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From Geopolitical Periphery to Center of Global Attention: Chile's Historical Path

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Abstract

The center–periphery paradigm has impacted on multiple disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. While criticized and revised for its duality, this paradigm has been most instrumental in tracing shifts in the dynamic positioning of world ‘players’, be they states, societies, or sectors thereof. This article follows it in highlighting the historical development of Chile, a society whose inception, in one of the most remote regions of the world, seemed to determine its path toward remaining a place at the ‘end of the world’. Still, by the late twentieth century, Chile attracted global attention, concern, and debate. Understanding this shift from the world’s periphery to the core of Cold War confrontation and of the neoliberal macroeconomic turn followed by the third wave of democratization enables us to trace how the global system evolved in the course of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and how that Latin American country has been paradigmatic of those momentous changes.

Keywords: center–periphery paradigm; Cold War confrontation; dictatorship; neoliberal economics; exile politics; democratization



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1. A Paradigm for Assessing World Dynamics

Since the mid-twentieth century, the center–periphery paradigm has impacted on multiple disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. Among them are sociology, where the notion of center and center formation implied a connection with the charismatic dimension of social order [1,2], and geography, where the notion served as a portrayal of the hierarchical structuring of space [3]. Likewise, in history, it was used to describe the emergence of capitalism as the aggregation of economic power in the world [4], and it was instrumental as well in studies of imperial, neo-imperial, and post-imperial structures [5–7]. In economics, it served to analyze socioeconomic change and stress its multi-layered structure [8]. In politics, geopolitics, and international relations, it led to approaches of ‘power structuration’ within regions, as well as analyses of the formation and reshaping of IR alliances (e.g., [9,10]). In cultural analysis, it allowed us to characterize varied processes of lopsided flow of cultural tenets as part of globalization [11,12].

Likewise, from the 1960s and closely connected to Latin America, it reflected claims about that region’s ‘development of underdevelopment.’ In that context, structural or network analytical perspectives followed the center–periphery paradigm to depict asymmetries and imbalances of power, resource access, and cultural assets. Among others, Latin American dependency theorists [13,14] and Marxist political economists [15] stressed the unequal terms of international trade between peripheral and semi-peripheral primary-producing countries and the industrial countries at the developed capitalist core of the world.

While the duality of the paradigm—or rather, sets of paradigms—of center–periphery relations has been criticized and revised in recent years (e.g., [16]), its persisting appeal stems from the dynamic connectedness or entanglement that it can postulate. Currently, the most stimulating aspect of center–periphery analyses—irrespective of their specific disciplinary anchoring—is when they trace shifts in the dynamic positioning of world ‘players’, be they states, societies, or sectors thereof.

This article presents a long-run perspective on the historical development of Chile, a society whose inception in a remote region led it to initially assume position in the global margins of the world. Still, by the late twentieth century, political changes brought Chile to the center of global attention, concern, and debate. Understanding this shift from the world’s periphery to the center of world confrontation and then of a neoliberal macroeconomic turn followed by the third wave of democratization enables us to trace how the world system evolved in the course of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and how as a Latin American country, Chile was paradigmatic of those momentous changes which drew much global interest.

2. A Place at the ‘End of the World’

The Romans called the place where the Eurasian world supposedly ended *finis terrae*: this was in Galicia, in the northwest of Spain, where a strip of land of about 3 km extended towards the Cantabrian Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Seemingly, this was the last corner of the world. For centuries, it was thought that beyond that point, there would be monstrous and unknown sea creatures that would threaten those who ventured to cross the waters.

During the Hispanic expansion in the Americas, being in the southernmost region, Chile took over that image of Finisterre from the perspective of Spanish rulers and conquerors. While confined to a long strip of land by the mighty mountain range of the Andes and encountering the headstrong native resistance of the indigenous Mapuche in the South, settlers became most aware of their natural location by the Pacific Ocean, from where they traded intermittently with Asia and the Iberian peninsula. As a proto-state, Chile was born relatively isolated territorially, at least from 1778 onwards, when the region of Cuyo—a trans-Andean area that today comprises three provinces in neighboring Argentina—became dependent on the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata created only two years before and was cut off from Chile. In the 1810s, as Chile became an independent state, such confined insularity crystalized the country’s policy options and decisions.

