

A "Funa" in Australia?

Peter Read

Copyright ©2009 Peter Read. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged

Abstract: A Funa in Chile is a public denunciation of a person identified as associated with crimes against humanity during the Pinochet regime. It begins as a web site notice of a planned procession, to be followed by a peaceful rally and demonstration. Some involve no more than thirty people, others, particularly those directed at notorious figures, have attracted thousands.

My questions are: What is the effect of Funas in Chile? Could a Funa occur in Australia? Against whom? Who would organise it? For what reason? What would be the consequences?

In discussing the question I will draw upon my recent work in reconciliation studies both in Chile and Aboriginal Australia

Key Words: Funa, Chile, Australia, Aboriginal Reconciliation Studies, Chilean Reconciliation Studies

While the Chilean state declines to punish the murderers and torturers of the Pinochet regime, runs the popular reasoning, then the people will have to do it. One form of punishment is the funa, a public denunciation of a former official of the regime who has so far remained unpunished. My paper asks: could such a public denunciation occur in Australia?

The funa occurs outside the home or workplace of the accused. In preparation for each such denunciation, the 'Funa Commission of Chile' posts on the web the chosen starting-point, usually a street corner. The exact destination, however, is not divulged. The crowd – it may be fifty, it may be many hundreds - assembles with placards, flags and loudhailers. At this point the destination, perhaps twenty minutes' march away, is now revealed. The procession begins. Marching, or ambling, to the dwelling or workplace, the leader shouts

Si no hay justicia...(If there is no justice...)

And the crowd roars in response

Hay funa ! [There is Funa]

While the invocation literally translates 'If there is no justice, there is Funa' it carries the deeper implication that 'for as long as there is no justice carried out by the state, then there is the funa of the people'. Arrived and assembled, the crowd joins together in the public denunciation of the named killer or torturer, whom the Chileans call the 'condenado', the 'condemned'. The funa concluded, the participants then disperse.

Such a conclusion may seem rather anti-climactic, but granted the limitations in which the Chilean government moves (or chooses to move) the funa is grounded in a sound sense of the possible. Only a handful of very senior Pinochet officials have been prosecuted and imprisoned by a government whose formal investigations have worked very energetically to name the victims and their sufferings, but refused to move against all but a very few of the most infamous perpetrators.

Funas originated in Argentina, and first were led by the survivors or close family of the disappeared. Some lasted for a week, the 'funistas' camping outside the dwelling, Argentinians sometimes describe the Chilean version, some of which last not much more than an hour, as feeble in comparison. Yet some funas are not without danger for the participants. Any major funa in the Santiago CBD will be closely observed by busloads of police, water-cannon and tear gas ready. In August 2007 an Argentinian cameraman covering a funa was arrested for 'public disorder', and only released on condition that he return to his country immediately, while a Chilean reporter received a death threat for his 'dishonest' reporting of the same funa. Another funa crowd was attacked by neo-nazis but the police, allegedly under orders from a mayor unsympathetic to historical revisionism, failed to protect them.

A funa that I attended took place in December 2007. The website began

Nelson Edgardo Haase Mazzei is funa'd

Our organisation carried out a new action of denunciation, this time concerning a 'prosperous entrepreneur' whose curriculum [life history] follows:

Then followed the terms of denunciation: Mazzei was Chief of the Operation Group, DINA (Pinochet's secret police), and participated in the repression of 11 September 1973, of the Osorno region in the south of the country. Five further paragraphs identified Mazzei as within the circle of Manuel Contreras, the hated leader of DINA, now in jail. Prisoners remember him as arrogant, a man supreme in power and devoid of pity, who always carried an electric cattle prod in his car. The website pre-denunciation then shifted to the present: Haase still carries, it claimed, the same attitudes as head of his export firm Haase SA. An alcoholic, he maltreats and exploits his workers, harasses the women and denies permission to union activities

We gathered as directed at a principal street corner of the industrial suburb of Macul. An organizer distributed leaflets, containing the same web information to which now were added the address of his work premises in Macul, his home address in the exclusive suburb of Las Condes, and the number plate of his Mercedes. It was clear that we were to process not to his home but to the warehouse.

Someone handed me a couple of leaflets, the first the war cry, 'Si No Hay Justicia....
The second read

Se Viene la Funa!!!

