supposed lack of education or assumed naïveté. Laura Moya, putting herself in the Che Guevara-style intellectual vanguard, perhaps stood among them, out of a sense of *noblesse oblige*. From the time she was first able to enter the site in 2000, she encouraged the participation of the *poblaciones* of the precinct, La Legua and La Victoria, in the memorial; one of the first inscriptions on the dividing wall between the house site and its neighbour was the Cuban slogan 'Always Onwards to Victory'.

A picture of Dr Laura Moya, psychiatrist and intellectual revolutionary, begins to emerge. In her third book on José Domingo Cañas she wrote:

The act of giving testimony transforms into a relationship between the giver and those who listen and absorb the testimony. In this sense, if we understand the testimony as a construction of memory, we realise that we are confronting many voices of the heard, the lived, the process of the time, which we recognise as a form of truth of a particular past, which in another form reflects the collective.<sup>7</sup>

Through the somewhat turgid prose we hear the voice of one who never ceased to demand structural change, societal reform from the bottom, and was irritated when the search for the truth of what actually happened at José Domingo Cañas in 1974, and punishment of the perpetrators, was sidetracked into contemporary issues of international human rights. The search for truth was, and should be, unending. To allow the wounds to be silenced, she wrote, was to become complicit in impunity. *We cannot live in a city that forgets its history*.<sup>8</sup>

The information of what had occurred could only, in 2000, be drawn from the people themselves. That year Moya founded the candlelit vigils, each candle representing a victim, outside the site every Wednesday night. At that time very little was known about who had been held in José Domingo Cañas or what had happened to them. Passers-by were invited to join the little groups sitting in a semicircle with their candles, round the list of names of the

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7 Laura Moya, *La Represión en el Barrio José Domingo Cañas Durante la Dictadura (1973–1990): Memoria de los Vecinos*, Fundación 1367 José Domingo Cañas, Santiago, 2013, p. 10.

8 Moya, *La Represión en el Barrio...*, p. 16.

detained-disappeared, on the pavement outside the deserted site. Through many interviews over many months Moya began to systematise and compare the growing dossier. She reflected:

The majority of passers-by to whom we handed a flier explaining the motive of our meetings gave us suspicious looks on first contact. But after we were there every Wednesday without a single absence for ten years, they came to salute us and came closer. Finally many of them became integrated in these vigils, participating in conversations, showing their satisfaction in the warm and sincere ambience that gave them confidence. It was ringed with candles that faintly lit up the place making them feel more secure. The ambience was certainly between us when the cold forced us to light a big brazier in the centre of the circle around which we gathered. Sometimes a maté or a coffee went round the circle from hand to hand.

A participant, surely another Marxist, drew this second word picture:

Little Laura and her gang were in circles chatting and a tasty and excited murmur made a spiral, or better still, a black hole of humanity. They told stories and passing by the fire, looked after it. At this time, to me, the story was the meta-story, the circular set-up and the context of seats, candles and bodies/disappeared human beings. The gesture towards human rights was *text and pretext*.<sup>9</sup>

Rather more poetic was a verse dedicated to the 'curious glow-worm' Laurita:

Your brilliance attracted new glow-worms  
Clearly invading the dark cold nights  
Of winter  
And the hot dusk of summer.<sup>10</sup>

Week by week, month by month, Moya's dossier enlarged. In the darkness she never stopped asking questions. She wanted dates and facts from everyone who came to participate: 'Why are you here?' 'Were you detained in this place?' 'What happened?' 'What else do you remember?' 'Did you speak to anyone also held here?' 'Do you know anyone who was?' 'When?' 'Who?' 'What political party did they belong to?' The chilling picture emerged: DINA trucks would

