

Four Keys to Chilean Culture: Authoritarianism, Legalism, Fatalism and Compadrazgo

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“No es chileno quien no lleve en sus corvas siquiera cien kilómetros de alameda.”
G. Mistral

*“El chileno siempre se ha proyectado en una imagen falsa.
Por eso es que cuando la gente se pone a pensar en qué somos, no encuentra lo que somos.
No porque no seamos nada, sino porque eso que somos no se quiere reconocer.”*
E. Carrasco

I. Introduction

Chilean culture¹⁾ is said to be part of a wider Hispanic American culture that shares many traits (see Godoy *et al.* 1986; Subercaseaux 1999; Valdivieso

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2000) and which could be identified as an identity with a Latin American sense (see Rodríguez *et al.* 2001). In this sense, though it may seem as if any attempt to describe or analyse particular operating elements, processes, systems and structures were a useless task, the nature of identity makes it a multiple and symbolically contradictory phenomenon, with relevant contextual ‘consequences’ and particularities that help identify a collective imaginary that can be associated with what means to be Chilean. As such, the importance of meaning lies not on its production but rather on its reception; therefore, we aim to address some elements of the reception that we have identified as ‘critical’ or ‘diagnostic’. By ‘critical’, we mean those elements, which absence would substantively modify what is collectively associated with Chilean culture and by ‘diagnostic’, we suggest the possibility they offer of exploring meaningful contextual traits.

In order to contextualise our analysis, we will focus on three discursive levels, namely organisational/structural, cultural/ideological and identity. At the organisational/structural level, we will make reference to structure and aesthetics in the broader sense of social context as well as in public and private organisations; at cultural/ideological level, we will make reference to practices, rituals, values and behaviours; and at the identity level we will make reference to strategies individuals use to manage their social identities.

That said it is worth mentioning Subercaseaux’s(1997) argument that each Chilean is a pool of contradictions and clashed values, and that never had there been a nation with a scale of moral and psychological values so hard to establish. In light of these considerations, we do feel it is worth highlighting that our discussion aims to present a general overview that under no circumstance must be considered fixed or exclusive because as a

¹⁾ Throughout this paper, the term culture will be understood as a combination of what Tylor(1891) referred as a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other abilities or habits acquired by people as members of society, and the resulting dynamics in what the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation(UNESCO)(2003) refers to as cultural life or ways of living interaction (*convivencia*).

set of discursive constructions and practices, culture is in constant process of (re)construction and (re)signification (see Sennett 1977).

II. Paternalistic authoritarianism in social relations

Chilean authoritarianism is soft and becomes subtle under an umbrella of paternalism, where social links are constructed based on personalised relationships between a protective ‘superior’ and a loyal subordinate (Godoy 1986). Its origin can be found in the hacienda, the significant political, social and economic institution that can be traced to the seventeenth century and represented the power system imposed by the landlords at the time (Rodríguez *et al.* 2001).²⁾ The hacienda was a family support mechanism, a symbol of caste and, in consequence, the alliance of renowned families is a distinct historic trait in the development of Chilean society. The relationship between landlord and vassal was always ambivalent, both oppressive and protective, authoritarian and paternalistic; within the hacienda, the landlord offered protection to his people, feeding them, providing them with land produce, handing them bonuses, taking them to hospital if they became ill and buying their remedies. Also, in his land, there was usually a chapel where mass took place every Sunday and at times a school for the children. In return, the landlord received his men’s work and expected their loyalty. The dynamics of this relationship represents an extension of the colonial mandate to ‘christian’ indigenous communities, along with other practices associated with informal relationships between Spanish colonisers and native indigenous communities.

²⁾ Medina(1971) notes the sociological meaning of the hacienda landlord in Latin American life, identifying his figure as an abstract combination of rich diversity – according to regions, time and activities – and attributing him specific sociological traits, namely, (a) being a cell of both military-political and economic power, (b) constituting the nucleus of a dilated family structure, (c) becoming a circumstantial model of authority, and (d) creating a human typology of particular singular character.

