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Branding the Chilean nation : socio-cultural change, national identity and international image

Prieto Larraín, M.C.

Citation

Prieto Larraín, M. C. (2011, November 24). *Branding the Chilean nation : socio-cultural change, national identity and international image*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/18141>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Conclusions

The year 2010, during which Chileans celebrated two centuries since the beginning of their nation's quest for independence from the Spanish empire, gave me the chance to analyze several of the aspects that my research touched upon within a fixed period of time. In fact, the February earthquake and tidal wave, the presidential transfer of power, the mine cave-in and release of 33 miners as well as Chile's Bicentennial celebrations attested to the continuity and change of social and cultural ethos of this country, its identity traits and international image. Indeed, throughout this study I have tried to understand further how and why its character, its society and culture, its self-image and reputation overseas —forged along the centuries— partly shifted and partly remained unchanged during the hatching of a modern liberal consumer society. What mainly drove my research was the desire to grasp what has become of Chile in social, cultural, political and economic terms on the inauguration of its third century of existence as a sovereign republic. The country's modernization process under the sign of neo-liberalism has not been uneventful. In fact, although the revolutionary economic, social and cultural changes that Chile has experienced since the mid-1970s have found approval in some sectors of society, it has also generated ill feeling and antagonism in others. Moreover, the fact that these changes followed a failed socialist political experiment and were introduced during a rightwing dictatorship, contributed to exacerbate the political environment which had already become highly conflictive during the *Unidad Popular*. Even further, some academics consider that Chilean politics still revolves around the yes/no hinge established during the 1988 referendum, meaning that citizens at large still fall within the categories of pro or anti-Pinochet and pro or anti-Salvador Allende as the basis for dialectic political discussion.

Nevertheless, the raising of the national flag on the 17th of September, 2010, during the inauguration of 2010's Bicentennial celebrations, showed a different scenario. As mentioned in the introduction, former Concertación Presidents as well as the then recently elected Aliancista head-of-state were present at the inauguration, showing

that Chile's old political style of pragmatism and compromise had returned. In my view, the ceremony was a symbol of the Chilean rejection of polarized politics, which sadly came to characterize the nation's affairs through the 1960s up to the 1980s. Moreover, one of the conclusions of this dissertation is that Chile's long journey of the last forty years has not only taken the country back to its pre-1965 consensus-seeking style, which included all moderate political actors, but has made politics in general shift towards the centre, leaving an extremist Right and Left on the fringes of the public forum. In the first place, the espousal of liberal market policies not only gave the country a way of achieving a Bicentennial desire —progress or socioeconomic development— but has forced both Left and Right to moderate their political stance otherwise incompatible with neo-liberal economic and social ideas.

Throughout the period addressed in this study, most Chilean left-wingers abandoned their belief in a state-centred economic administration as well as their like for popular-power mobilization. The fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European communist regimes, in addition to China's adoption of a more market-oriented economic system, ended by convincing them that their socioeconomic ideology did not work. As for right-wingers, although capitalistic, they also learned to appreciate the market economy approach and regained their faith in democracy: despite having supported a military dictatorship, after a few years of democratic exercise they began to keep their distance, either out of conviction or opportunism. As regards human rights, both sectors learned to value them. In fact, even if safeguarding human rights was not part of their political culture, the fact of having been persecuted helped left-wingers to appreciate their defence. As for right-wingers, increased information on the abuses committed during the dictatorship made them acknowledge and regret —albeit late— the darkest side of Pinochet's regime.

One of the conclusions of this thesis is that neo-liberalism together with a transformed Left and renewed Right are probably the most important factors that triggered Chilean social, political and economic renovation during the forty-odd pre-Bicentennial years. After referring to what I consider the main agents of change operating during that time, the following conclusions will deal with the three strands addressed throughout this thesis in an effort to understand, firstly, what it means to be Chilean today, how and when Chile's identity traits have both been formed, evolved and gained in new features; secondly, how Chile has been perceived by foreign countries along key periods of its history and how the country started to handle its international reputation by trying to brand the nation; and finally, how Chile's social, cultural and political stances have evolved towards the dawning of its Tercentennial. My studies have led me

to conclude that Chile has been able to position itself internationally with a positive country image—that of a modern, efficient and reliable state— thanks to two factors. Firstly, its political and social history, which has developed through the centuries and has allowed for the growth of a fairly stable, orderly and law-abiding country; and secondly, the adoption of a market economy system which put Chile on the road to socio-economic development and to a cultural evolution like some modern European and North American nations. An important aspect to take into account is that Chile's transformation has been so fast that not everyone in the country has been able to keep up with it. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that in the short run all sectors of the population will catch up, as has mostly happened in the currently developed nations.

