

DEMOCRATISATION AND STATE-CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS IN CHILE, 1983-2000: FROM EFFERVESCENCE TO DEACTIVATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

The 1973 military coup in Chile did not only put an end to the Socialist experiment led by Salvador Allende, it also destroyed one of the oldest democracies of Latin America. For more than seventeen years, a military regime led by General Augusto Pinochet ruled the country in an extremely repressive manner. Political parties and leaders were persecuted, tortured and assassinated, while all kind of social organizations and associations came under state surveillance or were outlawed. In this way, the nature of the traditional state-civil society relations in Chile, based in the existence of a complex and good organized civil society which was connected to the state through the active mediation of strong and representative political parties, abruptly came to an end.

During the 1980s, however, Chile experienced a peculiar process of democratic liberalization, which was eventually facilitated by the 1980 Constitution imposed by Pinochet himself. This process culminated with the full restoration of democratic rule in March 1990. Since then, Chile has experienced a relatively successful process of democratic consolidation in which for a long time government and opposition reached a high degree of consensus in several areas of policy-making, while the country's economic performance has been among the best within the developing world. Nevertheless, a series of 'authoritarian enclaves' remain within Chile's institutional and legal system, as a heritage of the former regime. In addition, even today the influence of General Pinochet has continued to put the country's political stability under permanent strain.

The Chilean nation has not yet found the way to adequately deal with its recent political past, as both the Allende and Pinochet years continue to exert a very strong influence on current political events. For instance, questions such as the responsibility of the Right and the Left (concepts

which are still very alive in this country) in the destruction of the former democratic system, and particularly the human rights violations committed by the Pinochet regime, still keep Chilean society divided in two almost irreconcilable camps. On the one hand, there are many Chileans who enthusiastically supported the former military regime and now forcefully defend the 'oeuvre' of General Pinochet and his person. On the other hand, there is another part of Chilean society which decisively opposed the military government and now demands justice and punishment for those involved in the human rights violations committed by the military in the period 1973-1989. The existence of these two Chiles became clear for international public opinion when Pinochet was detained in London in October 1998. A part of Chile euphorically celebrated this historical event, while the rest of the country frenetically defended the old General and demanded his immediate release.

In this paper, I explore the role Chilean civil society has played in national affairs both during the military government and the current democratic period inaugurated in 1990. I attempt to analyze one of the key paradoxes of the process of democratic transition in Chile: the fact that Chile's civil society has become extremely deactivated following the democratic restoration, while during the military government, particularly in its final stage, civil society was very active in national affairs. How can one explain the relative apathy and demobilization one can find in present day Chilean civil society? As I will argue here, we are dealing with an extremely complex phenomenon representing the result of the combination of a series of historical, political, social, cultural and institutional factors. Among these factors one can mention the traumatic experience of Chile's recent political history and the fears for populism, the pacted nature of the democratic transition, and the moderate and reconciliatory character of the new democratic authorities. Also, the good performance shown by the Chilean economy, and the relatively good functioning of institutions and the strength of the country's political parties system have contributed to the further demobilization of civil society. Last but not least, the social and cultural impact of the neoliberal model of society imposed by Pinochet, and the relative absence (and hence lack of influence) of the international donor community to actively promote a larger role for civil society in this country, have also produced negative effects on the citizen's disposition to actively participate in national affairs.

II. CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA

The wave of democratization moving across Latin America since the mid-1980s generated a vigorous debate about its causes and the prospects for

democratic consolidation in the continent (cf. O'Donnell *et al.*, 1986; Malloy and Seligson, 1987; Baloyra, 1987; Munck, 1989; Mainwairing *et al.*, 1992; Peeler, 1998). Among the most contested issues in the transition debate, we find the assessment of the role played by civil society in precipitating the final crisis of authoritarian rule in Latin America and the definition of civil society itself. Following Diamond (1999:221), I understand civil society as “the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared values”. However, under the concept civil society we have to understand *all* sectors of society, and not just the poor and the repressed and not only that part of society who resists authoritarian rule, as it has frequently occurred in studies centered on the nature of civil society in Latin America. One also has to include into the equation those sectors in society that tacitly or openly support the undemocratic regime. By stressing this point, I only want to make clear that civil society is far from being a cohesive entity and that its internal strong contradictions and conflicts can be present, as the Chilean case clearly shows. As Stepan points out, civil society represents an “arena where manifold social movements (such as neighborhood associations, women’s groups, religious groupings, and intellectual currents) and civic organizations *from all classes* (such as lawyers, journalists, trade unions, *and entrepreneurs*) attempt to constitute themselves in an ensemble of arrangements so that they can express themselves and advance their interests” (Stepan, 1988:3-4; emphasis mine).

But, again, how important was the role played by civil society in causing the terminal crisis of military government in the Southern Cone of South America? To this respect, two rather antagonistic interpretations have been put forwards. In the seminal and influential study by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986:19) a clear state-oriented interpretation is presented in which the end of the military regimes is related to deep internal disagreements and conflicts within the ruling coalition. As they categorically put it: “we assert that there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence, direct or indirect, of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself, principally along the fluctuating cleavage between hard-liners and soft-liners”. From this perspective, only when the moderate sector imposes its position within the inner circle to ‘decompress’ the political system, civil organizations make use of the broader political space to reactive themselves and to press for more freedom and eventually for the restoration of democratic rule. This mobilization, however, is according to them only temporary. As they argue, “the ‘opening’ ... of authoritarian rule, usually produces a sharp and rapid increase in general

politicization and popular activation (...). However, this wave crests sooner or later, depending on the case. A certain normality is subsequently reasserted as some individuals and groups depoliticize themselves again, having run out of resources or become disillusioned, and as others deradicalize themselves, having recognized that their maximal hopes will not be achieved. Still others simply become tired of constant mobilization and its intrusion into their private lives” (Ibid.:26). Unfortunately, they do not provide explicit evidences or examples of the ways this process of depoliticization and deradicalization take place in specific countries. Later, I will illustrate these phenomena for the case of Chile.