3. Insertion in the International Markets and Global Circuits of Modernization

Chile’s geographical location by the Pacific Ocean enabled it to be open to maritime connections and international trade. With a coastline currently of about 4000 km, with islands, fjords, and wild landscapes, Chile became a sort of island country, as highlighted by Patricio Guzmán in his film *El boton de nácar* [17]. It became a country more linked to the Pacific Ocean than to the continental mass from which it has been contained and separated by the Andes Mountain Range.

Albeit peripheral, since the 19th century, Chile linked itself to international markets through the ocean, was a recipient of ideas and global connections, and was driven by a desire for modernization. The model inspired by Diego Portales in the 1830s was characterized by a strong and centralized government, led by public leaders portrayed as examples of prudence, dignity, and strength. Portales imposed a system of government based on respect for state authority, which strengthened the stability of the government system, as long as whoever had power operated within the constitutional and legal framework [18,19].

Presidential power was absolute and gave the 19th-century Chilean political system a highly authoritarian yet mostly legal, idiosyncratic character.

Chilean elites did not hesitate to build military capacities as well as use force to achieve their political objectives, as was the case with the challenge posed by President José Balmaceda or the repression and extreme violence against indigenous minority of the Mapuche. Despite the 16th-century founding poem *La Araucana* by Alonso de Ercilla, which exalts the heroism and pride of the natives fighting the Spanish conquest, Chile thought of itself as a Spanish, Creole, Western Christian country, a civilized nation willing to end the ‘threat’ posed by the original people. The Chilean elites endowed their state with stronghanded policies, repression, and violence, especially against the indigenous people, the mobilized lower classes, and any other group that was seen by them as a threat to social order, stability, and progress. Using both legal and extralegal mechanisms of rule and coercion, they strove to attain that goal ‘by reason or by force’, a motto engraved in their coins during the 19th century [20].

Although authoritarian and elitist, Chile modernized the state and the army, which allowed it to defeat neighboring states and consider itself more stable than them, take territory, and control guano and saltpeter resources. In the Pacific War (1879–1883), Chile defeated Bolivia and Peru and occupied the territory of both countries. Peru lost 36,000 square kilometers and Bolivia ca. 158,000, including 480 square kilometers of coasts, thus turning it into a landlocked country (Since then, each of the belligerent countries developed its own narratives to explain to itself and justify to others the outcome of the war, the reasons that motivated such an outcome and the legal anchoring of what they considered their legitimate rights over the disputed territories. The Treaty of Ancón, signed in October 1883, signaled the end of the war. Under the terms of that treaty, in addition to paying compensation, Peru definitively ceded the province of Tarapacá to Chile and granted it possession of Tacna and Arica for ten years, at the end of which a plebiscite or popular consultation would be held to decide the definitive sovereignty of both provinces. Only in 1929, under the Treaty of Lima and through the United States, both countries reestablished diplomatic relations and divided the disputed territory in a Solomonian manner. Tacna returned to Peru and Chile retained Arica. Bolivia rejected the outcome of the war, which was agreed in a peace treaty of 1904, and filed in 2013 an international grievance against Chile at the International Court of Justice, demanding a sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean coast, a demand that was not accepted by the ICJ in its ruling five years later).

The tradition of political stability based on Portales’ autocratic model underwent transformations later on, although it remained a guide for Chilean nationalists who saw it as the antithesis of a ‘decadent’ liberal democracy. This also explains why, after the 1973 military coup, this model inspired the installed Pinochet regime. After the revolution and civil war of 1891, the Portales model was replaced by a model of oligarchic parliamentarism. Throughout these changes, a highly legalistic conception of the public sphere was maintained. Changes in the socioeconomic and demographic composition of the country were accompanied by inclusion policies that, in the 1920s, destabilized the political status quo and led once again to military interventions and the use of extraconstitutional mechanisms of internal security, lasting until the early 1930s [20,21].