Chapter 1 described and defined the state of the art in relation to the triple axis around which the thesis revolves and also addressed other key terms. Besides, it narrowed down the conceptual framework within which the study addressed its main lines of research. Thus, in the first chapter I referred to what is a nation, its identity and culture, social and cultural change as well as nation-branding and international image. In the coming paragraphs I shall first give an account of my conclusions on these issues. After that, I shall refer to my inferences from each of the three main topics addressed throughout my study, i.e. Chile's identity, socio-cultural change and international image, rather than draw conclusions from every chapter in numerical order. As for the way these factors operate, I have concluded they do not do so in a linear way but in an interconnected manner. In my opinion, it is almost impossible to assert clearly which of them started 'shifting' first and causing a domino-effect alteration of the others. Thus, it is not that the first aspect to begin shifting was Chile's identity, which activated a nation-branding process or a cultural change: all the pieces of the game started interacting more or less at the same time. On the one hand I believe that this happened given the fact that the cause of Chile's shift is external to its identity, its international image or its social building. On the other hand, the causal role played by neo-liberalism as well as diverse political factors would have had a different effect if Chile had had another idiosyncrasy, global reputation or socio-cultural system. Indeed, although I believe that the whole process of transformation of these three strands started more or less in a concomitant way pushed by external causes, I also think that the final result would have been different if the elements had been different, if Chile had been different from what it is.

To go on with Chapter 1, I conclude that the best definition of nation, national identity and culture—for the purposes of this dissertation— includes their connection with historical facts as opposed to their characterization as intellectual entelechies

only. Although connecting them to a reality that exists outside the protagonists of history, I conclude that these key concepts should not be considered as immovable metaphysical essences but evolving realities. Thus, 'Chileanness' has been formed in the course of history and, precisely because of that, it has undergone transformations with the passing of time and will continue to do so.

In the case of the formation of a country image, the thesis concludes that nation-branding is connected to what I call classical nation-branding. This refers to the efforts of modern states, from the very start, to foster the establishment of a national identity through nation-building: as mentioned above, identity formation partly obeys to certain levels of manipulation, as opposed to spontaneous development. A second aspect of nation-branding refers to its commercial angle as well as to governmental international policy aims. The fact that nation-branding has a commercial aspect is rejected by some academics as several do not accept that a nation -with all the weight the notion has- might be launched into the global market as a product. Nevertheless, it is also true that nation-branding is related to nation-building and foreign policy in a historical period in which global trade permeates several aspects of many countries' existence. Furthermore, I conclude that in a global world, nation-branding helps them to re-think their identities to avoid disappearing into a fairly homogeneous world market. Chapter 1 also considers that nation-branding should be understood as an effect of globalization both by acceptance and rejection. Taking Chile as an example, global trade has pushed it to deepen its contacts around the globe and has forced it to protect its national features.

Finally, Chapter 1 concludes that modernity as it evolved in Chile is mainly an economic fact —although underpinned by political particularities— which brought about social and political transformations. Thus, the arrival of neo-liberalism triggered a socio-cultural change and helped the evolution of the country towards material development as happened in wealthy North European, American and Asian nations. Chapter 1 also considers that the debate about modernity in Chile has mostly been policy-oriented and pragmatic, and highlights the idea that modernity is understood as achievable socio-economic development. Finally, Chapter 1 concludes that the modernising inspiration in Chile has mostly come from other countries, although Chileans have modified it to adapt foreign ideas to their national reality.