9 Ibid., p. 18.

10 Roberto Castro, 'Luciernaga Curiosa', in Roberto Castro, *Puerto Futuro*, Edición Luciernaga, Santiago, 2007, p. 35.

back into the building during curfew hours while screams resounded into the street. Neighbours well understood what they had to do: talk about the screams and trucks only behind closed doors and windows. Walk past on the other side of the road. Avoid eye contact with anyone connected with the building.<sup>11</sup>

## Maria Cristina Lopez Stewart

Moya's first book of her series, *An Experience Not To Forget*, relates that it was the mother of the detained-disappeared Maria Cristina Lopez who first contributed to the mystery of her daughter's disappearance.<sup>12</sup> Maria Cristina was a member of the MIR, arrested at the age of 21 by the DINA in a house in the upper-class suburb of Las Condes. Maria Cristina had dreamed, in her adolescence, of parties and clothes, but during her years as a trainee history teacher, she became more serious in her dedication to the helpless and the poor. Maria, her mother continued, was known as a rebel in college, especially in highlighting the different clothes worn by rich and poor. She dressed down to match the poorer students. On completing her last exams, she asked if she could graduate in the college uniform, as the poor were forced to do, and not in the regulation white dresses that upper-class girls wore: permission refused, she stayed at home. The young idealist used to say that she would not sleep on a night in which a child was homeless. Maria Cristina's zeal intensified when, at about 19, she enrolled at the University of Chile to study history, but spent most of her time in trying to alleviate the lot of the poor in the *poblaciones*; it seemed, to her mother, that her greatest happiness lay in being with them and hanging out in their homes.<sup>13</sup>

After the coup, her hiding place betrayed, the DINA came for her on 22 September 1974. For a month her family heard nothing, before receiving an anonymous message, then a call from Maria Cristina herself, on her birthday, 22 November, telling them she was okay, but unable to say where she was nor even whether she had been detained.

11 Espinoza, *Las Luciernagas*.

12 Corporación José Domingo Cañas 1367 [Laura Moya], *Una Experiencia Para No Olvidar*, Corporación José Domingo Cañas, Santiago, 2001.

13 'Maria Cristina Lopez Stewart', in *ibid.*, pp. 41, 57–63. Moya's second volume, *Más Memoria* [More Memories], added that Maria Cristina was always happy, of soft voice and loving smile, a tall and beautiful lady, with skin the colour of honey.



Constantly blindfolded, very probably she did not know that she was being held at José Domingo Cañas. Her health, according to a woman detained with her, began to deteriorate from anaemia exacerbated by the pitiful detainee ration. In all probability she was tortured by beating and electricity to make her reveal the whereabouts of the MIR leader, the charismatic Miguel Enriquez.<sup>14</sup> Though her mother never doubted that she was taken by the DINA, the authorities always denied it, probably to quell the outrage at the disappearance of so many young leftist militants. Nobody knew where she was. Knowing nothing, but suspecting that she might be being held in the better-known detention centre Tres Alamos, Maria Cristina's sister and mother visited it several times a week to be rudely told that nobody was held there by that name.<sup>15</sup> Several survivors remember seeing Maria Cristina in José Domingo Cañas, but nobody has reported seeing her anywhere else. Thus it seems probable, though not certain, that she had died in José Domingo Cañas itself perhaps in late 1974, as a result of malnutrition, anaemia and the effects of torture. Even now, no more is known about her than that Maria Cristina Lopez Stewart is a detained-disappeared.

Whatever the circumstances, in June 1975 the military government published the list of 119 missing militants, mostly members of the MIR, whose bodies had been supposedly discovered in Argentina. The name of Maria Cristina Lopez Stewart was included among them.<sup>16</sup> Several years later, but away from the Cañas vigils, more information about Maria Cristina was coming to light whose ambiguous nature accentuates again the agonisingly fragmentary scraps of information enacted by a policy of 'night and fog'.<sup>17</sup> According to a youthful admirer, Luis Muñoz González, Maria Cristina Lopez immediately following the coup went into hiding and resisted all attempts by her family to persuade her to seek exile. Instead, she threw herself into the resistance. In the months before her detention she asked Luis to

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14 Whether she did so is another matter. Few MIRistas, for obvious reasons, knew the location of his safe house, and the identity of the betrayer remains uncertain.