4. Institutional Stability, Authoritarian Democracy, and Politicization

The return of democracy began a long period of relative institutional stability and mobilization. Chile remained linked to international forces and models, but without generating too much fuss and international attention. It was a relatively stable country, a kind of authoritarian Eden, located at the ‘end of the world’, a country exporting raw

materials—guano, saltpeter, and later copper—and integrated into an international division of labor.

The decades of democracy were characterized by presidential governments balanced by highly partisan parliament, by tensions rooted in socioeconomic inequalities, political pressures, and demands, and by constant attempts to limit or exclude the radical left. Between 1932 and 1970, Chilean politics functioned within a multiparty system, ranging from the conservative and liberal right, through the center, represented by the Christian Democrats and the radicals, to the socialist and communist left. The democratic image of Chile then also favored the recognition of Chilean literature, with Gabriela Mistral receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945 and Pablo Neruda the same award in 1971, both poets having known exile and having also fulfilled diplomatic functions.

On the other hand, unlike what unfolded, for example, in Uruguay, with its two-party system, or under the crucial weight of Peronism in Argentina, the Chilean parties were political-ideological organizations and not multi-sectoral. After the Second World War, and despite the large number of presidential candidates and parties that were gaining positions in Congress, a political scenario was taking shape that rested on three forces. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Christian Democratic party, led by Eduardo Frei Montalva, replaced the Radical party as the main centrist force, flanked by clearly defined coalitions on the left and the right.

Modernization and mobilization went hand in hand, creating a highly politicized and polarized constellation of forces that in the early 1970s, failed to retain mechanisms for a consensual resolution of conflicts. It was then, after the presidential election of Salvador Allende in 1970, that the image of a Finisterre country would change definitively.

5. A Peaceful Path to Socialism in the Cold War Era

In those presidential elections, the Marxist senator Salvador Allende, leader of the Popular Unity (UP) coalition, won by a narrow margin over Jorge Alessandri, head of the alliance of right-wing forces. The Popular Unity was composed of the Socialist Party, the Communists, a section of the Radical Party, the Christian Left (MAPU), and a number of other small leftist organizations. His election in September 1970 provoked the violent reaction of the extreme right, which led to the assassination of General René Schneider, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, in an attempt to destabilize the political scene and provoke a military coup in October 1970. After signing a commitment to respect the Constitution together with parliamentary forces of the political center and right, Allende obtained sufficient parliamentary support to assume power.

Allende promised to move Chile toward Socialism while respecting legal and constitutional constraints, while his followers adopted more extreme measures and the opposition started plotting to bring him down. This conundrum projected the experience of Chile into the consciousness of the entire world, giving a strongly universal meaning to the fate of its democracy, which would soon be crushed by the military. The Chilean experience thus attracted global attention to the prospects of achieving Socialism within a democratic framework and in spite of the polarized context of the Cold War.

During his three-year term in office, President Allende attempted to introduce Marxist-inspired social and economic reforms within the framework of the existing legal and constitutional premises. As his government started encouraging agrarian reform and the nationalization of the banking system, major industries, and the mining sector, Allende faced vocal political and social opposition. When a government plan to reform the education system was announced, the Catholic Church and the opposition reacted bitterly. The economic policies also generated strong opposition, leading to capital flight, strikes, and a deterioration of the economic landscape. The situation was further aggravated

by the boycott of mineral exports promoted by the United States. The right-wing forces and the Christian Democratic opposition agreed on a strategy of obstruction of UP parliamentary initiatives. Attempts to achieve political compromises failed, and polarization and mass mobilization of both the right-wing and left-wing forces mounted, taking on violent overtones.

The Chilean experiment—the so-called electoral, democratic, ‘peaceful path to Socialism’—attracted global attention, as it developed in the midst of the Cold War [22]. As Allende’s government became caught between pressure from its radicalized base and the backlash of traditional elites, it was forced to call in the armed forces to stop strikes and repress armed activity. Forced to mediate between the government and the opposition, while the political right encouraged the overthrowing of the government, the armed forces came under increasing pressure. They had traditionally been respectful of the constitutional regime and highly disciplined and hierarchical, but they were not immune. During General Carlos Prats’s period as commander-in-chief, the armed forces constitutionally supported the government, but when General Augusto Pinochet replaced Prats as commander-in-chief in late August 1973, he soon opted to launch a military coup and install repressive policies to contain popular mobilization and discipline society [23].

