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Half of BRIC and a wall

International trade relations bulked large in the last two days of the week, despite the limelight on President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's war of words with the CGT — the upshot could be described as swings and roundabouts with contrasting effects for Argentina's two most booming industries. On the positive side of the ledger was Chinese Trade Minister Chen Deming's visit on Thursday — his presence here had triggered strong expectations concerning one kind of oil but ended up being significant for another kind, namely soybean oil where China has re-opened a door which had been virtually shut for the last 13 months. But these benefits threaten to be outweighed by the restrictions slapped by Brazil on the import of cars and auto parts from Argentina (where Brazil accounts for 81 and 65 percent of the market respectively) — apparently in retaliation for the escalating attrition of non-automatic licensing here against Brazilian goods in recent months although the word from Brasilia is that their new Customs measures also apply to other countries and that the specific reprisals against Argentina are still being contemplated.

While the Chinese news is undoubtedly good and the Brazilian bad, closer examination shows that the former is not so fantastic and the latter not so dire. If Chen is taken at his word, China will be buying some 700 million dollars worth of soybean oil (600,000 tonnes), yes, but this is only a third of 2009 purchases — nor is this a phased return to the previous status quo because the Chinese motive for suspending soybean imports 13 months ago (lifted last October after CFK's July visit to China although with only trifling quantities until now) was not only annoyance with Argentine anti-dumping measures against Chinese goods in general but also a strategy of import substitution. However by way of compensation China is talking of stepping up investment here (14 billion dollars announced in the last two years) to create jobs. As for Brazil, we have yet to see the full extent of the response (Industry Minister Débora Giorgi has been slow to admit the problem) but the bark might well prove worse than the bite — Brazil hurts itself more by restricting bilateral trade (which gave it a surplus of over four billion dollars last year and more than a billion in the first quarter of this year) but Brasilia feels obliged to show some kind of reaction in order to satisfy the Sao Paulo industrial export lobby.

However much Argentina's government and public might resist globalization, international trade (and not just the surplus) does matter and should be given the attention it deserves.

Cal china y arena brasileña

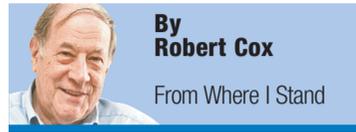
Las relaciones comerciales internacionales ocuparon un lugar importante en los últimos dos días de la semana, a pesar de que el centro de atención estuviera en la guerra verbal de la presidente Cristina Fernández de Kirchner con la CGT; el resultado se podría describir como uno de cal y otro de arena, con efectos contrastantes para las dos industrias de mayor pujanza en la Argentina. El lado positivo de la balanza fue la visita del ministro de Comercio de China Chen Deming el jueves; su presencia en el país había suscitado fuertes expectativas respecto del petróleo pero resultó ser significativa para el aceite de soja para el que China ha reabierto una puerta prácticamente cerrada durante los últimos 13 meses. Pero estos beneficios corren el peligro de ser neutralizados por las restricciones impuestas por Brasil sobre la importación de automóviles y autopartes desde la Argentina (en donde Brasil representa el 81 y 65% del mercado, respectivamente). Aparentemente es el castigo por la guerra de desgaste cada vez mayor de las licencias no automáticas de este país contra la mercadería brasileña en los últimos meses, aunque según Brasilia, sus nuevas medidas aduaneras también se aplican a otros países, y las represalias específicas contra la Argentina aún se están contemplando.

Si bien la noticia china es sin dudas buena y la brasileña es mala, un análisis más detenido demuestra que la primera no es tan fantástica ni la segunda tan grave. Si es como dice Chen, China estará comprando aceite de soja por un valor cercano a los 700 millones de dólares (600.000 toneladas), sí, pero esto es sólo un tercio de las compras de 2009; tampoco se trata de una vuelta escalonada al statu quo anterior, porque el motivo chino por la suspensión de las importaciones de soja hace 13 meses (levantada en octubre pasado luego de la visita de CFK a China, aunque con cantidades insignificantes hasta ahora) no fue sólo su disgusto por las medidas antidumping de la Argentina contra las importaciones chinas en general, sino también una estrategia de sustitución de importaciones. Sin embargo, para compensar, China declara su intención de aumentar sus inversiones en el país (14 mil millones de dólares anunciados en los últimos dos años) para generar puestos de trabajo. En cuanto a Brasil, aún nos falta ver el alcance completo de la res-puesta (la ministra de Industria Débora Giorgi ha tardado en reconocer el problema), pero tal vez resulte ser que perro que ladra no muerde; Brasil se hace más daño a sí mismo al restringir el comercio bilateral (que le dio un superávit de más de cuatro mil millones de dólares el año pasado, y más de mil millones en el primer trimestre del año), pero Brasilia se siente obligada a mostrar algún tipo de reacción para satisfacer al lobby industrial exportador paulista.

Por más que se resistan el gobierno y la sociedad argentina a la globalización, el comercio internacional (y no sólo el superávit) de hecho importa, y debería recibir la atención que merece.

A lexicon of terror

From ESMA to democracy



By
Robert Cox

From Where I Stand

CHARLESTON, South Carolina

— When Emilio Massera, the psychotic mass murderer who turned the Argentine Navy into a criminal organization, died last November, an author and a book title were launched into prominence.

The author is Marguerite Feitlowitz and the title of her book is *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the legacies of torture*. I am convinced that *Lexicon* as I will call it to cool down the title and make it easier to talk about, is the most important book to appear so far on the consequences of the vicious cycle of terror and violence that enveloped Argentina in the 1970s.