Based on the historical perpetuation of this model, dominant political elites early established paternalistic relationships of protection and loyalty as appropriate dynamics of social interaction with subordinate classes, which resulted in what is recognised today as a benefactor and protective State. This brought about a political and cultural ‘clientelismo’, which has generated a weak and disorganised civil society where social paternalism and corporate paternalism proliferate. Huneus(1981) notes the contradiction generated by the presence of the ancestral subordination of the hacienda landlord in the subconscious, with guidelines of social relations similar to those of the vassals at medieval feudalism that at the same time resulted in conflictive relations in which popular vindications were canalised through the organisation and activism of powerful industrial and mining unions. However, even with the changes and the process of modernisation of the State, which resulted in the opposition to paternalistic authoritarianism, individuals still seek to establish paternalistic relationships in all aspects of their civil lives, with bosses, union leaders or whoever is considered to have/represent power to them. This also determines the relations established between the State and other organisations; formality calls for detailed contractual relationships yet informally practices keep reproducing the same patterns of paternalistic authoritarian relations where workers demand protection and aim to involve their supervisors and line managers in the solution of their personal issues and supervisors and line managers assume roles of protectors and expect loyalty from them (Rodríguez *et al.* 2001). In the same way, companies involve the State and expect its protection, and the State, in return, expects loyalty from them. These relational patterns create psychological contracts based both on complicity and reciprocity, which is still observable nowadays in the high public value that elites in the private sector place on the government, under the understanding that there must be reciprocal treatment of protection and favouritism.³⁾

³⁾ This is the most acute criticism that the CUT (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores) made to former president Ricardo Lagos in regards to all his public speeches.

Understanding authoritarianism as a means of interpersonal relations defined by domination, in which ones dictate others what to do (see Harré & Lamb 1986; Baars & Scheepers 1993), different ways of authoritarianism can be recognised to operate in Chilean public and private spheres. Authoritarian behaviour in the public sphere in Chile is imposed solely on the 'presence' of power; Hurtado (in Di Girólamo *et al.* 1984) suggests that Chilean authoritarianism is based on an assumed understanding of people's lack of maturity to exercise their liberty, hence a minority which considers itself to be enlightened and superior, assumes guiding roles identifying what is good, promoting what is convenient and establishing what is necessary for the rest. In that sense, be the powers factual or just a perceived attribution; they are rooted on tradition, law and class structure.

This form of connection and behaviour inhibits and opposes individual autonomy of subordinates and restricts open discussion and analyses of ideas between individuals to be understood of different status. People take up authoritarian behaviours, taking advantage of spaces of power available, no matter how small those spaces are; around those spaces, individuals then build up their own self-centred universe, imposing their points of view and world visions/understandings without considering others' opinions and experiences. Those who find themselves in a situation of dependency or subordination, uncritically assume the opinions, mandates or instructions of those who have any power over them and reproduce this situation making use of that power over those who are even weaker.

In that sense, not many differences are recognised between the public and the private spheres. In the public sphere, authoritarianism is expressed in agreements that affect general interests; these agreements are usually reached with the sole participation of powerful elites who impose their wishes to a passive obedient mass. Similarly, many political agreements are reached without major debate or consideration of the opinions of all affected parties and usually imply the neglect of opposing ideas and arguments.

In regards to the private sphere, family relations can be seen as a nest of authoritarianism. Based on a history of strong patriarchal values, family relations are based on obedience and the imposition of behavioural models from parents to children. There is no space or desire to consider individuality, which is sometimes understood as rebelliousness or lack of discipline. In that sense, justification discourse revolves around “[I am doing it] *for you own good*”. Likewise, authoritarianism is expressed in the way families allocate resources between their members; for example, males hold a much better chance of being supported by the family to pursue university studies than females, which would indicate that resources are allocated following a line of traditional patriarchal power within families.

Within couples, men organise and dictate relationship dynamics based on the idea that ‘there’s only space for one Captain on the ship’ (*donde manda capitán no manda marinero*). This is strongly related to the ‘machismo culture’ that along with paternalism, ethnicity, re-racialisation, racism and social adaptation, has been identified by some authors (see Bowser 1972; Liebman 1976; Alba 1978; Stephan 1991; Allen 1994; Wade 1997) as the main source of conflictive identity issues in Latin American cultures and which is linked to prescribed and assumed gender roles. Following up on that idea, paternalistic authoritarianism is an important relational pattern because in terms of gender roles, it is commonly expected that women assume a passive role and are cared for.⁴⁾

Undoubtedly, this perpetuates a systematic lack of social power of women and also affects both their self-confidence and their independence because social understandings of their role are linked to motherhood, housework and generally the reproductive role as opposed to the productive one⁵⁾. In that sense, it could be stated that women generally hold secondary

⁴⁾ Oral tradition argues that women must pass from the hands of their parents to the hands of their husbands.

