



## 4<sup>th</sup> Symposium of the Elisabeth Käsemann Foundation Abstract

### Colonia Dignidad – a German-Chilean History from the Perspective of Science, Legal Processing and Public Staging

The Center for Latin American Studies (ZILAS), in cooperation with the Elisabeth Käsemann Foundation are currently organizing a symposium at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (KU), in June 2022, under the title "Colonia Dignidad – a German-Chilean history from the perspective of science, legal processing and public staging". The event's focus is to draw attention to a hitherto academically rather neglected chapter in the history of German-Chilean relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The symposium is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

The idea is **to bring together internationally renowned key experts on the topic** from various disciplinary fields who will present their findings and perspectives and who shall contribute their specific conclusions and interpretations to a wider interdisciplinary and interconnectable discourse. The controversial topic "Colonia Dignidad" will, thus, be addressed and tackled from a historical, political, jurisprudential, anthropological and (social-)psychological perspective. The aim is to reconstruct a more comprehensive, multifaceted picture of this "state within a state" by critically assessing and reflecting **the source- and literature-based state of the art and by taking into account latest new evidence e.g. from archives or online data bases made available only recently**. Each of the various contributions will be discussed in an interdisciplinary perspective. The results and outcomes will be published later in the form of Conference Proceedings as a collective volume publication. Eventually, the conference seeks **to promote further scholarly exchange** that goes beyond the international event in June 2022 and **to foster an ongoing dialogue between several different national and global research approaches and perspectives**.

The planned conference will be preferably organised and conducted as a non-public in-presence event format. It is crucial for the participants to have **the chance to meet each other in person** and to talk and discuss on the subject even beyond the single paper presentations face to face. Therefore, the conference clearly aims at **establishing a platform for dialogue, exchange of ideas and for the transfer of knowledge for the worldwide small, though growing scientific community of scholars and experts**, who deal with this topic in research.

#### 1. On the topic of the symposium

The "Sociedad Benefactora y Educacional Dignidad" (Dignity Charitable and Educational Society) was founded by the German sect leader Paul Schäfer and his followers in 1961. The "Colonia Dignidad" staged and externally represented itself as a working as well as a welfare-oriented community deeply rooted in original Christian values and ideals. Through close contact with right-wing extremist groups such as "Patria y Libertad" and with indirect support of the Chilean coup d'état in September 1973, the German sect quickly succeeded in gaining the favour and benevolence of the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Due to a close cooperation with the oppressive Chilean state apparatus, the secret services and the military, the colony subsequently



acquired a protected, even inviolable or sacrosanct status, so that the systematic human rights violations committed there remained undiscovered and unpunished for a long period of time.

Since aspects such as sexuality or reproduction were generally taboo, Paul Schäfer used to continuously abduct or kidnap Chilean children in order to assure the operational capacities of the "Colonia Dignidad" and its continuance for the future in terms of new generations yet to come. According to the most recent state of our knowledge, cooperation with the Chilean dictatorship was mainly based on the production of weapons for the Chilean military as well as on the provision of premises for secretly torturing opponents of the Pinochet regime by the Chilean secret service. Within the "Colonia Dignidad", several files were also created and administered on opposition members.

The "Colonia Dignidad" retained its formal existence until 1997. However, the Chilean government – Chile was already a republic at that time – did not manage to bring the semi-autonomous enclave under its control until the arrest of its cult leader Paul Schäfer in 2005, who had been hiding underground since 1996. Five years later, Schäfer died in a Chilean prison, without a proper legal trial or lawsuit and a historical accounting and processing of all the human rights violations he and his entourage had committed over more than three decades.

Today, former cult members and victims live in Germany and Chile alike, though strict boundaries between perpetrators and victims are difficult to grasp. Around one hundred people still live on the site of the former "Colonia Dignidad" to this day, which since then has been renamed "Villa Baviera". The area has now been made accessible and been transformed into a tourist destination. Judicial investigations, criminal prosecution of perpetrators, financial reparation and support for the victims as well as land re-distribution proceed for the most part slowly both in Chile and in Germany. In May 2019, the legal proceedings against Hartmut Hopp, a medical doctor in the "Colonia Dignidad", were finally suspended due to "insufficient suspicion"<sup>1</sup>.