15 Corporación José Domingo Cañas 1367 [Laura Moya], *José Domingo Cañas 1367: Más Memoria*, Corporación José Domingo Cañas, Santiago, 2007; 'Caso de los 119, operación Colombo', *Exilio Chileno*.

16 'Maria Cristina Lopez Stewart', *Memoria Viva*.

17 'Night and fog' was the policy fostered by the Nazi leader Wilhelm Keitel, who believed it more effective in intimidating the civilian population than publicised executions.

find her a safe house where he could contact her rapidly.<sup>18</sup> His brother Hernán clouded the mystery of her disappearance as late as 2013. He related how, in April 1975, Maria Cristina, looking terrible, very pale and speaking slowly, arrived escorted by DINA troops at his parents' house. They demanded to know the whereabouts of his brother Luis, whom they must have suspected of MIR membership. On being denied, they ransacked the house and threatened to take Hernán away for 'further questioning'. Luis's father was on the point of confessing Luis's whereabouts when Maria Cristina stepped forward and taking him by the hand said, 'Tell them nothing. To resist is the only thing that remains for a proud people'.

Luis Muñoz González did not reveal this curious information publicly until 40 years later, in September 2013. Such were common elements in the life of the detained-disappeared after kidnapping and detention that the candlelight vigils or visits to detention centres could never uncover. If the story is accurate, Maria Cristina was alive and in the hands of DINA five months after it was reasonably assumed that she died. Where had she been? In José Domingo Cañas? Was she being kept alive in the hope of extracting information? Why was she brought to this house? Had she been dragged there in the hope of persuading Hernán to cooperate? Was she killed after this failed attempt, after her heroic advice to reveal nothing? It was only a month later that Maria Cristina's name was published among the 119 left militants who had supposedly fought each other to a fatal standstill in Argentina. The news, though, never reached her sister. Safe in France, racked by the guilt of the survivor, she wrote to Maria Cristina who, unknown to her, had been executed some six years previously:

**I am proud of you**

Today Cristina, you are a prisoner, a disappeared

I am free and safe

I can speak, I can say whatever I think

I was fearful, Cristina, and abandoned my country and left you there  
a prisoner

I had to search for you, guiding my steps and my letters

They watched our house

And I escaped

Now I'm in an immensely rich country

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18 Raúl Caviedes, 'Memoria Historica. Detenidos Desaparecidos. Los Familiares'.

Where there are no *poblaciones*, Cristina!  
 New friends help us  
 There is no danger here  
 Except the immense danger in living securely  
 Without the constant fear of failing in the task  
 The work of denouncing your prison  
 Of [keeping on] meeting more *compañeros* who understand us  
 To meet new friends who'll support us right now  
 2500 *compañeros* are prisoners  
 without trial, without conviction ...<sup>19</sup>

## Lumi Videla Moya

On 4 November 1974 the naked, mutilated body of Lumi Videla Moya was thrown over the wall of the Italian Embassy during the hours of curfew. The grotesque and crude attempt to blame the 250 refugees crowding the embassy grounds for killing her in a Marxist orgy soon backfired amidst hostile international publicity.<sup>20</sup> Among all the martyred opponents of the regime Lumi thereafter became, in no small measure thanks to the efforts of Aunt Laura, a larger-than-life cult hero of the Chilean resistance. Her name has become synonymous with the torture centre in which she died.