⁵⁾ Friedan(1963) argues that ‘tradition dictates that women should be satisfied with the glory bestowed by them by their own femininity’(13). In the Chilean case, as it is generally within Latin America, the idea that the construction of womanhood is based on the value bestowed

spaces and remain invisibilised by a cultural system that does not allow them to have a podium or space to express their views and needs. Authoritarianism then as a general criterion serves the purpose of ‘organising’ but within the order it establishes, authority is disaggregated by gender, ethnic background, age, economic activity, educational background, and so on.

In the labour market, relationships are organised in accordance with the power socially bestowed to professions and occupations; for example, in the health sector, authoritarianism is manifest in the power exercised by doctors over all other professionals in the field, which even reaches patients as their fears, doubts are not considered and clear information about their illnesses is not provided. Though this makes people more dependent and less responsible for their bodies and wellbeing, it places doctors on a pedestal of inaccessibility, which perpetuates their status as a powerful professional elite.

Within smaller organisations, decisions are based on criteria of validity and reality defined by authority. What is learned throughout the years allows people to define the correct and acceptable actions, and criteria of rationality or efficiency are not considered or disregarded; for example, in order to decide any course of action, the behaviours of higher management are examined and their possible expectations guessed. In line with the same pattern, daily activities are justified in relation to past events in which the preferences of the superior determined the course of action or the superior’s reception was positive. This also assumes that individuals willingly assume the role of followers, which would validate McGregor’s(1960) Theory X, where he suggests the presence of managerial assumptions about human nature and human motivation arguing that individuals who place the most importance on security willingly accept to be tightly controlled and supervised because their needs of social acceptance and self-realisation are

by men on women on the base of their ability to be companions and bearer of their children could suggest that women’s glory lies in being there for men rather than in being there for themselves and pursue their own interests (even if those include wifehood/motherhood).

predominant and they would go to the extreme of losing the sense of self and become what the leader wants/needs in order to fulfil those needs.

From the previous discussion, it can be drawn that all scenarios of social dynamics, namely home, work and even ludic-recreational environments, are characterised by paternalistic authoritarianism, which is based on a perceived certainty and confidence on the unlimited power of superiors over subordinates, and the conviction that in order to ‘survive’ it is necessary to have the permanent protection of a superior, be this person the head of the family, the leader within a group of friends, the supervisor or line manager at work, the union leader, the government or even the State.

This results first, in the visualisation of consequences only in terms of their immediate implications and possibly in terms of how those consequences relate to a superior; based on the idea that there is always a superior who one can turn to when faced with any troubles or difficulties, and second, in a willingness to demand solutions from others who are perceived as more powerful, therefore assuming a complete lack of accountability for one’s actions. Individually, this results in mechanisms that promote and perpetuate a hierarchical order in which female, indigenous, uneducated and poor oppose male, Caucasian, educated and rich.

After having discussed the relevant aspects that characterise social dynamics in the light of authoritarianism and how it determines relational patterns amongst individuals and groups in different societal contexts; in the next section, we will discuss legalism and double discourse focusing on their importance in discursive justifications.

III. Legalism and double discourse

“[en Chile] la ley no sirve para otra cosa que no sea producir la anarquía, la ausencia de sanción, el libertinaje, el pleito eterno, el compadrazgo y la amistad.”

D. Portales

Legalism, understood as the discursive justification of specific actions, decisions and behaviours on the base of existing laws and regulations, is referred by many authors (see for example, Sepúlveda & Sabatini 1996; Geisse 2001; Fernández & Bello 2004) as one of the traits with more cultural weight in Chilean society. In general terms, the combination of legalism and double discourse can be linked with a reduction of uncertainty and personal responsibility yet it is interesting how two apparently contradictory terms coexist within Chilean social dynamics.