In the cultural sphere, the topic has attracted increased public awareness for the first time since the release of the international cinematic film production "*Colonia*" directed by Florian Gallenberger in 2015, a thriller starring Emma Watson, Daniel Brühl and Mikael Nyqvist. Moreover, in December 2019, a multi-part thriller series entitled "*Dignity*", a German-Chilean co-production directed by Julio Jorquera Arriagada, was launched by the German streaming platform Joyn and the Chilean television channel Mega. Yet even broader public attention most recently raised a so-called true-crime documentary series entitled "*Colonia Dignidad – a German Sect in Chile*" directed by Annette Baumeister and Wilfried Huismann that was released on Netflix just on 1 October 2021<sup>2</sup>. In addition, two Chilean exhibitions were dedicated to the issue in Santiago de Chile by the end of 2018: "*Dignidad*" in the National Archive<sup>3</sup> and "*La Casa Lobo*" in the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Centre<sup>4</sup>. Even though the exhibition "*Dignidad*" integrated previously unconsidered sources, such as log files of telephone conversations by Paul Schäfer, the focus of both exhibitions was rather on an artistic presentation.

<sup>1</sup> He was legally convicted in Chile, only in Germany the execution was declared inadmissible. See, in this context [www.olgduesseldorf.nrw.de/behoerde/presse/archiv/Pressemitteilungen\\_aus\\_2018/20180924\\_PM\\_Colonia\\_Dignidad/index.php](http://www.olgduesseldorf.nrw.de/behoerde/presse/archiv/Pressemitteilungen_aus_2018/20180924_PM_Colonia_Dignidad/index.php) (30 March 2022).

<sup>2</sup> The documentary is a production of LOOKSfilm/ Canal 13 for WDR/SWR/ARTE/ Canal 13 and was shown in television before being released on Netflix. The documentary was nominated for the renowned Grimme price 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Exposition "Dignidad". See [www.archivonacional.gob.cl/616/w3-article-87473.html?\\_noredirect=1](http://www.archivonacional.gob.cl/616/w3-article-87473.html?_noredirect=1) (30 March 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Exposition "La Casa Lobo". See [www.gam.cl/exposiciones/la-casa-lobo/](http://www.gam.cl/exposiciones/la-casa-lobo/) (30 March 2022).



Despite of this emerging cultural-intellectual interest resp. artistic reception, the topic only developed its political significance in recent years. In a remarkable speech in 2016, former German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier acknowledged the responsibility of his ministry in admitting that the Federal Foreign Office and the German Embassy had failed to "give the victims of German citizenship advice and assistance at their discretion"<sup>5</sup>. During his term of office, the German Federal Foreign Office for the first time released documents on incidents and events in the "Colonia Dignidad" for public scrutiny in 2016, insofar as these were completed by 31 December 1996<sup>6</sup>.

In 2016, a delegation trip of members of the German *Bundestag* to Chile took place. Upon their return, they reached a resolution of the German *Bundestag* that provided for an aid concept for the victims of "Colonia Dignidad" including financial payments, an oral-history project and a learning site. After a long effort on the part of the deputies, an agreement was reached with the German government on the implementation of the measures. Nevertheless, extensive investigations into the crimes committed in Colonia Dignidad are still pending<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. State of the Art

So far, a rigorous examination of the politically sensitive topic outlined above has hardly taken place in a scientific context. However, in 2018, the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Federal Foreign Office jointly approved funding for a project to set up an oral history archive on "Colonia Dignidad", the so-called "CDOH" project, based at Freie Universität Berlin<sup>8</sup>. Although substantial data and material for scientific research are available in various archives both in Chile and Germany, there still is a lack of source-critical, empirical research to date<sup>9</sup>. A most relevant and recent novelty is the collection "Sociedad Benefactora Colonia Dignidad" (*Fondo SBCD*), which was transferred from the former "Colonia Dignidad" to the National Archive in Santiago de Chile between 2000 and 2005. This collection comprises German and Spanish-language sources in 311 volumes in total. The holdings have been accessible to researchers since 1 January 2019<sup>10</sup>. Due to the opening of central source collections, significant theses and monographies on the topic have been compiled in recent years<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the "Colonia Dignidad" event (Federal Foreign Office). See

<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/160426-colonia-dignidad/280124> (30 March 2022).

<sup>6</sup> It comprises more than 100 files from various organizational units of the Federal Foreign Office and the German Embassy in Santiago de Chile from the period 1957 to 1996.

<sup>7</sup> For further and more detailed information on this complex topic, see *Drucksache* 18/12943, <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/18/129/1812943.pdf>; *Drucksache* 18/12943, <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/18/129/1812943.pdf>; *Drucksache* 19/3233, <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/032/1903233.pdf>. (30 March 2022).