The invasion and conquest by the Spaniards as well as the installation of a colonial system in the southernmost end of Spanish America initiated the embryonic formation of what would become Chile in centuries to come. Both different from the land's

indigenous inhabitants and from its European invaders, Chile developed as a *mestizo* nation with fairly well-defined characteristics. In fact, compared to other nations of the region, its identity traits —often ethereal and of difficult assessment— are rather well-defined given several particular characteristics that have set Chile apart from its continent. Thus, a distinct conquest and colonial setting partly conditioned a singular republican life and fairly strong democratic twentieth century. Even Pinochet's dictatorship and the Concertación era were quite 'Chilean' in the sense of being different from what other neighbouring nations went through at roughly the same time. I also believe that the fact of Chile's isolation helped to develop these rather distinct identity particularities.

Chile developed very early on an awareness of being quite unimportant and cut-off from its regional neighbours, let alone from the rest of the world. The remoteness syndrome and a certain inferiority complex increased with the acknowledgement of being a poor colony, relevant only as a protection barrier against the enemies of Spain for the wealthy and prominent Viceroyalty of Peru. Although the nineteenth century saw Chile's significance increase slightly in the region and the world —it gained fame for political stability, developed a fairly important wheat trade and experienced unseen levels of wealth during the nitrate era— it was nevertheless evident that it was of little concern at a global level. The same happened during the first decades of the twentieth century until several social, political and economic experiments started to take place. In fact, the modernization attempts by Presidents Eduardo Frei Montalva, Salvador Allende and General Augusto Pinochet furthered the intellectual and business world elites' interest in Chile. Nevertheless, what strongly pushed the country out of isolation was neo-liberalism and concomitant globalization which impelled it towards world trade. Moreover, improved means of communication and transport have diminished Chile's isolation. Yet, although Chile has partly overcome its remoteness syndrome and inferiority complex, it is quite evident it is not a pivotal nation at a global level and has integration problems with its immediate neighbours.

In spite of the tremendous communication barriers that have historically affected Chile, it has always been in contact with the external world. Thus, the colonization itself obeyed to a global trend, as well as Chile's independence movements, triggered by the Napoleonic wars. Also due to its geographic position —its waters being the forced sea route from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean— Chile was constantly visited by almost all vessels coming from European sea-bound nations. Consequently, the increase of world commerce in the nineteenth century improved Chile's connection to the rest of the globe. Moreover, its further participation in world commerce combined with a

wave of liberalism and globalization, as well as with the political upheaval of the 1920s, all tendencies that were very much in tune with European events. Also imports substitution industrialization, political progressive and Marxist experiments, followed the world trends of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps the Chilean experiment that has made more of an impact on the world has been the implementation of neo-liberalism. Thus, although not Chilean in origin and certainly fostered by Americans, Chile was the first nation in the world to adhere to the new liberal wave, acting as a laboratory for world powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Paradoxically, neo-liberalism led Chile to a second period of isolation. Thus, during Pinochet's regime the country was quite isolated for political reasons; a military dictatorship and human rights violations made it a pariah nation. It is worth noting that although these political factors were overcome during the twenty years of Concertación governments, their market-oriented policies, democratic and non-populist administrations kept Chile fairly isolated from its fellow Latin American countries.

Other identity particularities that were implanted in Chile's embryonic national mentality, which have evolved and lasted up to the Bicentennial era, have been the drive towards order and the development of a law abiding attitude, the need for effort to overcome natural disasters, war and poverty, and the idea of being an exceptional country. In the first place, Chile's conquest was hard because of the fierce opposition of the *Mapuche* people, which caused a three hundred year war; the attack of Dutch and British pirates, and the frequent and destructive earthquakes. Also, as it was lacking in precious minerals and wealthy native cultures, it did not offer quick compensations for a tough conquest. These facts, among others, prompted the development of a military mentality, an inclination towards order, the settlement of pacifying *haciendas*, a legalistic attitude and the acknowledgement of effort and resilience as character traits required to live in this part of the world. These traits continued to evolve during the first century of republican life as Chile fought and won five wars and developed fairly stable public institutions and democracy. Although in the following century Chile did not have to endure wars, it nevertheless suffered its worst two quakes and tsunamis. Thus, during its two centuries of independent life Chile continued to resort to the psychological resources that had historically helped its people to endure hardship and geological chaos. What is more, I would like to suggest that attachment to social order and law plus a regard for stable governments were present in the collapse of Allende's regime as well as in Pinochet's rise and fall. In fact, Allende's administration led to economic chaos, social upheaval and the abuse of the Constitution, all of them factors strongly opposed by most Chileans. Thus the military coup was initially backed by considerable portions of the country, its middle class, the political Right and the Centre-Left