Chilean legalism covers all aspects of social life defining explicit written rules to limit individual freedom and power to make important decisions and justifying the consequences of decisions on the use of the law. In that sense, it limits actions to what is legally required and promotes avoidance of personal involvement in the critical assessment of facts, which takes us back to the idea we previously discussed about accountability for one's actions. That is why, through a discourse that stresses that law is justice and reason whilst politics is passion and interest, behaviour compliant with the law is understood to be rational, appropriate and politically correct. Some authors (see Eyzaguirre 1977; Squella 1994 & 1995) have suggested that this derives from the Napoleonic Code and Roman law, which have been the base for the Chilean judicial system for more than 100 years.

Legalism is then, a practical guide to behaviours; any significant opposition or conflict must be taken to court in order to be solved and there will be no opportunity to appeal to the court's ruling once the highest tribunal dictates a sentence. In this sense, the law is seen as an overpowering force with emphasis on systems of punishment and rewards to intimidate and control individual and group behaviour. As such, there is

an underlying assumption (see Schein 1985, 1992) that the nature of human beings is essentially bad, hence the need of explicit laws and punishments to uphold social order. A clear example of this is the long discussion in Parliament over new laws and penalties to be applied to those who contravene private or public order; where the debate is centred on typifying the offence and establishing punishment mechanisms rather than on analysing the possible causes that lead to committing offences.

In a cultural environment that elevates the law to a cult status, the process of creation and approval of any law is relevant because even the process itself is highly scrutinised in order to assure that it is carried out in an exemplary way; in that way the process epitomises a fountain of legitimacy, justice and the rule of law. However, it must be considered that the will of strengthening rule of law is not what gives origin to the law but rather the defence of specific interests and needs of different influence and power groups within Chilean society.

However, Chileans associate legalism with formalism and seriousness in social dynamics; within groups, there is always some degree of formalisation and structure needs to become explicit to its members. This awareness of structure operates not necessarily in simple superficial terms of formality but to a certain extent, it fulfils a need for order and hierarchy in social relations. At the same time, formalism includes flexibility or an agreed informality, which is included as part of the formal definitions of this social interaction. This could possibly explain the respect shown by Chilean society to ideals of established and legitimised order, which makes change very hard to accomplish due to the resistance/rejection shown to any transformational initiative that aims to modify or change legitimised practices.

In contrast with this extreme legalism, there is a tendency amongst individuals with little social powerful not to keep their word and to consider sharpness (*viveza*) as a virtue, praising those who deceive others (Edwards

1983). Whilst formal public discourse objects to certain practices, these practices remain part of social dynamics and are instead kept hidden ‘in the backyard’ (*en el patio trasero*), known by everyone and becoming an important source of pride for those who see themselves as having defeated the system. In this sense, double discourses are an interesting practice because even those who would be considered as verbally extreme in their pursue of legalism, incur in practices that evidence double discourse, making it complex to identify the real intentions of speakers in given circumstances.

In line with the contradictory relation established by the concurrent presence of legalism and double discourse, social control is established through contracts and laws, with the aim of minimising ambiguity. Legalism is then reinforced through laws, which are interpreted in their ‘essence’ by courts and tribunals because every law has both word and spirit.

IV. Tendency to fatalism and conservatism

“La vida dramática y angustiosa del chileno medio no deja lugar para la alegría espontánea.”
H. San Martín

Fatalism can be understood as a belief system in which people understand that events in their lives are totally determined by the outside world (see Greene 1944) and that ‘there is nothing they can do about it’. The term derives from the Latin word ‘*fatum*’ which means prediction, oracle or unavoidable destiny and in the sense in which we refer it in this writing, it implies a sense of the tragic that results in behavioural patterns that revolve around a devaluation of the present.

It has been suggested (see San Martín 1970; Hunneus 1981; Di Girólamo *et al.* 1984; Godoy *et al.* 1986; Gómez Díaz 1997) that the basis for Chilean behaviour lies in a fatalist understanding of existence in which everyone’s

destiny is already pre-determined thus every occurring event is inevitable. This belief becomes evident in a resigned attitude towards the inevitable, an acquiescence that recognises an irremediable nature in people's destinies, thus resulting in pessimism about the future and sense of impotence towards the world and society.

The particular influence of fatalism in the psico-social profile of Chileans has been widely discussed (see Gómez Díaz 1997; Rodríguez Ortiz *et al.* 2001) suggesting that it results in conformism and resignation as main responses when faced with any circumstances, even the most negative ones, whilst also allowing for the avoidance of accountability and take refuge in ideas of inevitable fatal circumstances. As such, conformist and resigned behaviours are the result of the feeling of impotence towards a 'set' destiny.