<sup>8</sup> *Colonia Dignidad. Ein chilenisch-deutsches Oral-History-Archiv (CDOH)*. See [www.lai.fu-berlin.de/disziplinen/geschichte/forschung/Forschungsschwerpunkte/Erinnerungsforschung/ColoniaDignidad/index.html](http://www.lai.fu-berlin.de/disziplinen/geschichte/forschung/Forschungsschwerpunkte/Erinnerungsforschung/ColoniaDignidad/index.html) (30 March 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Sources in Chile can be found in the *Archivo Nacional de la Administración (ARNAD)*, the *Archivo del Congreso Nacional* and the National Library. In Germany, sources can be found in the archives of the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Archives, the archives of the Research and Documentation Center Chile-Latin America e.V. and in private collections alike.

<sup>10</sup> *Archivo Nacional pone a disposición de la ciudadanía archivos de Colonia Dignidad*, *El Desconcierto*, 03 January 2019. See [www.eldesconcierto.cl/2019/01/03/archivo-nacional-pone-a-disposicion-de-la-ciudadania-archivos-de-colonia-dignidad1/](http://www.eldesconcierto.cl/2019/01/03/archivo-nacional-pone-a-disposicion-de-la-ciudadania-archivos-de-colonia-dignidad1/) (30 March 2022). Regarding this collection, see Dieter Meier and Luis Narváez: *Kartei des Terrors: Notizen zum Innenleben der chilenischen Militärdiktatur (1973-1990) aus der Colonia Dignidad*. Stuttgart 2022, Schmetterling Verlag.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Meike Dreckmann-Nielen: *Die Colonia Dignidad zwischen Erinnern und Vergessen. Zur Erinnerungskultur in der ehemaligen Siedlungsgemeinschaft*. Bielefeld 2022, transcript; Jan Stehle: *Der Fall Colonia Dignidad. Zum Umgang bundesdeutscher Außenpolitik und Justiz mit Menschenrechtsverletzungen 1961-2020*. Bielefeld 2021, transcript; Tomás Villarroel: *Un enclave de indignidad. La fuga de Wolfgang Müller y los primeros años de Colonia Dignidad en Chile (1961-1966)*. In: *Historia* 53, vol. II (2020), pp. 661-690; Holle Meding: "Nach Chile, um den Menschen zu helfen...". *Die Anfänge*



In addition to ongoing research in Chile, Germany and beyond, a Pre-Conference was initiated and organised by ZILAS in cooperation with the Elisabeth Käsemann Foundation, which aimed at (re-)addressing and focussing on one particular neglected aspect of this broad topic: namely the scope of German foreign policy on Latin America during the Cold War Era. This further preliminary initiative in preparation for the larger international conference in June 2022, was launched and started in the aftermath of the cancellation of the international conference originally planned for May 2020. This Pre-Conference was conceived as a round table and is to be considered an important scientific contribution to the topic. The experts, Prof. Dr. Herta Däubler-Gmelin, the President of the Federal Agency for Civic Education, Thomas Krüger, and two historians, Prof. Dr. Holger Meding and Prof. Dr. Friedrich Kießling, provided new insights into the topic during the round table format, which was moderated by Prof. Dr. Sabine Kurtenbach<sup>12</sup>.

### 3. Structure plan of the conference

Both, the outstanding scientific discussions regarding and, at the same time, the ongoing public interest in "Colonia Dignidad" provided were the two momentous factors which provided the necessary impetus for the event.

The three-day symposium comprises several independent thematic panels that deal with the topic at different methodological and content-related levels in order to gain a more comprehensive and differentiated picture of the "Colonia Dignidad" and its contemporary historical context based on historical facts. Therefore, aside from international experts, scholars and academics, political representatives e.g. from the German *Bundestag* will be invited to the event, too. The insights and outcomes obtained during the symposium will also be summarized in a short *Dossier* which will be provided to the political field of action in terms of "lessons learned" resp. evidence-based policy making, in order to support and enhance the political decision-making process in ongoing reparation, compensation and collective memory debates with regard to the subject of "Colonia Dignidad".

In addition to a purely scientific approach to the topic, the symposium will also look at new perspectives on how this important chapter of German-Chilean history can constructively be processed further in the future. Thus, the question also needs to be addressed how the topic can evolve as a component for a joint collective culture of remembrance, in the sense of an international understanding and as a commitment to a multilateral world order.

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der Colonia Dignidad (1961-1970). Berlin 2019, Wvb; Evelyn Hevia Jordán and Jan Stehle: Colonia Dignidad. Verdad, Justicia y Memoria. Santiago 2015, El Desconcierto.

<sup>12</sup> The video is accessible on the YouTube channels of the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt and the Elisabeth Käsemann Foundation. In German: <https://youtu.be/-CieW64P8OI> and <https://youtu.be/1tLkm3UwT1M>. In Spanish translation: <https://youtu.be/BOIFtN4pzw> and <https://youtu.be/gdlYX3Tgkrq> (30 March 2022).