Christian Democrats, all of them wanting peace and stability. Years later, Pinochet's fall was also marked by law abidance as he lost a plebiscite and respected the results. Even if he had not wanted to do so, his supporters and the military would not have allowed a different outcome. In the same line, the first Concertación governments were almost obsessed with governability matters, fearing popular power and economic slowdown, both of which would have triggered an unwanted social unrest. Finally, order and its related organizational capacity, as well as resilience and effort were also observable features during February 2010 earthquake and the rescue of 33 miners trapped in a pit in October that same year.

Chileans have long believed that their country is exceptional and I suggest that this self-perception and reality is strongly present throughout its history. A first strong period of exceptionality took shape during its pre-republican, an epoch that made this long strip of land differentiate itself from the other Spanish colonies. A second aspect of Chile's exceptionality refers to its institutional stability. Indeed, at the same time as most post-independence Latin American new-born nations took a long time to achieve political stability and many of them had *caudillista* governments for decades, Chile underwent a relatively short period of political try-outs and quickly achieved a fairly steady republican —albeit authoritarian—system. Thus, nineteenth century Chile was regarded as exceptionally democratic by both continental and world standards. Although the twentieth century brought two interruptions in its democratic path —the most important one being Pinochet's regime, whose coup took the world by surprise as Chile had historically been able to avoid military dictatorships— Chile managed to regain its traditional style, celebrating the Bicentennial as a democracy.

I would also suggest that a third period of exceptionality started towards 1965 and was still underway in 2010. In fact, Chile went through exceptional political, economic and social experiments from the mid-1960s onwards. Thus Frei Montalva's progressive government and Allende's leftwing coalition government —unique cases as they were the result of elections— made Chile exceptional by world and regional standards. Pinochet's regime brought in a new period of exceptionality, stronger than Frei Montalva's and Allende's, given that the military brought neo-liberalism along. In fact, while nineteenth century Chile was acknowledged because of its democratic exceptionality, it was also regarded as a rather poor nation. The military dictatorship brought about a new facet of national exceptionality, but destroyed Chile's good reputation as a stable democracy. Being the first country in the world to apply neo-liberal economic policies, after several years of hard trial and error Chile started to move decisively towards full development, and can be said to be the first Latin American nation to be so near that

goal. After the Concertación gained power, Chile's exceptionalism was operated at two levels, as democracy was added to fast economic growth and social development. At the same time, several Latin American nations experienced some kind of instability or tried to apply neo-liberal economic policies to no avail.

This last period of exceptionalism gave way to the formation of new identity traits found in modern liberal consumer societies in Europe, North America or some East Asian nations. Thus, as an important segment of the population has become part of the middle class and more people want to get there, economic performance —the necessary condition for being governability and political legitimacy— became critical. Although the general improvement in the population's standards of living is a positive aspect, the new modern and liberal identity has also involved less beneficial ones. On the one hand consumption appears to be a trait that defines today's Chileans. In my view this is positive in as far as it allows people to access goods —such as food, education, medical attention, entertainment, etc.— which allow for improving the quality of life. However, quite often these goods are achieved thanks to credit, which means that a large proportion of Chileans have considerable levels of indebtedness. Thus, the advent of a liberal society has also triggered unease at the level of social mood: the periodical set in of economic crisis, overworked women, family breakdowns, less public protection, more individualism, bitter disputes over traditional values —which in some cases help to achieve happiness— and the like, have contributed to develop a feeling of disenchantment or malaise which cuts across social classes.