Otro chancho muerde el

Polvo...nos juntamos en Jose Pedro Alessandri (Macul)

con Rodrigo de Araya el

Viernes 30 de noviembre

A las 17.30 horas

Si No Hay Justicia
Hay Funa

Here comes the Funa
Another pig bites
The dust... We gather on [the corners of] Jose Pedro Alessandri (Macul)
and Rodrigo de Araya on
Friday 30 November
At 5.30

The crowd numbered about fifty, mostly under twenty five years of age, dressed rather like Australian students at a demonstration; but I noticed very few of the blue eyed and blond haired which signify Chile's upper classes. The group was probably all under forty years of age: perhaps none of the majority had clear memories even of the end of the Pinochet era in 1989. Two or three motor cycle police seemed to be watching from the other side of the road, to the evident satisfaction of some of the crowd who took their presence as a validation of what was to come. The mood was expectant rather than tense; neither sombre nor carnivalesque, affirming rather than defiant. One of two of the crowd looked familiar to me as members of the leftist collectives which take part in the weekly evening vigils outside several well known former torture and disappearance centres in the city. After twenty minutes the motorcycles drove off and did not return, to the disappointment of some. Hundreds of leaflets whirled through the air like ticker tape. Shortly afterwards

The procession began. Perhaps to avoid traffic congestion we turned right immediately off the main street, then left, and entered the domestic neighbourhood. The chants began
Si no hay Justicia,
The crowd knew all the responses by heart. They roared in response
Hay Funa!

Many residents of the comfortable, gated houses, seeming more curious than threatened, came out to watch or take leaflets. One slammed the gate, but another, evidently the owner of a hair salon within, allowed herself to be photographed holding a leaflet as if in approval. To this neighbourhood, perhaps, the funa is yesterday's politics. Indeed, one has to have been born by about 1953 to hold the coup in adult memory.

The cantor took up a new chant
Alerta/Alerta/
Alerta Vecinos
Al lado de su casa /
trabaja un asesino

Beware/Beware
Beware Neighbours
Beside your house
Works an assassin!

The insistent rhythm brought to my mind the youthful quasi-orgasmic exhortations of Castro's twelve year old demagogues

Abajo!Abajo!
Abajo el fascism!

Round another corner and into the street containing Haase's warehouse. Here the houses looked less prosperous, the people older. Those who came outside these dwellings to watch the straggly procession seemed more apprehensive. Was it because they once supported the left collectives, and paid the price, or simply because they remembered?

A new chant, clearly directed at the government, in the same 4/4 time.

El baile de los ministros/
Lo bailan los asesinos

The dance of the ministers
Is the dance of the murderers.

And another directed at all those whom the Chilean state refuses to pursue:

Como/los Nazis los seguimos/
Nos vamos a funar

Just like we pursued the Nazis
We're going to funar (you)

On each occasion the crowd, thoroughly familiar with the first line, shouted its response in the second. The analogy with a religious procession long familiar in Catholic countries grew stronger as I watched the cars and pedestrians carefully negotiate our progress. No shouts of support or toots of disapprobation, this funa seemed just another peaceful procession to be avoided.

The ritual continued as we arrived and the crowd spread out on the road in front of a high fence and its two locked wooden gates. Two people unfurled the same banner which appeared in the web announcement. It read 'El sueño del pueblo se hace a mano y sin permiso', 'This is the dream of the people made by hand and without permission'. The pointing hand accused both the criminal action and the government inaction.

The leader mounted the small stepladder he had been carrying. He read out the whole 800-word denunciation while the crowd followed his reading aloud, sounding to me oddly like the recitation of the Creed in the Anglican Holy Communion liturgy, mumbling, straggling, and a second or two behind. The warehouse remained close and silent. Someone threw a packet of leaflets over the wall.

The litany continued with the mocking, rhythmic cry

Catamba! Catamba! /
Hola. Que tal/
Aqui hay un milico/
Que se va a funar

Hey! Hey! How are you going
Here is a milico [in contemporary Chilean, a military assassin]
Who is going to be funa'd

Now the President of the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos, (Group for the Families of the Detained Disappeared) got on the ladder to put the event in the wider context of the failure of the government to prosecute the criminals of the past. 'These things can't be allowed to go on, it's time they were brought to justice'.

