

HAVING TOPPLED POPULAR AND DEMOCRATICALLY elected leaders in Iran and Guatemala, murdered Che Guevara in Bolivia and made assassination attempts on Fidel Castro for decades, the CIA successfully set its sights on Chile's Salvador Allende in 1973.

Allende's murder set the stage for a military coup under General Augusto Pinochet and a ruthless repression of leftists and intellectuals. It's an old story by now. Many political exiles, such as Carmen Rodriguez, eventually fled to Canada, settling in Vancouver.



Originally written in Spanish and simultaneously published as *De Cuerpo Entero* in Santiago, Carmen Rodriguez's patchwork of thinly disguised memoirs and short stories, *And A Body To Remember With* (Arsenal \$14.95), doesn't revisit past injustices so much as evoke contemporary pain.

The reminiscences — in simple English, many translated from Spanish by the author — dignify the lives of women in transition who are torn between two cultures, not feeling fully at home in either, adapting to Canadian customs and winters, silently haunted by a nightmarish past.

While raising families which straddle two hemispheres, Rodriguez and other ex-Chileans must watch uncomfortably, from afar, as Allende's killers appear to be vindicated through the all-powerful prism of international economics.

As Chile is being drawn further into the so-called free trade global economy, young people in Chile are increasingly disinclined to consider what the fuss was all about. Yes, Chileans were tortured and murdered. Yes, thousands disappeared. But shouldn't people like Carmen Rodriguez learn to get over it?

"I couldn't go back until 1987," she says. "I had been blacklisted until then. Because the Pope went there in '87, they shortened the blacklist. All those emotions of going back for the first time happened for me in '87. There is a character in one of my stories who goes back for the first time and she says, 'Santiago has become a very clean city, as clean as oblivion.'"

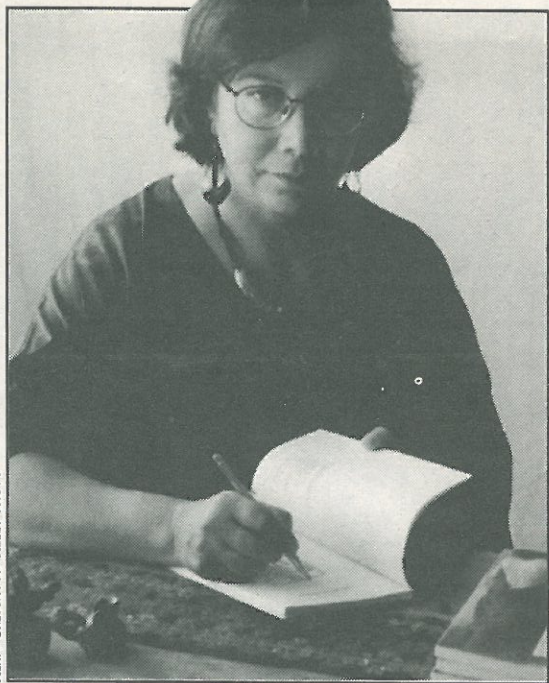
As illustrated by a documentary at the Vancouver Film Festival, *The Obstinate Memory*, modern Chilean history isn't being erased so much as eroded by neglect.

"This time when I went back to launch the new book at the National Library, it was very political. I had mixed feelings and I didn't realize how emotional it was. I started suffering from insomnia. I knew I wasn't in any danger but subconsciously I was still scared. It was like repeating the experiences I had just after coup.

"My family was very supportive. At the same time it hurt to see that few people were talking about the human costs of this economic success story. Young people have been brainwashed. Everything is very fine and dandy. They see in their textbooks that Allende's government were barbarian Marxists. Many of them genuinely don't know what happened.

"The country is suffering from collective amnesia."

It is common knowledge that a camp in southern Santiago called *Dignidad*, founded by ex-Nazis, served as a government collection point for the disappeared, but Rodriguez says few writers within Chile are addressing the country's bloody past directly. One exception is Chilean judge Rene Garcia Villegas who has alleged that political prisoners were killed aboard the schooner *Esmeralda*, 'a floating torture chamber', which docked at Canada Place in October.



ALAN CREIGHTON-KELLY PHOTO

MIXED EMOTIONS: Carmen Rodriguez signs the Spanish version of her book in Santiago

# Chile scenes of Canadian winters

"Santiago has become a very clean city, as clean as oblivion."

At the entrance to the main cemetery in Santiago is a monument listing the names of the disappeared, but government and major media only acknowledge torture and state killings in oblique ways.

A Chilean writer in Ottawa, Leandro Urbina, has published *Collect Call*, mainly about being in exile in eastern Canada; Carlos Cerda's first book deals with his exile, in East Germany; and Lake Sagaris recently completed a lengthy book about contemporary Chilean society from her Canadian perspective.

"Bringing my book to Chile made me feel good," Rodriguez says. "It was like saying, 'You're not going to make us forget. The dreams have not gone away.'"