Laura Moya's last (and posthumous) tribute to her niece, *Lumi Videla Moya: Her Life, Her Struggle, Her Heroic Death*, added to the considerable amount that she had already written.<sup>21</sup> Laura claimed that Lumi's grandmother Livia founded the Chilean Socialist Party (though her name is not mentioned in some accounts of the birth of the party) while all of her family were leftist militants. By adolescence – we can hear the voice of Auntie Laura so clearly here – she was 'stimulated to learn about nature and its dialectics, to observe human behaviour ... to see the characteristics of different social groups to

19 Composed in about 1981. Maria Cristina's sister does not name herself; 'Maria Cristina Lopez Stewart', *Memoria Viva*; see also Lucía Sepúlveda Ruiz, *119 de Nosotros*, Colección Septiembre, LOM, Santiago, 2005, pp. 321–27.

20 'Quienes y por que mataron a Lumi Videla y arrojaron su cuerpo en la Embajada Italiana de Santiago?' [Who killed Lumi Videla and threw her body into the Italian Embassy, and why?], Villa Grimaldi.

21 Corporación José Domingo Cañas [Laura Moya], *Lumi Videla Moya, Su Vida, Su Lucha, Su Muerte Heroica* [Lumi Videla Moya, Her Life, Her Struggle, Her Heroic Death], Corporación José Domingo Cañas, Santiago, 2013.

gradually come to understand the system of domination by which a social minority exploited the larger'. We can read both the atmosphere of her household, and of the 1960s student experience in which everything seemed possible, in a friend's message addressed to her on her 15th birthday wishing her 'a revolutionary salute from a comrade who always has valued you. May all your ideas always triumph and when we are in the Socialist Republic of Chile, may we know how to fulfil our obligations and accomplish our ideals.'<sup>22</sup>

Lumi and her friends continued to take themselves just as seriously in the years before Allende's election. Before leaving secondary school, she had enrolled in the Young Communists in demonstrations against the US role in Vietnam and Cuba. A friend remembered her there as being combative, a hardened warrior, tremendously daring, brave and audacious, who used to shout out slogans 'like a man' because women students were too genteel.<sup>23</sup> But it was not long before, according to Laura, Lumi found 'contradictions' in the thoroughly working-class orientations of its programs. She shifted her allegiance to the party of the revolutionary left-wing intellectual elite, the MIR.

At the University of Chile, like Maria Cristina Lopez Stewart, Lumi threw herself into the leftist politics of the poor. She spent much time at the radical New Havana *población*, where in 1970 she joined a vigilante group taking 'direct justice' (whatever that meant) against alcohol-sellers and brothel-keepers within the precinct.<sup>24</sup> By 1971, she had become head of the 'Political Militant Group' charged with the organisation of the MIR in Santiago.<sup>25</sup> While at university, too, she met Sergio Perez Molina. They married in 1960; in 1970 Lumi bore a son, Dago Emiliano Perez Videla.<sup>26</sup> While Sergio spent the whole of 1972 in Cuba learning the strategy and tactics of an urban revolutionary,<sup>27</sup> Lumi was at the forefront of another MIR initiative, the Revolutionary Workers Front.<sup>28</sup>

22 'Mireya', quoted, Moya, *Lumi Videla Moya*, p. 20.

23 Nora Astica, quoted, *ibid.*, p. 25.

24 Moya, *Lumi Videla Moya*, p. 31.

25 'Lumi Videla Moya', *Punto Final*, 19 December 2013.

26 Moya, *Más Memoria*, pp. 34–35.

27 Testimony of Dago Perez Videla, *La Memoria Rebelde*, p. 71.

28 Moya, *Lumi Videla Moya*, p. 33.

From this point Lumi Videla's story is intertwined with that of Sergio. Like all MIRistas (following the edict that MIRistas should not and did not seek exile) the couple went into hiding, and for a year sheltered in a safe house. Following a request made to the clandestine but still hierarchical leadership, the parents stepped back from the struggle for a few months in order to care for Dago Emiliano. But not for long. Aunt Laura revealed a poignant moment during Dago's fourth birthday 'hot chocolate' party, to which the neighbouring kids were invited. Drawing Laura aside, and looking through the window into the distance, Lumi and Sergio told Laura that they had decided to resume the struggle of resistance to the dictatorship. Recognising the risk of torture and death of the child as well as themselves, they asked her to look after him. Thereafter their contacts with Dago were confined to Laura's reassurances, from her own safe house, that the child was safe from DINA persecution and the threat that if the child was found he might well be tortured in front of his parents to force confessions.