If this was people's power, it was no lynch mob, more like a formal de-consecration of a wicked priest proceeding to its foregone conclusion. The speeches ended. No one had shouted out 'Are you inside you pig?' or 'Why don't you come out?' The presence of the condemned seemed not even to be required and there would be no appeal. The sacrament was complete and the subject of the funa would carry the disgrace forever. The sense of a ritual ended was strengthened again for me when, as everyone was preparing to leave, the big gates unexpectedly suddenly swung open. I watched a little apprehensively. Would Haase emerge? Would it be a bunch of thugs ready to beat us up? At first nobody came out. The widening gates revealed a few men standing around, some reading the leaflets. The workers were anything but angry, and the man who had opened the gate looked at us expectantly.

Yet none of the funa crowd took the slightest notice. The point at last clarified. This was no attempt to recruit support or even to discuss the current activities of the workers' boss. Funas are public performances. No one is to interfere with the liturgy. The role of the people, as in Hindu ritual, is to strengthen the rite through mass participation. Justice is ceremonially delivered and the people are its agents.

Later I asked several older members of the Agrupación what they thought of the funa as a process. One or two disapproved: it's rough justice, they said; there is a possibility of error; we did not fight against tyranny for 18 years in order to replace it with show-trials. But so far, I was assured, there have been no mistakes of identity, only one of a mistaken address. One funa'd official is said to have killed himself, but another retorted to the assembled crowd, 'We should have killed the lot of you'.

Funas, perhaps, are useful for everyone, for the left, for the government, and for the armed forces of the right. The revolutionary Chilean left, once so strong, is now disunited and has nowhere to go. Peaceful vigils outside torture centres allow room for harmless condemnation of government inaction. So too do the large funas, at which the crowd sings the Internationale, condemns the US government for its imprisonment of Cuban political prisoners, and applauds speeches in praise of Castro. Much fury is expressed over the centre-left government's social policies, its failure to name the perpetrators of state violence, and its handling of Indigenous issues. Another army coup remains a remote, but perpetual possibility. Perhaps the funa is the unspoken agreement between government and the left: we each do what we can. Condemn us if you must and within reason we, the state, will look the other way. The military itself may find the funa useful. Since Pinochet's death, and as younger officers continue to assume the higher commands, an attitude may be developing that from now on the old guard will have to look after itself, provided that the army itself is not humiliated by state-driven public trials and prison sentences.

The funa of the killer of Victor Jara, was of a quite a different order. A popular left-activist entertainer enjoying something of the status of Pete Seeger, Jara was killed in the first days after the coup. Ignoring his family's pleas, he insisted on attending what was to have been a function led by Allende at the Technological University of Santiago on the 11th of September. Next day with hundreds of others he was arrested and taken to what is now the Victor Jara Stadium where he was recognised by a tall, blond Chilean known as '*el principe*', the prince, who reportedly said, 'This one's for me'. Jara was horribly tortured, especially by *el principe* for several days before being murdered. It was not until 2006 that *el principe* was identified as working as Dimter Bianchi, a senior bureaucrat of a government department working in the CBD of Santiago. A massive funa was arranged. Such were the passions, grief and fury of the *funistas* on that day that the video of the Funa of Victor Jara, can still reduce an audience to shocked silence.

Early in the video we see the planning taking place, including the crucial question of who amongst the *funistas* will enter the building to ascend to the high level office where Bianchi will be at work. The procession begins. Camera following, some twenty people push their way through forming a crush so tight that neither the cantor nor his step ladder can squeeze in. He ascends his podium in the passage outside to begin the denunciation while those inside set about Bianchi. Amidst the uproar of shouts and execrations we see Bianchi at his desk, trying to rise. Perhaps in the commotion the camera was jostled or lost focus for a few seconds, for next we see him still in his neat trousers, white shirt and tie, but now lying on his back on his desk, legs waving in the air like a cockroach. Everywhere the *funistas* are screaming or brandishing huge photographs of Jara. Bianchi tries to shield his face from the faces and the cameras with his arms and hands. In panic he seizes the nearest poster which a protester is pushing into his face. It is a photograph of Victor centimetres from his nose. Someone pushes open the window, possibly to allow the huge crowd waiting below to hear the commotion. Above the tumult, outside in the passageway, another camera follows the cantor calmly reading the official denunciation. No one can hear a word. After twenty minutes the *funistas* leave the building and the cantor, now mounted on his ground-level ladder, repeats the denunciation through a megaphone to the crowd outside which now follows and recites the text word by word.