6. The Breakdown of Chilean Democracy and the Onset of State Terror

On 11 September 1973, the armed forces overthrew the civilian government of Salvador Allende, who refused to resign and go into exile, and who committed suicide in the presidential palace of La Moneda. This was followed by a period of military rule lasting sixteen and a half years, during which systematic repression against the left and its bases of popular support was carried out as part of a broad move to reshape Chile according to a doctrine of national security that intended to eliminate all leftist opponents [24,25]. In parallel to the planned and methodical use of massive repression, the military junta led by Pinochet succeeded in institutionalizing its own regime constraining future democratization with a formula of authoritarian enclaves and limited democracy [26,27]. To accomplish that goal, it made use of constitutional acts, the sanction of the Amnesty Law of 1978, and the promulgation of a new Constitution that was approved by 67% of voters in an uncontrolled referendum in September 1980.

Following the 1973 coup, virtually all left-wing leaders who were not killed or imprisoned were forced to flee into exile. The military government conceived exile as immutable and prevented most in exile from entering the homeland until 1984. Immediately after the military coup, a Refugee Commission (CONAR) was formed, whose main function was to help persecuted Chileans reach and enter embassies where they would receive asylum that would save their lives. In 1974, an agreement was reached between the Inter-European Committee for Migration, the Red Cross, CONAR, and the Chilean government, to allow the departure of people placed under administrative detention who were not to be tried in court. In 1975, another agreement made it possible for people suffering political persecution and serving sentences to also leave Chile. Three thousand Chileans were released from prison and allowed to leave the country. Furthermore, the military government also ruled that detainees who were held without trial in concentration camps could be banished, i.e., expelled from the country without the right to return.

The decision to pursue exiled political opponents even in the diaspora, through a counter-intelligence agency, the DINA (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional), between 1973 and 1977, yielded specific results: the murders of General Carlos Prats and his wife in Buenos Aires; the attempted assassination of former Chilean Vice President Bernardo Leighton in Rome; and the assassinations of former Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier

and his assistant Ronnie Moffit in Washington, USA. However, in the long term, it turned counterproductive, as it further highlighted the terrorist character of the Chilean regime.

The case of Chile was notable for its internationalization and influence on public opinion in the West and the Communist countries. The 11 September 1973 air attacks on the presidential palace of La Moneda in Santiago left a deep mark on the global consciousness, similar to the impact of the attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. The military takeover of power constituted a break with Chilean constitutional tradition and put an end to the first experiment of Marxist–Socialist administration that came to power through the ballot box. The brutality and scale of the repression after the military takeover made Chile the cause célèbre of both the left and liberal democratic forces. The military government had alienated many Christian Democrats and members of other centrist and non-revolutionary parties (pp. 68–80, [28]), creating a constellation of forces that transcended the division of the Iron Curtain during the final stages of the Cold War. The coup thus transcended the east–west divide, as both Christian Democrats and leftist forces raised their voice against Pinochet’s rule, resonating in both Western circles and Communist countries.

Moreover, with the advice of ‘Chicago Boys’ economists trained in the USA and projecting Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman’s theories, Pinochet implemented policies of deregulation, trade liberalization, and privatization (with the exception of the national copper firm CODELCO), which drastically departed from previous protectionist and state-regulated orientations. That neoliberal model was launched first in Chile under repressive political conditions, dismantling trade unions’ strength and their capacity to oppose those policies [29,30], and from there it spread and inspired other leaders to adopt the same, among which were Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US.