No Santiago safe house was really secure. The parents must have known that any wanted leftist, especially MIRista, might be recognised and betrayed, even while walking or cycling in the street. Lumi and Sergio undertook that if one of them were detained, as would be apparent by their failure to return home, then that partner would do their best to hold out against torture for 24 hours in order give the other time to escape. This was exactly what should have happened: spotted walking in Gran Avenida by the informer Marcia Merino Vega, Lumi Videla was detained. She was supposed to be home by 1 pm. By 9 that night Sergio was 'very worried' about her. Inexplicably, he did not take her absence to be the sign that clearly, in retrospect, she had been detained. He remained at home and was himself detained the next morning. Lumi had begun 43 terrible days of detention, and had presumably resisted the first 24 hours of torture within the walls of José Domingo Cañas.

The capture of Sergio Perez Molina shortly afterwards was taken to be a particular coup – as a senior member of the MIR he was savagely tortured to reveal the names and whereabouts of its leadership, especially that of its elusive general secretary Miguel Enriquez.

Lumi's period of detention in José Domingo Cañas is better known than that of any other detainee. One story relates that, comforting a young detainee who had been returned to the holding cell horrifically

tortured by electricity, she remarked 'this boy has become a man'. The biographical listing 'Memoria Viva' lists depositions of several people associated with her, including several who saw and talked with her in the house of torture. The online archive reveals that the initial beatings and torture of Sergei failed to extract any information about the MIR leadership.<sup>29</sup> Cañas commandant Contreras resorted to more desperate measures. In the expectation that other MIRistas held in Cañas would be sufficiently overcome by the sight of the tortured Sergio to reveal Enríquez's hideout, several, including Lumi, were brought to him to find him savagely tortured. They were told that medical attention would be sought for him if they revealed the address. Next day the detainees were again brought in to find Sergio in a worse state than before, vomiting blood and with a new bullet wound in his leg. Even when Lumi was removed from his cell, his terrible screams and pleadings to be killed went echoing round the whole building. Later Lumi asked to say goodbye to him, which she was allowed to do for a minute.<sup>30</sup>

Sergio Perez, now very near death, was then driven to one of the DINA's 'clinics', where, according to the infamous torturer Osvaldo Romo Mena, in the sinister Spanish idiomatic phrase 'le dieron duro', 'they gave it to him hard'. It was here that he died. Perez, like Maria Cristina Lopez Stewart, remains officially a 'detained-disappeared'.

At this point the curious personage of Luz Arce Sandoval enters the story. A militant Socialist during the Allende years, Luz Arce was first arrested and tortured in 1974. She consented to act as informer for the DINA, at first to provide names and addresses, later to pose as a detainee in several houses of torture.<sup>31</sup> Yet on finding herself sharing the same cell as Lumi Videla, doubtless having been placed there to report conversation, she seems to have been overwhelmed by the calm and resolute presence of her cellmate. In her book, *The Inferno*, she claims to have confessed to Lumi her role of agent provocateur. Lumi replied, if Arce is to be believed, that she too was trying to curry favour with the guards in order to find out as much as she could, presumably to be revealed later on her hoped-for release. From this distance it seems more likely that the DINA officers were playing with

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29 'Lumi Videla Moya', Memoria Viva.

30 'Videla Moya, Lumi', Centro de Estudios Miguel Enriquez.

31 'Lumi Videla Moya', Memoria Viva.