However, Chilean fatalism is not always linked to pessimism; like in any other human community, there is a combination of pessimism and optimism. On one side, there are the most documented and debated beliefs and behaviours, which relate to a pessimist approach, such as the ones previously described. On the other side, there are the least studied beliefs and behaviours that suggest the use of mechanism and controls to affect social reality, such as the perception that social problems do have solutions if the appropriate means are in place to deal with them. As it can be identified, both systems of beliefs and patterns of behaviours suggest a perception of inevitability, yet both have different consequences and are expressed in different moments. The pessimist moment or pessimist disposition is wrapped by a feeling of anticipated failure, which brings about an inability to let go of particular behavioural patterns, resulting in a self-fulfilled prophecy. On the contrary, the optimist moment or optimist disposition the same reasons derive in a feeling of inevitable success, yet in the later, the result is not always a self-fulfilled.

The previous ideas can be summarised in Gómez Díaz's (1997) argument that Chilean fatalism oscillates between two moments: optimism (manic)

and pesimism (depressive); enthusiam is quickly abandoned upon a feeling of complete discouragement; manics show an exaggerated and unrealistic faith in sudden solutions that would solve all problems at once, which is typical of the initial enthusiasm over any new project. It is said that in Chile, people are inevitably über optimist or annoyingly pessimist. Finally, it can be stated that these apparently dichotomical positions are easily observable in most aspects of Chilean societal dynamics, for example, discourses in the political arena, competitive sports (particularly football), private sector and unions.

We will now move to discuss *compadrazgo* in friendship networks; following up on the model of analysis we identified, we will address social interactions, both at individual and group level.

V. Compadrazgo and friendship networks

“Esta clase privilegiada pone en acción todos los medios sociales en cuanto le conviene a su defensa y conservación; arrojándose la tutela del pueblo, manifiesta desear mucho su progreso, pero no hace jamás por él todo lo que desea.”
J. V. Lastarria

In Chilean society, the need to be part of groups defines the development of relationships, and appropriateness mainly varies in terms of circumstances of affinity; that is, criteria for desirability to belong are very diverse and move within a spectrum that covers groups, such as family, friends, former classmates, work colleagues, acquaintances, and so on, and psychosocial traits, such as bio-physical appearance, gender, cultural background, economic background, amongst others. This is the result of the class structure imposed by the Spanish colonisers, which had a strong ethnic

component where Europeans (white caucasians) see themselves as superior to the local indigenous population⁶⁾.

Within this general framework of stratification, mechanisms of solidarity and reciprocity developed in order to minimise uncertainty and guarantee security through the help of others. That is how Chilean *compadrazgo* comes to be; it can be defined as a social institution that allows reinforcing links with relatives and friends through reciprocity. Within it, each person's value, influence and power are determined by the level of centrality they have within the *compadrazgo* network. This centrality assumes the simultaneous participation of individuals in several groups and networks, and also the rooting of connections within them. The networks are of particular importance because they connect people both within and outside organisations both in the private as well as in the public sector. As large is the amount of links within networks and across networks, the more valuable an individual becomes within the *compadrazgo* network.

As it was already suggested, *compadrazgo* implies a reciprocal relationship and as such, it operates like a 'contract' that links the parties involved in a system of moral and social obligations, requiring the reciprocal exchange of favours. Three symbolically equivalent and irrevocable acts are expressed in this contract: doing favors, receiving favors and paying back favours. The system of giving and taking assumes an implicit accounting that never closes in absolute terms but is rather always in debt because one always owes and is owed.

In its most benigne form, *compadrazgo* becomes manifest in 'special treatment' that usually overruns or violates others' rights. There is a guilt-free reciprocal dynamic in the way these favours operate, and there is a consciousness about the symbolic importance of the favour dynamic in order to secure a trustworthy network of acquaintances and friends. The

⁶⁾ Close to the Sixteenth century, Spanish colonisers established a social stratification based on elements such as race, use of resources and services, and access to certain privileges (De Ramón 1971).

value of a service or favour is given by, at least, two elements: the value of the act in itself (e.g., how much is this worth if I had to do it on my own?) and most importantly, the circumstantial aspects of it, that is, the situation in which the giver and taker were. The latter may be related to an identifiable need of acceptance in the form of being prioritised by another in a relative position of power (e.g., others will realise that this person prioritised me over them, therefore I am important).