In the widest sense funa may represent a trend in the western world towards civil governance, in which 'the people' act in the name of human rights wherever government is perceived to be quiescent or unwilling. Whistle-blowers, local citizenry and investigative reporters converge on the belief that the defence of human rights is no longer a state responsibility alone. Indeed, a democratic state may sometimes oppose the exercise of certain rights, and for a variety of reasons. The funa too is a recognition that in modern civil society justice must sometimes be administered in many forms and by several interest groups.

Australia has little equivalent to the Latin American sense of public exposure. Attempts to 'out' unpunished or former criminals in Australia have been more ludicrous than useful. Occasionally people may gather outside the homes of a convicted child molester to denounce him, but generally only to drive him out of the suburb. One or two former Nazi death-squad officers have been bailed up at airports or outside their homes, but these too generally end in denials and farcical anticlimax.¹

Clearly such attempted exposures of past crimes are not the place in which to find Australian funa equivalents, for such issues do not morally touch the nation deeply enough. But while Chileans since 1990 were confronting the executions, tortures and disappearances of the seventeen years of Pinochet terror, Australians were grappling with something much more relevant, the long persecution of Indigenous Australians. The equivalents of the Rettig² and Valech³ reports were the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Enquiry into the Stolen Generations 'Bringing Them Home' and the Final Report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.⁴ The fate of all three, so disappointing to the present author in terms of government response, were the nearest Australia was able to come to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission into the treatment of Aboriginal Australians.

In truth the several analogous Commissions in Latin and Central America have not been without their critics. The results, according to a recent analysis in *Radical History Review*, all showed an implied preference for catharsis and forgiveness over punishment.⁵ The three best known of South America are those of Argentina, Chile and Guatemala. Like 'Bringing Them Home', these Enquiries tended towards the narrative rather than the forensic. They sided to with the collective truth of the victims, presenting history less as a collective conflict of interests or ideas, more as violations of individual human rights beyond the constitutional or legal rules of each country. Resistance, especially collective resistance, was not a major theme of any of the reports. Rather, the enquiries of both Australia and Latin Americas tended to steer away from the deep structural, racist or economic issues which had led to the violence. Privileging and validating the individual experience of trauma and healing turned the focus away from the inequities of the social structure. Despite the comparative innocuousness of the recommendations, the Guatemalan and Argentinian governments distanced themselves from the Final Reports, while successive centre-left Chilean governments have remained mindful that the national need for national unity might arguably be greater than natural or restorative justice.

¹ 'Justice Denied' Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, *The Review*, Jan 2000

² The Rettig report, or the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation Report', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rettig_Report

³ National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report, 2004, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valech_Report

⁴ Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The Royal Commission and its Records, http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/Publications/research_guides/pdf/black_deaths.pdf; 'Bringing Them Home. The Stolen Children's Report (1997), http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/index.html

⁵ Editorial introduction, *Radical History Review*. Winter 2007 (#97), 3-7. The journal's editorial criticized *Memory of Silence*, the twelve volume Guatemalan Report of 1991 which followed 34 years of internal conflict and 200,000 dead, for narrowing the narratives through which the past is understood. The editorial claimed that the Report only merely individualized violations of human rights and neglected to identify victims also as social actors or activists for social change.

The similarities between the history of these enquiries, and 'Bringing Them Home', not least the responses of the respective governments, are intriguing. To the Recommendations of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Commission' the Labor government's response was sympathetic, but few of the recommendations were implemented.⁶ The succeeding conservative government distanced itself decisively from *Bringing Them Home* first by refusing to apologise to the Stolen Generations, then acceding to few of the Bringing Them Home Report's 64 Recommendations. Prime Minister Howard stated 'I do not believe, and have always strongly rejected, notions of intergenerational guilt'⁷ Meanwhile the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was moving towards its own conclusions, due ten years after its establishment in 1990. Its 2000 its Final Declaration included the proposition 'Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of the past so that we can move on together with ourselves'. The Recommendations included an agreement or treaty through which unresolved issues of reconciliation could be resolved'.⁸ It also proposed, remarkably given the political climate, that one part of the nation should formally apologise and express 'its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past', while the other part accepts 'the apologies and forgives'.⁹ Howard's government rejected all of the six Proposals except number five, which dealt with measures of 'practical reconciliation', claiming the government was already working hard on that. Nor, it seemed, were any of the perpetrators of acts of inhumanity against Aborigines to be punished, even after a 2007 Australian Court found for the first time that a removed Aboriginal child was entitled to compensation.¹⁰