Finally, if Chileans have historically been proud of their small but fairly organized and stable nation which, as Simon Collier says, more than once led the lot of Latin American nations through example, it had never been able to boast about being wealthy. The nitrate years brought in affluence, but nitrate was nevertheless unable to transform the nation into a developed one. By contrast, the last decades of economic reform brought in a remarkable rise in living standards for a considerable proportion of Chileans. While Chileans have not traditionally felt wholly Latin American and have often perceived their nation as morally superior to other countries in the continent, the newly acquired economic growth and relative wealth has boosted their self-perception of advantage in relation to the other countries. The idea of being the jaguars of Latin America, a country mistakenly located in bad neighbourhood, has taken shape in the minds of many nationals and foreigners that have fostered the idea of Chile as a model to be imitated. This newly acquired arrogance is a novel angle of Chile's centuries-long self-perception of being exceptional.

It is risky to assert that the image of a country is spontaneously generated given that it is easy to find that someone in its history has done something intentionally in order to foster its good or bad reputation. Thus, even before the Spanish conquest of Chile, this country—which would later become a Captaincy-General—already had a negative name because of the lack of wealth of the land and the disastrous conditions in which the first European explorers returned to Peru after crossing the Atacama Desert. By contrast, Chile's chief conqueror, Pedro de Valdivia, wrote beautifully about the same land, as well as Alonso de Ercilla, who exalted Araucanian bravery, and Alonso de Ovalle, who was determined to spread the word about the advantages of the new colony regretting that it was so little known in the rest of the world. Nevertheless, although all these examples show that a country's image seldom originates totally at random, the difference between a nation's repute derived mainly from historical events and a closely monitored nation brand is considerable. In my view, Chile has walked all avenues of local reputation construction.

I have put forth that through the centuries of conquest, colonization, and early republic up to the first half of the twentieth century, Chile's image was closely connected to the process of nation and identity building. Thus, the Arauco war, which contributed to the formation of a culture of order in the colony, also determined its external image as a place at war, the Flanders of the American continent. This issue plus the frequency of earthquakes and lack of material wealth contributed to build the negative reputation of the Captaincy-General. In fact, it was a burden for the Spanish Crown, borne only because it helped to control who was sailing across Cape Horn. Nevertheless this bad reputation was to change during the early republic as Chile achieved democratic stability fairly quickly. The '*república modelo*', as Simón Bolívar called it, was still poor but it had the moral superiority of relying on fairly strong political institutions and laws which allowed for governability. The same reputation of democratic stability accompanied early twentieth century Chile. It was in the 1960s that it started to be perceived as a place of interesting political experiments within a democratic framework. Thus Frei Montalva's 'Revolution in Liberty' and Allende's 'Chilean Road to Socialism' were seen as examples to be followed at a time when progressiveness and Marxism were well regarded by influential world intellectuals: Chile had become emblematic and, by the same token, Allende's death and the breakdown of democracy were like the sad awakening from a dream. This helps to explain why Pinochet's regime was so severely resisted by the world, given that in the 1970s Latin America witnessed a series of military administrations, some of them far gruesome than Chile's in terms of human rights violation.

Pinochet's dictatorship marked the appearance of a very negative country image, this time accompanied by world exposure. In fact, while until that point in time Chile had been widely unknown, Pinochet introduced the country to a wider global consciousness. Although negative visibility windows can be reversed and a nation's reputation restored or improved—as happened with the February 2010 earthquake in Chile—the military dictatorship proved to be resistant in its negative connotations. Nevertheless, there was one aspect of that authoritarian regime that was the object of approval: its good economic performance. In fact, just before the 1982 crisis the country seemed to be taking off in economic terms and full development appeared close at hand. Although that dream proved wrong, post 1985 re-loaded economic expansion appeared to be sustainable. Knowing that the country's dictatorial administration was defied almost everywhere, the Chilean government decided to create ProChile, an entity that depended on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both by promoting Chilean exports overseas and fostering economic diplomacy to open foreign doors to the country, the organization contributed to Chile's participation in an increasingly globalized world, even if it achieved very little in terms of white-washing the country's political credentials. Interestingly, I think that ProChile's creation coincided with the efforts of several states around the globe, which started promoting their 'good character' in a regular way. Mainly seeking commercial gain, they jumped on the bandwagon of a brand attached to their names so as to be more successful in a progressively more competitive global market. I also conclude that it was broadly from the 1970s onwards, when liberalism regains importance, that nation-branding became more prominent. In fact, I suggest that in a less liberal ideological environment nation-branding would not have grown much as a discipline, let alone as an academic area of research.