7. The Chilean Diaspora, the Networks of Transnational Solidarity, and Global Concern

The arrival of Chilean exiles and transnational solidarity networks gave new impetus to the rupture of Chile’s historical insularity. General Pinochet sedimented his rule through ostracism, murder, imprisonment, and banishment. However, with the passing of time, the crystallization of a Chilean diaspora energized by the arrival of thousands of political exiles proved dysfunctional for Pinochet. Exiles disputed the legitimacy claimed by the military regime and led a global campaign against Pinochet. Their number has been estimated as between 408,000 (a number used by the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* and followed by some researchers) [31] and 450,000 [32], which is a lot for a country with a population of 10.6 million at the beginning of the dictatorship and under 14 million at the end of it. There are even larger estimates when pooling together exiles and migrants. Jorge Arrate, secretary of the Committee of Chilean exiles, even mentioned once the number of 1,800,000 nationals staying abroad [33]. The largest concentrations of Chilean exiles were in Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, and Mexico, but smaller exile communities settled throughout the Americas, Western Europe, the USSR, and East Germany, as well as in Australia or Israel [34]. Like in any other group of exiles, there was a huge diversity of age and gender, occupational and class background, and regional or ethnic composition. In terms of class origin, the workers were a minority compared to people of middle- and upper-class social backgrounds. A relatively large group of Mapuches, some 500 people particularly targeted by the military, found their way to Western Europe, where they created a Mapuche Foreign Committee that coordinated actions with other organizations and networks of exiles (pp. 229–243, [35,36]).

While abroad, many of those banished remained politically active, joined networks of solidarity and advocacy, and mobilized global public opinion, providing alternative information about the situation in Chile. The parameters of their activity were shaped by

the high level of politicization of Chilean society prior to military rule and by the length and severity of the dictatorship's rule.

The Chilean diaspora soon assumed global prominence and made Chile the *cause célèbre* of the struggle against the Southern Cone dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s. The breakdown of democracy and the extent of 'state terrorism' carried out by Pinochet's regime galvanized both Western democratic and Communist countries. Fleeing exiles and those forcefully banished from Chile became the voice of a vibrant diaspora that projected into global awareness the plight of their society undergoing massive human rights violations. The Chilean resistance resonated with many public officials, politicians, trade union activists, human rights associations, churches, and student federations in the countries of relocation.

They organized massive marches of protest and popular demonstrations in front of Chilean embassies, and they led hunger strikes that impacted public opinion. They brought stevedores' unions into European ports to boycott Chilean ships. On the walls of cultural centers, universities, theaters, and public buildings, Chilean exiles painted murals to heighten local awareness to their plight and encourage solidarity with their struggle and resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship [37]. Music also became a major medium for keeping spirits high. Exiled groups of performers such as the Quilapayún and the Inti Illimanyi visited many communities and energized them with their songs of protest and the struggle against the dictatorship [38]. The concerts also served other purposes. Like the *empanadas*, the traditional meat and onion pies that they made and sold, the concerts provided funds to support the families of political prisoners, widows and sons of the *desaparecidos* in Chile, and continue the campaigns raising public awareness and recording of the human rights violations of the dictatorship [39].

Exiles re-established their parties abroad: the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, MAPU, the Radical Party, the Christian Left, and MIR, all associated with Allende's former coalition and reconstituted in exile, mainly in Europe. The majority were left-wing parties, although there were also non-partisans and Christian Democrats, who after their initial support for the coup, opposed Pinochet's subsequent policies and had to flee. Political action through parties, solidarity committees, NGOs, and local and international organizations received a boost with the arrival of the exiles and their cooperation with local solidarity networks [40].

As time went on, exile brought about cardinal transformations. While the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in 1979 could still be interpreted within the framework of the Cold War, events in Europe and the process of rigidity, weakening, and disintegration of the USSR and the communist bloc, affected Chilean exiles' political revamping. The Chilean experience also became a major reference point for European political activists [41] in the transformation of Eurocommunism into a new kind of social democracy. The impact of the reconfiguration of the European left around its debates on Eurocommunism, the Solidarity struggle in Poland, and disillusionment with the Soviet Union impacted exile communities. These changes contributed to the reconfiguration of the Chilean left, a re-evaluation of the meaning of world politics, and the launch of think tanks for envisioning ways to modernize Chile. Think tanks and journals disseminated the renewed ideas. ASER in Paris, the Institute for the New Chile in Rotterdam, and Chile Democrático in Rome led the think tanks. Plural, published in Rotterdam, Convergencia Socialista in Mexico City, and Chile-América in Rome expressed and projected this transformation. In turn, by 1991, even Russian academics of international relations were eager to know more about Pinochet and the Chilean model of development, which they saw as a model of economic stability, growth, and governability. Apparently, this interest stemmed from the fact that in ex-Soviet eyes, Chile was about to reach a balance between prosperity, civility, and liberty,