Lumi to gain information, rather than the reverse. Whatever the truth, Luz replied, 'Lumi, don't trust any of them. It is one thing for any one of them not to beat you and give you a cigarette, and another thing altogether for them do something for you, something that would go against the DINA.' In an affecting moment, perhaps exaggerated in the light of Luz Arce's later confession and public contrition, the terrifying circumstances brought the two women closer. Lumi told her companion:

You're from the Socialist party and I'm from the MIR. We are both trying to do something. I realise that we can't both win. We are doing two very different things. I can't do anything else. I've thought about it and I can't.

Luz replied, 'Lumi, you're acting with a short-term goal. And you'll die whether you achieve it or not. You're committing suicide.'

On their last meeting, when Luz Arce was suffering from fever, Lumi Videla insisted that she swap her own, elegant brown leather jacket for Luz Arce's miserable and holey knitted sweater. *When we aren't together any more, it will be like a hug from a friend.* She was already destined for terrible torture and death within a few days. One authority represents the moment as Luz Arce seeking 'a kind of absolution from a woman destined for martyrdom'. Whatever the truth, Luz Arce says that she received the first intimation of the death of her new-found soulmate when she saw two of the guards rolling dice as to who would get her clothes.<sup>32</sup>

It was not until 2001 that it was officially confirmed that Lumi had been asphyxiated, perhaps even accidentally, to stifle her screams. Her body had been thrown over the embassy wall as a reprisal for an attack on a DINA agent shortly before, and to punish the Italian ambassador for taking in so many refugees.<sup>33</sup> Laura Moya claimed that such was the international revulsion at the DINA's actions that not

32 Luz Arce, *The Inferno: A Story of Survival and Terror in Chile*, tr. Stacey Alba Skar, University of Wisconsin Press, London, 1984; see also Jean Franco, foreword to *Luz Arce and Pinochet's Chile*, p. xiv.

33 Jorge Escalante, 'Asesinato de Lumi Videla: El "Guatón" Romo contó que el general Garín le pagó por su silencio' [Murder of Lumi Videla: 'Pot Belly' Romo reveals that General Garín paid him for his silence], *La Nación*, 25 July 2007.

only was torture within Cañas reduced, but was instrumental in the abolition of the DINA the following year, to be replaced with a new, though similar organisation, the CNI.<sup>34</sup>

Removed from the embassy, Lumi Videla's body was hurriedly buried in a family tomb, and in no little danger to the mourners. Flowers arrived anonymously, a few friends arrived in cars without identifying licence plates. In 2004 Lumi was reburied, the cortège halting while tributes were paid at the famous Memorial to Victims of the Dictatorship in the General Cemetery, some 200 metres from Patio 29. Only two people were required to carry the box containing her bones. They were Lumi's aunt Laura and her son Dago. *You left dead. Now you return alive.*

Legal proceedings began in 2006, initiated by Laura Moya and Dago Videla. In 2007 the Court found that Lumi had been murdered, and that Sergio Perez Molina had been kidnapped by DINA officials, which constituted a crime against their human rights. For the murder of Lumi Videla, Manuel Contreras received a sentence of 15 years and a day, Krassnoff Martchenko received 10 years and a day, and the officer who held her down while she suffocated, Willeke Floel, five years.<sup>35</sup>

Another sign of passing times were the reflections of Dago Perez Videla, the little boy who only saw his parents together for a brief four years before both were captured and tortured to death. On the 40th anniversary of her death, he tried to resolve his emotions in broken phrases that seem just a little wistful:

I want to thank my mother Lumi Videla and my father Sergio Pérez, because thanks to them I have looked straight, always hold my head high to carry a blazing heart, and having the strength to demand justice and follow their lead. They gave me the best example that a son can follow and I want to thank them the best example that a son could have, and I give thanks to them in front of all your compañeros.<sup>36</sup>

34 The new organisation, founded in 1977, was the CNI, the more euphemistically named 'National Information Centre'; interview Laura Moya by Marivic Wyndham, August 2013; Whelan, *Out of the Ashes*, p. 736.