As a circuit of exchanges postponed in time, *compadrazgo* continuously creates social links and extends the net of potential allies. *Compadres* (buddies, pals) owe each other protection, mutual respect, help and favours; in the extent in which established links become more consistent, they become mandatory and require reciprocity. The existence of *compadrazgo* is conditioned by the mutual response of the parties involved: if any of the parties does not comply with its ‘duty’ the relationship is broken and the contract is in danger of being broken, not only with the person to whom it was violated, but with the entire network associated with that person.

The exchange is based on unwritten rules of reciprocity: Favours are usually exchanged between people of the same social status; someone must not deny a favour or service and must always be willing to do them because ‘favours must be paid back with favours’ (*favores se pagan con favores*). Equally, other ‘rules’ include that those who are not able to reciprocate a favour must not ask for it and also, one must not ask someone ‘important’ for a trivial favour. The rule of thumb could be that one needs to have the right friend at the right time (“se debe tener el amigo adecuado en el momento adecuado”); at times, the number of relatives and friends can be insufficient and someone must go to ‘the friend of a friend’. As a result of this form of social interaction, *compadrazgo* relations prevail within formal structures, both at public and private organisations. Even though people acknowledge individual merit as means for social recognition, this alone is not enough and friendship and group solidarity seem to be needed as well;

as society becomes more modern and complex neither *compadrazgo* nor merit are useful on their own but rather complement one another.

In the public sector, workers assume their roles and fall under the influence of line managers and supervisors, who then assumes the role of ‘landlord’ and ‘compadre’. This can be identified in the common practice of higher authorities who generally reserve a number of posts for their followers and appoint the most loyal members of their *compadrazgo* network to positions of monitoring and control. In summary, *compadrazgo* must be understood as a network established by interconnected units of groups and individuals. Connections represent both formal and informal relations and are constituted based on shared interests, complementarity, affinity and belonging. It is present in the private sphere and within the public sphere in work environments as well as in politics. Jobs in the public sector are valued and filled through political *compadrazgo*, which results in chains of clientelism and defensive behaviours that can be categorized as corporativism (see Malloy 1977).

Eventually, *compadrazgo* can generate nets of corruption; as for example, the case of the reciprocal exchange of resources between political groups and pressure groups. Pressure groups must get to political groups in order to have privileged access to decisions; similarly, political groups need pressure groups to obtain information and use their ability to stabilise the environment. At this level, negotiations, bargaining and information exchange takes place, usually at the margins of legal norms, and though not violating them but rather leaving a sense of questionable moral grounds.

In the private sphere, given the central role of the family in Chilean social order, reciprocity between relatives and friends is seen to have a ‘sacred’ status; however, as societal dynamics become more complex, there relations turn more ‘secular’, and as a result, supervisor/worker relations can at times be stronger than that of members of a same family group. An example of this can be found in the traditional farming sector in the central

zone of Chile where the ‘patron’ (*el patrón*) offers political protection and job security and in return, gets obedience and loyalty. Linked to *compadrazgo*, there is a tradition of socialisation that promotes the inclusion in practices and actions typical of the immediate reference group, without any critical thoughts to mediate those behaviours or their consequences they imply. The presence of a strong sense of hierarchy is evident and individual will is subordinated to definitions made by collectives and groups in terms of what is the best thing to do and who are the best people to do it.

After having systematised the main ideas underlying *compadrazgo* and the social dynamics that it defines, we will now move to a closing reflection of the four traits previously discussed and argue their importance as key elements of Chilean culture.

VI. Chilean culture: Diversity, fragmentation and ambivalence

“En el caso de Chile nos encontramos con algo mucho más sutil y elaborado. Se trata de la mentira perfecta. Una legalidad que se convierte en legalismo, una formalidad que se convierte en formalismo, una moral que se convierte en cinismo producen la apariencia de normalidad, de claridad y de funcionamiento correcto. Es una mentira tan perfecta que casi parece una verdad.”

R. Otano

Based on the issues previously discussed, we have identified three themes within which we can analyse those issues and frame Chilean culture: diversity, fragmentation and ambiguity. Though diversity would suggest the impossibility to make generalised categorisations; first, Chilean context shows cultural uniqueness in relation to that of the Latin American or South American region so it would be accurate to state that it is diverse context to which no sense of fixed uniformity can be attributed. And second, the co-existence of systems with apparent contradicting aims makes it equally diverse as it suggests both the operating dynamics that actually regulate

actions and behaviour but also, an intent to discursively reproduce vital situations how it is understood they ‘should be’.