The ambiguity of the Chilean reputation overseas was to prove long lasting. Actually, despite having returned to a democratic form of government and being welcomed back to the club of 'well behaved' nations, most people who remembered Chile because of Pinochet, the coup and human right violations, kept associating the country with those events. Thus, even if the nation was perceived as fast-developing, its political status was frozen, a fact that took its toll for years. Although Chile was presented by the world political and financial elites as a model to imitate, and Chileans thought of themselves as the continental jaguars with a brand-new democracy, Pinochet's imprisonment in London and its bad relations with its neighbours showed that Chile's shady reputation had not disappeared and that economic success did not necessarily bring about a positive regional diplomacy.

A final conclusion related to the setting up of ProChile is that it marked a leap forward in terms of systematic promotion of the country image. Indeed, if up until then most events associated with the development of Chile's international image had to do with nation-building, from then on they increasingly evolved as what would be understood—from the mid-1990s onwards—as nation-branding. In fact, Chile began to monitor its international reputation more closely mainly to foster foreign trade and open up new markets for the new export-led economy. Once the Concertación coalition got in, Chile's nation-branding efforts continued along the same lines. In the course of time more studies were conducted to find out what people in different countries knew about Chile, which systematically revealed that very few had heard of it and if they had it was in relation to the former dictatorship. Events that aimed at promoting Chile's good reputation—such as Seville 92, APEC 2004, ProChile's 'Chile, All Ways Surprising' campaign, etc.—have tried to apply strategic marketing to Chile's promotion in order to encourage trade, direct foreign investment and tourism. Nevertheless, although economic aims may have been pivotal to these nation-branding projects, they have not been the only ones, as they have also aimed at backing up the nation's foreign policy and some initiatives that Chile has undertaken. Good examples of the latter have been the two major events of 2010: February's earthquake and October's rescue of the 33 miners. In both cases the country—closely monitored by its newly created country image administrator, *Fundación Imagen de Chile*—was able to convey messages that went beyond the field of economy. In fact, efficiency, organizational capacity, strong spirit and solidarity were some of the attributes linked to Chile after both events.

The Spanish colony hatched what was to become an independent nation called Chile. As seen in this dissertation, wars, *mestizaje*, the stable *hacienda* system and several other factors contributed to the conversion of the Captaincy-General into a nation-state, the pursuit of political stability and socio-economic and cultural development being at the heart of the young republic. Although Chile gained fame in the political field, it did not evolve so positively at the economic level. In spite of ever increasing international trade and the export of nitrate, the country remained relatively poor whilst political culture kept making progress in terms of enhancing its democratic institutions. Thus, Chile was able to soften the authoritarianism of its initial democracy and ended up by developing an important capacity for reaching agreements between political opponents, which has been observable since the late 1930s. Nevertheless, towards the 1960s this pragmatic spirit started to show cracks and few years later Chile's admired institutions broke down. In fact, the ideologically led exclusion of political adversaries

was sadly followed by extreme confrontation during Allende's tenure and ended in the collapse of democracy.