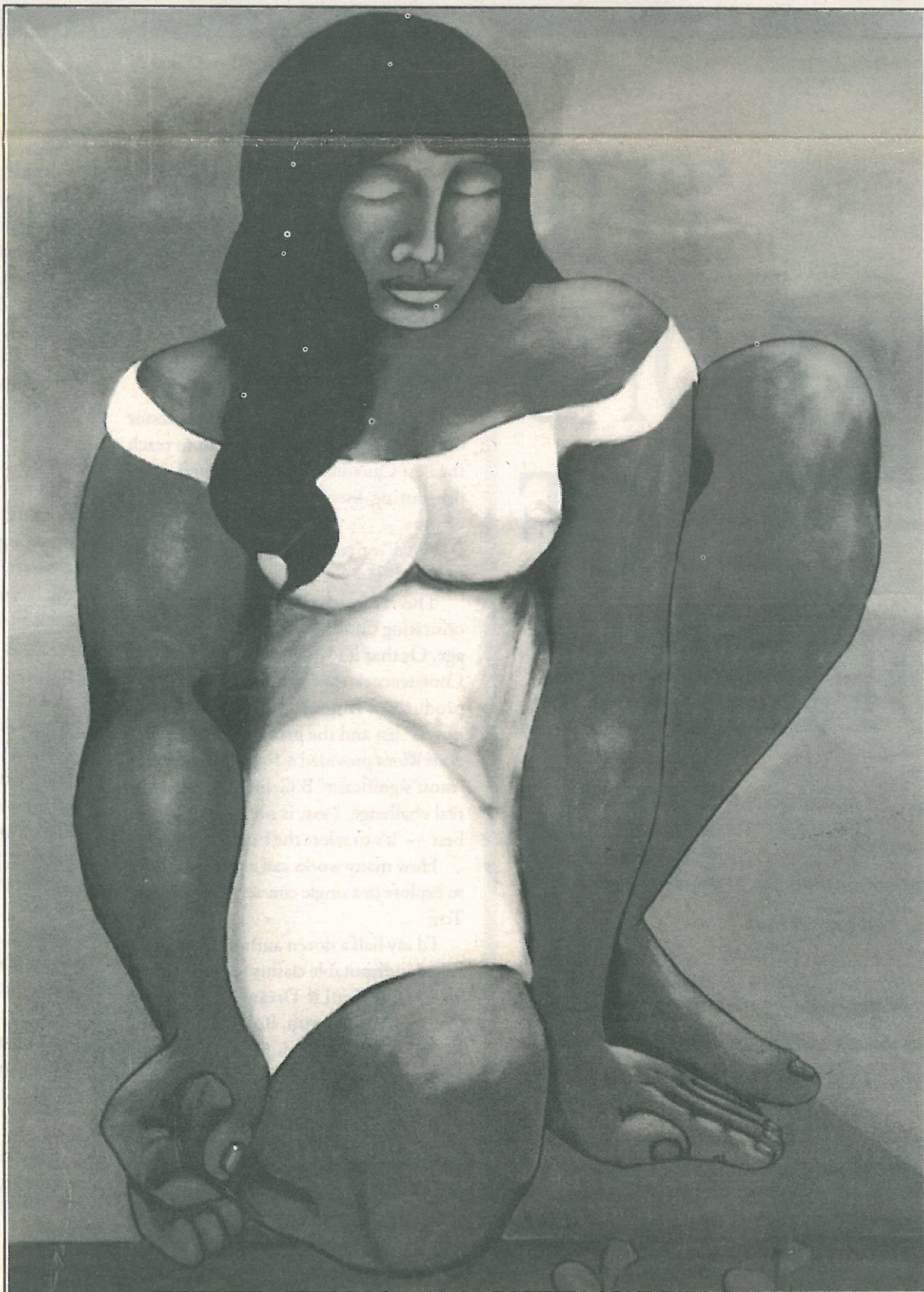
Of the approximately 40,000 Latinos in Vancouver, she estimates 15,000 are of Chilean origin. Recent news reports that police have been harassing Latinos are alarming to her, especially given that she has escaped one police state in the past.

"There's no doubt that there is a problem in the Downtown Eastside with single men,

mainly from Central America, who have come here by themselves, who are completely lost. Their only survival system is the drug system. But I also know people who are completely clean who have been picked up just because they're Latin. They get harassed and punched around and then released. What can they do?"

Carmen Rodriguez was born in Valdivia, Chile in 1948. She left Chile in December of 1973, staying in California until she was allowed to emigrate to Vancouver in August of 1974. Between 1979 and 1984, she lived in Bolivia and Argentina.

Rodriguez was a founding member of the collective which produced 21 issues of *Aquelarre*, a ten-year-old Latin Canadian magazine which has ceased publication this fall. She works as an adult literacy consultant and has published one bilingual poetry collection, *Protracted War / Guerra Prolongada* (1992). 1-55152-044-3



Nora Patrich artwork for "And A Body To Remember With".