at a time when the USSR was about to collapse following the policies of perestroika and glasnost [42].

8. The Redefinition of Political Positions in Tandem with Global Transformations

These transformational tendencies were part of a process of redefinition of the political positions and horizons of the Chilean diaspora in a relatively short period of time. Chileans settled in liberal democracies changed their views of democratic practices, civil society, and the social welfare state, institutions that in Europe and Venezuela, were articulated differently than those they had known before. Likewise, the process of transformation of authoritarian regimes in southern Europe, and later in Poland, made a strong impression on exiles. At the same time, those experiences triggered a process of re-evaluation of the political processes that led to the institutional crises at the root of their own expatriation and banishment.

All these contributed to the renewal of political creeds and party reorganization. For example, exile prompted changes among the socialists, leading them progressively to embrace political democracy, after a split in 1979. After the return of the exiles to Chile, changes also influenced the domestic front. Returning politicians were influential in January 1988 in creating a multiparty coalition of seventeen parties, the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, that won the plebiscite that same year against Pinochet's permanence at the head of the government, thus allowing the transition to democracy. The case of the PPD, the Party for Democracy, a center-left party founded by Ricardo Lagos in 1987, which served as an alternative for activism for many members of the Socialist Party, but which remained illegal under Pinochet, is illustrative. The PPD achieved centrality through its work on the 'No' campaign. Of the nine presidents of the party during the period of 1987–2011, seven had lived in exile. Only two were not displaced during the dictatorship (pp. 87–98, [34]).

That coalition, defeating Pinochet in the referendum and paving the way to democratization, governed Chile for three decades (1990–2010) and carried out several constitutional reforms aimed at eliminating the authoritarian enclaves that characterized the 1980 Constitution. In 1989, 54 reforms to the 1980 Constitution were approved through negotiations between the military and the opposition, and another 15 were enacted between 1990 and 2005. Many returning politicians served in the administrations of the Concertación, most notably under presidents Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet. Significantly, an analysis of cabinets for the period of 1994–2009 indicates that the percentage of ministers who had been exiled during the dictatorship was substantial. Although there were variations between the various administrations, the number of cabinet members who had been exiled remained high during the entire period in which the Concertación held power, playing a leading role in the curtailment of Pinochet's legacy.

The former exiles' prominence at the head of the state and in the public arena contributed to the democratization and reconstruction of institutions, as reflected by multiple testimonies of Chilean exiles, sojourners, and returnees [34]. The return to democracy was not negotiated as in Uruguay, nor was it the result of a war catastrophe and political collapse as in Argentina. But Chile inherited the Pinochet Constitution of 1980, with its authoritarian enclaves that took years to be reformed and eliminated, and above all, it inherited the impact of the profound transformations of the country's socioeconomic and cultural structure.

9. Democratization, Policies of Accountability, and Cultural Assets Projected onto the Entire World

With the return to democracy, President Patricio Aylwin adopted a broad policy of reaching a truthful account of recent history—with the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, or Rettig Commission—and achieving justice for the victims of repression ‘to the maximum extent possible’, that is, under the limits and authoritarian enclaves inherited from Pinochet’s rule and enshrined in his 1980 Constitution.