Interestingly, if nineteenth and twentieth century Chile saw a positive evolution of its republican system, nevertheless it was during a dictatorship that the so much desired economic development started incubating. Indeed, even if Chile's democratic institutions had worked, there was a generalised feeling that the country needed a revolution to get out of underdevelopment. In fact, most of the country's twentieth century history is a quest for development. In fact, neo-liberal policies, pragmatically applied by Finance Minister Hernán Büchi, installed in the country more than a decade of fast economic growth. In my view, this is the one of the key answers to why Chile started moving away from being a traditional and poor society into a modern liberal one, not wealthy but certainly economically on the rise. This is why I have suggested that Chile's transformation of the past decades has been economically driven given that neo-liberalism is an economic theory and the influx of wealth has enabled people to move forward in social terms. Nevertheless it is known that the liberal economic theory has far-reaching socio-cultural consequences and those responsible for its introduction in Chile knew it would spearhead a social-engineering process: Chile's case shows how neo-liberalism's drive towards world commerce apparently aims only at—for example—fostering commerce and yet ends up transforming a nation, both economically and culturally. Therefore, this thesis also concludes that adherence of Chile's political elite to the advantages of neo-liberalism was also pivotal for its success. In fact, both the Right and the Left had an intellectual turnabout as regards liberalism, although the Left's conversion implied a wider change given that the Right was already capitalistic, albeit protectionist. A final consideration about the agents of change is that both the technocrats and politicians that administered the system during the dictatorship and in democracy had the ability to adapt it to Chile's needs and mentality, thus helping Chileans to consider it as something of their own, not as imposed.

Thus, towards its Bicentennial celebration, Chile is home to a modern liberal society, consumption being one of its most prominent features. Although it certainly has negative aspects, consumption implies the social development of the poorer groups, a fact that is undoubtedly positive. Other characteristics of modern Chile are the decline in mass mobilizations attached to collective utopias and the increased autonomy of the people from the authorities, be they religious, political or cultural. This can be observed in the fact that political studies may conclude that Chileans think in a certain way, yet grassroots opinion surveys show just the opposite. It also

appears quite patent when church leaders say that the faithful should act in a certain way, and the latter simply disagree or do not act as told. Even political groupings, such as the Concertación, characterised in the past by their discipline, seem to be affected by this centrifugal force.

The controversy over how positive or negative Chile's transformation into liberal modernity has been is far from over. In my view, the causes of the feeling of malaise about the system are twofold: firstly, economic frustration given the financial slowdown that has affected Chile since the Asian crisis in 1998 and, secondly, the alteration of traditional ideals. As for the first reason, it appears that the country is regaining economic vigour which, should it continue, might win back people's faith in the system. As for the discussion over values, I believe that this aspect is on the rise mainly in what pertains to Chile's traditional identity, family issues and the persistence of poverty. In the first two cases, the loss of ideals such as austerity or the loosening of community and family bonds as well as the invasion of consumption and market criteria into all walks of life, keep generating bitterness within Chile's society, making many nationals ask themselves what it is to be Chilean today. As regards socio-economic progress, I conclude that—for all the development liberalism has brought in— growth has been only partly successful as poverty has proven quite difficult to eradicate. In fact, while many Chileans have seen their socio-economic standards improve, an important minority has not been able to leave poverty behind. This issue has generated bitterness: although a significant segment of the population has moved into the middle classes, there is a fairly sharp perception of social inequality associated with the effects of neo-liberalism.

Finally, opposed feelings are also present as regards Chile's international standing and country image. Indeed, this nation is often congratulated by international organizations and even presented as a model to be imitated in political and economic terms. Its successful recovery of democracy, together with rather fast material modernization and international recognition has fostered among Chileans a sense of pride and increased their centenary self-perception of being exceptional within Latin America. A portion of Chileans believe that it is necessary to foster a winning mentality and highlight the idea of being an accomplished country in an incompetent neighbourhood. On the contrary, others are in favour of establishing bonds with the other countries rather than stressing the differences with the region: Chile may be admired in the continent but not loved, and this has proved to be quite dangerous in economic, political and diplomatic terms.

Some of the events of 2010 helped me to understand what has become of Chile in social, cultural, political and economic terms, now that the country has crossed the threshold of its Tercentennial. In fact, the commemoration of its second and beginning its third century of existence as a sovereign republic, February's earthquake, March's presidential change-over, the lengthy rescue operation of the miners and showed that Chile remains unchanged in many aspects and has changed dramatically in others. My final conclusion as regards what first inspired my research—working out how and why Chile's identity, its society and culture, its self and international image were formed along the centuries and partly remained, partly changed from 1973 onwards—is that Chile is a country in the making. Although I believe there is practically no chance that the drive towards a modern liberal consumer society will be reversed, there is still much room for change.