35 Moya, *Más Memoria*, pp. 36–37; see also Escalante, 'Asesinato de Lumi Videla' [Murder of Lumi Videla...].

36 Quiero agradecer a mi madre Lumi Videla y a mi padre Sergio Pérez, porque gracias a ellos he podido mirar de frente y tener siempre la frente en alto, tener un corazón ardiendo y tener la fortaleza para pedir justicia y para poder seguir su camino, ellos me dieron el mayor ejemplo que un hijo puede tener y yo tengo que agradecerlos delante de todos sus compañeros.



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Meanwhile, a law of 1990 provided that houses seized by the military should be returned to their proper owners. The empty house soon was reoccupied by drug dealers and petty criminals; some of the homeless saw the ghosts of the disappeared. Tiles cracked, a window broke, the garden went wild. Neighbours, some concerned about the deterioration, souvenired bits and pieces and wondered how the decay could be stopped.<sup>37</sup> Some time in 1999, workmen paid by the owner of the toy store next door arrived to begin the destruction of Casa Domingo Cañas 1367. Within a week the site was empty, the pool filled in, the door constructed by the DINA to allow secret ingress from the house next door was blocked, and a steel fence erected outside.

Since Lumi's death Laura Moya had never once visited the site, nor barely mentioned her niece. The destruction of the House of Torture seemed to have galvanised her into active memorialisation. From 2000 she became, as she put it, 'la persona indicada' – the chosen one. In December she began the foundation that would, more than a decade later, in part fulfil her vision of what she termed a collective memorial – an evocation designed to 'disturb the present time through the collective actions lived by the people in the past'.<sup>38</sup> The Wednesday evening vigils began. On behalf of the foundation she began involved negotiations with several ministries to acquire the site and establish a House of Memory. Under her direction, students from Ñuñoa produced a maquette of a remarkably ambitious precinct incorporating not only 1367, but the blocks each side. A splendid five-storey building on the left, Laura explained, would be for 'accommodation', but who would live there, or who would pay for it, was far from clear. Despite the misplaced optimism there came some tangible successes.<sup>39</sup> In 2002 the Cañas site, after vigorous lobbying, was named a National Historic Monument. At least the site could no longer be built over nor demolished by the toy shop owner. In 2006, in answer to Laura Moya's ceaseless lobbying, several government departments agreed to acquire the site, construct the House of Memory and ultimately cede ownership to the corporation. The House of Memory itself, though far from Laura Moya's hopes, was opened in April 2010.

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37 Espinoza, *Las Luciernagas*.

38 Moya, *Memoria de los Vecinos*, p. 69.

39 Moya, *Más Memoria*, pp. 105–7.

In what was probably her last interview before her death, Laura Moya confessed to a little disillusionment. The structural changes to society that she, as a dialectical materialist expected, had not occurred. Nor was anyone even demanding them any more. Truth and justice for the detained-disappeared seemed as far away as ever. Young people seemed too sceptical to take part in political protest, and those involved seemed less dedicated to defending the rights of the working peoples. They were militant for a while, then went off to pursue their own desires. Human rights? How could there be talk of human rights when classes were still not equal. Without drivers like ‘justice’ and ‘truth’ the future was empty. The local communities, which had done so much to protect the Cañas site even before Laura was involved, were less interested than they had once been; the neighbourhood was becoming more middle class. She had donated her Marxist-inspired library to the people, and sold her magnificent architect-designed home in Las Condes to fund early construction, and jumped in whenever money was needed urgently; but the state had not fulfilled its share of the contract. Her last words recorded in this interview concerned how she saw the future: ‘I see [it] as very grey. I won’t say black.’ Her last words, after turning off the recorder were, ‘You know, I am totally the boss of this place. Just me.’<sup>40</sup>

What remains today of Laura Moya Diaz’s vision of the complex she dreamed of we will consider in the final chapter. At this point, we turn to 2006 after the House of Torture itself had been destroyed, the grounds desolate and dusty, not even locked any more. The presence of Laura Moya is already everywhere, but does not yet overwhelm the voice of the *poblaciones*. Anyone can do ‘the tour’ just by entering the unlocked gate and walking about. Though the walls on each side carry much signage and political exhortation, the principal space where stood the house, its garden and swimming pool is barren, neglected and overgrown and depressing.