Once again, the Chilean example would serve as a model for numerous nations that undertook the arduous attempt to implement a ‘truth’ about dictatorial policies and a transitional justice that would demand accountability from those responsible for acts against humanity. An example of how the Chilean path of transitional justice effectively impacted other nations is the case of José Zalaquett. As legal director of the Committee for Peace, which defended detainees of the military regime, he was imprisoned in November 1975, and months later, went into exile. In London, he chaired Amnesty International’s executive committee from 1978 to 1982. Upon his return to Chile, he played a key role in the Rettig Commission and in the Round Table for Peace, a dialogue table between the military and the civilian left that operated from August 1999 to June 2000. As director of the Human Rights Center at the Faculty of Law of the University of Chile, Zalaquett continued to have a great influence on the recognition and institutionalization of human rights norms and served as an advisor to the South African truth commission.

This same centrality of Chile in the global arena can also be illustrated by the case of Michelle Bachelet, who after her second presidential term, went on to serve as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In cinema, art, music, and theater, the work of Chilean exiles and returnees impacted wide circles worldwide. Some, like directors Patricio Guzmán, Raúl Ruiz (who returned to Chile intermittently, a sojourner), and Miguel Littín, made films that provided critical perspectives on both the Allende period and the legacy of the dictatorship, making contributions that would help overcome some of the dichotomies of the past. In the final months of Allende’s government, Patricio Guzmán had collected filmed material for what became *La batalla de Chile* [43]. Shown only once in his country, Guzmán was already in exile when the material was smuggled out of Chile. After democratization, Guzmán showed it to younger generations, sometimes provoking a first encounter with facts that young people were completely unaware of from the national past. The result served as the basis for Guzmán’s *Chile: La memoria obstinada* [44], a documentary which allowed younger Chilean generations and many abroad to learn about what had happened and realize how the global trend of disillusionment of ideologies had been bolstered through narratives on the dangers of political polarization and how Chile’s tectonic changes in economic policy were soon replicated worldwide.

In academia, although reintegration was an important objective of the transition to democracy, and a National Office of Return was created, from the point of view of the recovery of human capital and professional skills, the policies and legislation adopted since 1990, as well as their results, were clearly insufficient. It was not enough to express support for ‘academic reconstruction’ in the context of a free market model. Areas that were not adequately addressed were legislation on reintegration, recognition of foreign academic and professional qualifications, support for education, health and housing, as well as the repatriation of affected persons, whether on an individual basis or supported by agencies and governments abroad, pension rights for staff expelled from the state sector, and institutional efforts to reintegrate returnees (pp. 206–215, [35]).

Although under the reborn democracy, there were policies of truth and justice, with trials of those responsible for the repression and forced disappearance of citizens and reforms that reduced the weight of authoritarian enclaves, the idea that old forms of

mobilization and collective solidarity can destroy the social structure and therefore must be avoided, which Pinochetism disseminated, seemed to have been internalized. The assassination of Jaime Guzmán, founder and leader of the UDI party and one of the legalists responsible for the 1980 Constitution, who was assassinated in 1991 shortly after the presentation of the Rettig Report, reaffirmed the right-wing sectors in their positions and left them feeling justified in having brought about the fall of Allende.

10. Internal Policies Tuned with Ideological Transformations, and a Subsequent Backlash

Chilean public spheres had been transformed under the tremendous influence of economic neoliberal policies into a more individualistic and sectoral society, with high levels of privatization, exclusion, unemployment, and pauperization. On their return from exile, many found Chile ‘greyer than expected’, a place where many feared competition from returnees. Extreme individualism prevailed instead of solidarity. Self-censorship had become deeply embedded, at least until October 1998, when Pinochet was arrested in London and released to supposedly stand trial in Chile. The economic model produced good macroeconomic indicators, but these concealed high social costs for those living with meager resources in a highly unequal capitalist system [45,46]. While income inequality as measured by the Gini Coefficient would eventually be reduced (bringing Chile down from Gini coefficients of over 0.50 until 2009 to a coefficient of 0.43 by 2022), research indicates that for decades, besides the concentration of wealth by dominant elites, inequality in access to social services, education, health, and pensions was more severe and impacted sociability and trust in institutions [47,48]. This sense of ‘horizontal inequality’, to use Sebastian Edwards’ term, generated wide disenchantment about social segregation, corporate greed, excessive individualism, racist traces, and, in general, a sense of lack of dignity experienced by the lower strata of Chilean society [49].