Such a comprehensive rejection of two major reports and their recommendations by a conservative government might have sponsored, as it did in Chile, a series of funas directed against either individuals for committing acts of inhumanity or crimes, or for government ministers for failing to punish them. Yet that seemed barely possible in an Australian context. Even if the Aboriginal Welfare department's individuals had been named, it is hard to imagine a group of Indigenous people gathering outside the home of a retired former reserve manager or inspector, however hated by the community. The deeply cultural Aboriginal sympathy for the old or oppressed, I suspect, would weaken the proceedings. If a funa were directed against, say, a police officer associated with the killing of an Aboriginal man, the Australian version of the funa might be a noisy and hostile demonstration, but not the formal conviction that the funa implies.

Yet Australians can and do react against governments which refuse to accept responsibility for acts of racist cruelty in the past, or continue to deny their existence. An uproar greeted the national government's bowdlerized version of the history of the

⁶ C. Cuneen, 'Assessing the Outcomes of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody' <http://hsr.e-contentmanagement.com/archives/vol/10/issue/2/article/239/>

⁷ Commonwealth Parliamentary debates, House of Representatives, 30 Oct 1996, p. 6158; quoted Murray Goot and Tim Rowse, *Divided Nation*, MUP Melbourne 2007, p 141.

⁸ Final report of the Council for Aboriginal reconciliation, Recommendation 6; <http://www.austlii.edu.au/other/IndigLRes/car/2000/16/text10/htm>

⁹ Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation; <http://austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/2000/12/pg3.htm>

¹⁰ The Bruce Trevorrow case, August 2007, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/stolen-generation-payout/2007/08/01/1185647978562.html>

stolen generations in a planned memorial in Reconciliation Place in Canberra.¹¹ The most spectacular expression of public disapproval of the government's position in the decade occurred as the Council of Reconciliation presented its Final Report in Sydney in May 2000. Australia's most senior Aboriginal public servant, Charles Perkins, sacked some years earlier from the Aboriginal Affairs Ministry, shouted at the Prime Minister in the packed Sydney Opera House, 'Say sorry you bastard!'. Next day perhaps three hundred thousand people walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge as a declaration of support for the Indigenous cause while a skywriter wrote the enormous letters of SORRY across the stratosphere.¹² While the Prime Minister was not stretched on his back like a cockroach, there was no doubting the intention or the intensity of the public denunciation. Perhaps Australia had achieved its first funa.

Peter Read is Research Professor, Department of History, University of Sydney. He has worked extensively as a historian of Aboriginal Australia, especially in the Northern Territory and NSW.

In 1980 Peter founded, with Oomera (Coral) Edwards, the organisation LinkUP (now Link-Up Stolen Generations (NSW)). He worked with the organisation as field-worker for three years, and since 1984 has been its Public Officer.

He works with the Aboriginal historian Jackie Huggins in the Indigenous oral history project 'Seven years On', sponsored by the Oral History Program of the National Library of Australia. From 1995 this project created a base-group of seventy five young Aboriginal leaders to whom we return, every seven years, for a further interview. Jackie and Peter are also currently interviewing all the members of the Reconciliation Council 1990-2000.

Outside Australia he has interests in Cuba and in the Mapuche Indigenous people of Chile

¹¹ The design implied the removal of Aboriginal children was merely another example of how children are socialised into an adult world. The memorial was constructed in defiance of strong Aboriginal disapproval and stands today adjacent to a second, 'counter-' stolen generations memorial quoting testimonies in strong condemnation of the policy of child removal. See P. Read, 'The Truth that Will Set Us All Free: National Reconciliation, Oral History and the Conspiracy of Silence', * *Oral History*, 35/1 (Spring 2007), 98-107.

¹² See *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*, 27 May 2000; http://www.gadigal.org.au/GadigalInfo/Bridge_Walk.aspx?Id=6