Lexicon was quoted widely when Massera left the scene because Feitlowitz not only captured the evil essence of the Navy commander-in-chief and aspiring dictator but also unveiled the coded language that Massera, in particular, and the military dictatorship, more generally, employed in an attempt to establish mind control over the Argentine people. The nominal dictator, Jorge Rafael Videla, I now acknowledge, did not use veiled language. Feitlowitz cites Videla as saying: "The repression is directed against a minority we do not consider Argentine — a terrorist is not only someone who plants bombs, but a person whose ideas were contrary to our Western, Christian civilization." The vicious and unrepentant statements that Videla has made since his sentencing to life imprisonment for multiple crimes against humanity have revealed the wolf beneath the sheep's clothing that fooled me.

I must make a confession. When I first heard about her book, I imagined that Feitlowitz had embarked on an academic project, some linguistic adventure divorced from reality. And I was in no hurry to read *Lexicon* because I had also suffered linguistically at the hands (should I write "tongue"?) of Massera. I had translated many of his speeches from Spanish to English in reporting for the *Herald*, and had also attempted to render them into English for a book the Navy was publishing. That was a "command performance" because I feared that if I refused, the then almighty admiral would have me bumped off or, even worse, ordered the *Herald* blown up.)

Writing news stories based on his speeches had already made me think that Massera was spouting pretentious rubbish most of the time. So, when I started to translate the voluminous texts of his speeches for the book and wondered how in the world to translate *la pampa líquida* into understandable English,

I was already convinced that he was an expert in gobbledygook. (Google's Spanish translation is *jerigonza* but I think that describing his rhetoric as "bla bla" makes the point.)

I discovered how wrong I was when, after the introduction, and on the very first page of the first chapter of *Lexicon* I read:

We know that in order to repair so much damage we must recover the meanings of many embezzled words.

— Admiral Emilio Massera, 1976

In his November 8 article in this newspaper, Andrew Graham Yooll, former editor-in-chief of the *Herald*, partially quoted Feitlowitz's description of Massera as, "The grand orator of the Process (*el Proceso*, as the dictatorship called it), master of the majestic rhythm, learned tone, and utterly confounding, but captivating, message. As a young man he had studied philology, and language would remain a life-long obsession. Here is but one of his darkly shining verbal jewels: "Unfaithful to their meanings, words perturb our powers of reason."

BOOK PROVIDES LESSONS FOR ALL OF US ON THE LEGACIES OF TORTURE AND TERROR AND HOW THEY CAN BE OVERCOME.

Feitlowitz describes Massera as "tormented by the state of language," which he compares to "an abject Tower of Babel" and warns his audience to beware as he pronounces, "the only safe words are our words."

Feitlowitz writes: "The warning is surreal, for it captures exactly what Massera himself is doing: spinning an intricate verbal web to ensnare his audience and perturb (their) powers of reason."

I met Marguerite Feitlowitz in person for the first time quite by chance in late 2009 at the ESMA torture chamber and death camp. We were both on the same tour, which began with a lecture by a young guide whose words were, in a way, the new "safe words" — a simplistic version of the causes that led to the horror that we were about to experience vicariously.

Marguerite was gathering information for the new and updated edition of her book that has just come out, published by Oxford University Press. That meeting led to an invitation to visit Bennington College, a true university where minds are opened, not closed and where Marguerite teaches. There my wife and I joined a group of bright, inspiring students taking a course she has developed, "Cultural Legacies of Argentina's Dirty War." I wish that all young people in Argentina could have

such an opportunity.

I always hesitate before using the term "Dirty War." Derived from the military's own description of their filthy methods of repression, it does not do justice to the enormity of the crimes committed. The title of a book by the late and much lamented philosopher Carlos Niño, *Radical Evil On Trial*, gets closer to the essence of their criminality. Marshall Meyer, the heroic rabbi who risked his own life to save others, described the military's extermination of thousands of people who were considered to be "subversives" as a "holocaust" because the methods used so closely resembled those of the Nazis. No one could seriously accuse Rabbi Meyer of trivializing the Jewish Holocaust by applying it to Argentina. Marshall knew what he was talking about because he had been inside the beast.

In the lengthy epilogue written for the new edition of her book Feitlowitz describes watching the trial of the officers who ran ESMA and raises the question of genocide. It includes conversations Feitlowitz had with lawyer and long-time champion of human rights Horacio Méndez Carreras. As the attorney representing the families of the two French nuns who passed through ESMA and were hurled unconscious from Navy planes into the Atlantic, Méndez Carreras devoted 25 years of his life to bring to justice their torturers and murderers and is finally concluding the case against them. Long-time readers of the *Herald* will recall the weekly column on law and human rights he wrote jointly with Martín Villagrán when democracy returned to Argentina in 1984.

In a review for the British newspaper *The Independent* when the book first appeared in 1998, fellow lexicographer Ian Stavans noted that *A Lexicon of Terror* has universal significance. He wrote: "The lessons to be drawn from Feitlowitz are, therefore, invaluable, for hers is the type of book that should remain timely as long as men kill in order to force their ideas and vocabulary on others." Feitlowitz's book, I might add, should also be published in Argentina, in Spanish.

The wealth of empathy and understanding, the depth of knowledge and the intensity of the scholarship that Feitlowitz brings to this book will enrich everyone who cares for or cares about Argentina. Like Evita in the song, Marguerite never left Argentina. The people she came to know as she travelled throughout Argentina, the things she learned as she read countless copies of *Para Ti*, the women's magazine which became a dirty propaganda sheet, her continued concern over the suffering and her hopes for the future provide lessons for us all on the legacies of torture and terror and how they can be overcome.