Following on the previous argument, fragmentation results from the complexity of identity within culture. Again, even as the idea of identity is that of something always ‘in construction’, the repetitive question of what is acceptable or not as essentially Chilean and the inconsistencies and gaps between what is understood to be ongoing, what is happening and what should be happening, creates a sense of dissonance that repeats in all the discourses analysed. Valdivieso (2000) suggests the need to work on objective and realistic visions of Chile in order to reach a form of ‘authentic truth’ to bring about coincidence between the soul and the past that configures it. Though we will not argue the contested nature of what ‘objective’ means, his suggestion is in line with ideas about moving on from self-deceit and acknowledgement of the ‘real’ Chilean identity; one full of contradictions, for example, a denial of indigenous past in a territory with a population whose majority shares indigenous roots.

Finally, ambivalence is a key element in what could be identified as both an understanding of existence as cyclic and a contemplative approach to life. As it was discussed, there are tendencies to deny or rather not recognise the future and present time is assumed as cyclic, more reversible than unrecoverable; which results in an almost absolute detachment from the consequences of present acts. People live their lives as if the world were relatively static; exercises of linear projection are made where facts and events from the past are extended to the future, estimating consequences and change not in terms of what is happening now but in terms of what was lived.

In addition to this, there is the idea of the ‘systematic growth of failure’ (*cultivo sistemático del fracaso*) which is centred on passive contemplation. This is relevant because even as there is an official discourse that reinforces the idea that Chile is not a developing country but a country already living

the industrialised dream, and encourages Chileans to live up that reality; there is also recognition of the presence of contemplative attitudes at group and individual levels, where accomplishing is discouraged and the existence of those with intentions of building, creating or generating changes is made difficult (see Edwards 1983) by means of blocking, being undervalued and ‘*chaqueteo*’.⁷⁾ In this sense, those who follow suit are better off as they comply with group mentality.

In our view, these three themes help frame Chilean culture as they reflect the dynamics we elaborated on in the previous sections of this paper. Our closing statement will be one of a thoughtful nature as even when we may identify gaps, flaws and contradictions in relational patterns, we have to go back to the importance that those relational patterns have in individuals and groups within specific cultural contexts (Boas 1966). Cultural knowledge helps people mediate their existence in any social group. In the Chilean case, it is obvious that even the fatalism we addressed can be recognised in the descriptions we used as reference or even in our own approach. In the end, the fact remains that through the use of this specific systems that combines diversity, fragmentation and ambiguity, Chileans (re)create what they understand to be their culture and control and apply symbolic meanings that help them ‘make sense’ to their lives and experiences.

Abstract

In this paper, the authors explore some of the characteristics that stand out in social dynamics in Chile and which can be understood as structuring ‘Chilean culture’, particularly amongst the population in the middle region on the country, between the Fourth and the Tenth Region; that is to say

⁷⁾ *Chaqueteo* is understood as the practice of systematically lowering the profile of someone by making remarks that undervalue their ideas, their work and so on, resulting on perceptions of that person as being a charade, sham or false.

between La Serena and the Great Isle of Chiloe⁸. The paper comprises six sections. The first section provides a brief introduction to Chilean culture, contextualising it in the framework of the Latin American Region. The second section discusses paternalistic authoritarianism in social relations; the third section addresses legalism, arguing that in Chile, legalism implies a tendency to generate formal mechanisms to avoid uncertainty and accountability regarding the consequences of decisions; the fourth section discusses the tendency towards fatalism and conservatism and these traits coexist with double discourse; the fifth section discusses the construction of social dynamics, focusing on the influence of nepotism, friendship and compadrazgo in relational patterns. Finally, the sixth section provides a final reflection of how the traits and characteristics described frame what could be understood as ‘Chilean culture’ and result in particular dynamics within Chilean society.

Key Words: Chilean culture, authoritarianism, legalism, fatalism, compadrazgo

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⁸⁾ The middle region is approximately 1600 kilometres long and an average of 100 kilometres wide. The country's length is superior to 4200 km, from the extreme North to Cape Horn.

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