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40 Laura Moya, interview, 2012.

## The tour, 2006

In front, between the footpath and the road, stands a monument listing the names of the 42 detained-disappeared. The name of Lumi Videla, politically executed, is not, of course, among them, she's on the more prominent other side. Carved thus on the side facing the road is the inscription:

In this House, José Domingo Cañas 1367, in the year 1974 during the Dictatorship 1973–1990, 42 compañeros became Detained Disappeared.

And murdered under torture

Lumi Videla M.



Lumi Videla Moya's name is the only one to appear on this side of the memorial stone at José Domingo Cañas. The names of others believed held here but who may have been killed elsewhere are on the other side, facing the pavement.

Source: Photograph by Peter Read, editing Con Boekel.

On the right-hand side, the dividing stone wall between the site and its neighbour, is painted an arresting mural of four naked men and women suspended, in obvious agony, by ropes tied to their hands. The protruding, unnaturally wide rib cages and the elevated position

of the women's breasts on their bodies suggest that this depiction is by no means imagined. Some years after production, apparently on request by one or two neighbours, the genitals of the figures were painted over with loincloths as well as the women's faces. The painting is now restored, but that first urgency to communicate something truly terrible is no longer evident. Beside the depiction are the words:

They murder the flesh  
But not the idea

On a neighbouring wall is a proud mural painted by the *población* 'La Victoria' depicting women, men and children waving or bearing arms and flags. It reads:

For You. Always Were Are and Will Be (*Población La Victoria*).

Another nearby painting depicts two arms emerging from a pool into which a stream flows. On it are inscribed the words:

The fallen...  
Eternal springs of life

An unsourced plaque:

And if on the other hand  
they were to survive  
in the truth  
of a fellow man  
in the broken voice  
of a spokesman  
of the people

The most poignant and poetic of the markers is a poem by the Uruguayan leftist exile poet Mario Benedetti:

Then if they return as birds  
To perch once again  
On the ruins of the future  
As a good omen  
To meditate on the earth  
And its divisions.

(Tr. Paula González Dolan)



Bureaucratically destroyed signage, José Domingo Cañas. Originally the message read, 'Here were committed the/Most ferocious violations/Of human dignity/For this reason we demand/JUSTICE AND PUNISHMENT'.

Source: Photograph by Peter Read, editing Con Boekel.

The last and most visible words painted on the wall on the left, and opposite the graphic images of the suspended detainees, are inscribed by the people of La Legua.<sup>41</sup>

Here were committed the  
Most ferocious violations  
Of human dignity  
For this reason we demand  
JUSTICE AND PUNISHMENT

It is signed 'Brigada Pedro Rojas. [Población] La Legua'.<sup>42</sup>

The voices of the *poblaciones* were not entirely broken by the coup. We will find no stronger public statement by onsite victims of the regime in all of Chile.

41 'La Legua', Wikipedia.

42 La Legua is another of the *poblaciones* that, like La Victoria, has contributed to the signage of Cañas. It was the first of the *poblaciones* to be created, in 1947, following the closure of several saltpetre mines. The allusion to 'Brigade' may allude to a brigade dedicated to a particular purpose commonly formed within the Chilean Socialist Party.

This text is taken from *Narrow But Endlessly Deep: The struggle for memorialisation in Chile since the transition to democracy*, by Peter Read and Marivic Wyndham, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.