These systemic contradictions gave rise to social explosion as early as 2011, with student protests, social protests by broad popular sectors, including the Mapuches, and a renewed social explosion in October 2019. This is how a cycle of attempts to promulgate a new political constitution opened up in Chile. While surveys indicated that initially 80% of citizens were in favor of replacing the Pinochet constitution, a first constitutional project presented by the defunct Constitutional Convention in September 2022 was rejected by 62% of voters, and in December 2023, close to 56% of voters again rejected the new proposal prepared by a constitutional council. Although Chilean democracy has shown vitality, there has been lack of broad agreement within the constituent bodies with an overrepresentation of right-wing forces, and little interest from citizens whose attention is focused more on economic issues and personal security. Chilean society remains politically and socioeconomically divided.

Lacking a majority in Congress, since the start of his term in March 2022, President Gabriel Boric has had to negotiate under pressure from both the leftist and rightist political forces and has tried to reach agreements on several reform initiatives. With relatively good management of the economy and managing to attenuate the initial antagonism of the business community, although forced to replace close collaborators in his cabinet with figures close to the Concertación (Alberto Van Klaveren or Carolina Tohá), the government has made some achievements toward a better distribution of wealth. Examples include the agreement reached to legislate free healthcare in the public health system FONASA, the agreements to expand the number of medicines to be purchased at discounted prices, and the increase in the minimum wage to about USD 500 a month.

11. Conclusions

This article has followed several Chilean historical experiences that reached the global limelight, receiving wide notice and interest rarely known before. Historically, Chile did not receive much attention besides its economic participation in international markets and global circuits of modernization. Salvador Allende's 1970–1973 administration and its policies attempting to promote Socialism within legal boundaries, as well as the September 1973 coup d'état, with its subsequent repression and neoliberal policies, changed that peripheral exposure, generating a global upsurge in interest. Soon, the hectic activism of the Chilean diaspora and the networks of transnational advocacy and solidarity impacted governments as well as civil societies on an almost global scale. Likewise, the redefinition of Chilean political positions and alliances paved the way for democratization in the homeland and the adoption of policies of transitional justice that served as inspiration for other countries, among them South Africa.

Around the 50th anniversary of the 1973 military coup, global attention was again generated around Chile in a manner that resembled how the international public learned about the rise and fall of Allende and witnessed the transnational struggle of the exiles against the dictatorship and their return to the homeland. The commemoration of the coup along with the failure to pass a new constitution replacing the charter promulgated by Pinochet's regime in 1980 again attracted global public attention, albeit not with the intensity of before. Moreover, around that time, polls found a wavering commitment to democracy in Chile and shifting attitudes toward the military coup of 1973. When comparing polls from 2013 to 2023, the *Americas Quarterly* found in 2023 that there was 20 percent greater support for Pinochet's coup d'état and a decline of 27 percent in the sense of a lack of justification for any coup compared to a decade earlier [50].

Chile has reached a prominent place among Latin American nations. By 2025, Chile Global could boast that Chile was ranked 45th in the world in the HDI 2023–2024, "consolidating its regional leadership and standing out [in the region] in health, education, sustainability and gender equality [51]". The global need for Chile's mineral wealth, including of rare earth minerals, driven by the energy transition, is also of heightened relevance today [52]. Chile's agenda is likely to continue resonating worldwide and be followed by many countries as it faces, among others, policy decisions on challenges that other countries also face. Among them, the following stand out: how a politically divided society can reach consensual solutions and its political system be resilient, how to address public concerns about crime and personal security, how to promote better access to social resources, education, and pensions in a highly stratified society, how to address the contrasting views of the native population, the nation-state, and economic corporations about the use of lands, how to deal with immigration, and how to modulate the contents of education in the face of these challenges. While other countries have succumbed to the appeal of authoritarian and populist solutions as they have faced some of these challenges, Chile seems to retain its institutionality despite weakening popular enthusiasm for democracy, keeping the country in the spotlight. The days when Chile was of peripheral interest to the global system are long gone.

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