Contrasting to this interpretation, Stepan (1985) vindicates the importance of the mobilization of civil society against authoritarian rule in forcing the regime change. In addition, he stresses the need to pay more attention to the dynamics of state-civil society relations in order to understand the changes at state level. In his view, however, the nature of this relation not always necessarily represents a zero-sum situation (in which a strong state led to a weak civil society or that a weak state is generally accompanied by a strong civil society). For instance, he mentions the case of Argentina where in the early 1980s a decline in state power went hand in hand with a decline in the strength of civil society. In contrast, Brazil experienced a brief positive-sum period (1970-1973) in which civil society began to rebuild its institutions while the state continued to acquire additional coercive capacity. In the Chilean case, as he correctly points out, state power under Pinochet in the period 1973-1981 radically increased while the power of civil society dramatically declined. This was made possible by a series of factors such as the intensity of the class conflict during the period that preceded the coup, making it relatively easy for the military to obtain a broad acceptance of their political project from the large and powerful middle and upper classes. In addition, during that period the repressive apparatus of the Pinochet regime possessed a high degree of internal institutional cohesion, which, for many years, made the organization of active opposition coming from civil society practically impossible (Stepan, 1985:320).

III. DISARTICULATING CHILEAN CIVIL SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF CONSUMERISM

The disarticulation of civil society during the largest part of the Pinochet regime cannot be exclusively attributed to repression alone. The neoliberal model of society imposed by Pinochet and his *Chicago boys*¹ produced profound social and cultural transformations that for many years also helped to keep Chilean civil society in a state of disarray. The Chicago

boys rejected collective efforts among the population and stimulated the achievement of individualistic goals. Happiness and individual rewards had to be found in the market in a constant attempt to increase the personal levels of consumption of goods. The new value system supported by them represented in fact an open appeal to the population to liberate its consumerist desires (cf. Silva, 1995).

The project of authoritarian modernization imposed by the military regime was oriented toward the full opening of the Chilean economy to foreign competition and the total integration of the country into the world market. The neo-liberal economic policies led to a full-scale privatization of the state-owned industries and almost to the elimination of the traditional role played by the state in the country's socioeconomic development. The idea was to replace the state by the alleged 'impersonal rule of the market' as the main mechanism for the allocation of resources in society (cf. Foxley, 1985).

By the full integration of the Chilean economy into the world market, Chilean upper and middle classes did dramatically enlarge their access to consumer goods from the core countries, leading to the adoption of very sophisticated patterns of consumption. Although the import wave of consumer goods mainly benefited the dominant social sectors in society, the popular sectors were not entirely marginalized from the new phenomenon of consumerism. In a sense this is true even for those who did not obtain 'effective' access to those goods, as they at least ideologically assimilated the idea of modernity as formulated by the military regime in which 'modernity' became almost equalized with 'consumerism'. In the authoritarian conception of modernity the 'liberty to consume' has to replace political liberty in an effort to depoliticize society and consolidate the personal rule of general Pinochet (cf. Moulán, 1998).

The attempt by the military government to redefine Chileans as 'consumers' instead of 'citizens' was mainly directed to privatize the nature of the social relations within civil society. For this purpose, the regime tried to destroy all kind of collective identities existing in Chilean society such as party and neighborhood loyalties and social solidarity with the needy, which were officially seen as unwanted heritages of a 'socialistic' past. As a substitute for the search of collective goals, the military government offered a neo-liberal ideology that was entirely directed to obtaining 'individual' achievements (Moulán and Vergara, 1980; Vergara, 1985). In this manner, individual freedom was redefined so as to encourage free access to open markets, while the 'pleasure of consumption' was presented as an instrument to express social differentiation and as a way to obtain personal rewards. From this perspective, the Chicago boys pointed out that

social mobility was in fact mainly a question of personal achievement. At the end, the expansion of consumerist behavior in Chile generated a kind of passive conformism among the population, who eventually accepted the individualistic tenets of the neo-liberal economic model based on the search for private satisfactions. Chile had in fact become a consumer society, this despite the country's strong social stratification and inequalities.

The internationalization of the Chilean economy has not only strengthened consumerism in the local culture, but it also has led to the adoption of values, beliefs, ideas and even patterns of behavior and cultural orientations similar of those of the core countries. Indeed, one can state that Chilean society has been deeply shaken by the modernizing neoliberal project. Actually, with the relative expansion of the market relations also the patterns of behavior regulated by economic calculations have been expanded. In addition, many people incorporated themselves to a system of meritocratic and individualistic mobility, replacing the old system in which one had to be part of a group (mainly political parties) and in which mobility was conditioned mainly by the capability of the group to exert political pressure on the state.

The consumption-oriented model introduced by the military government had from the very beginning a structural weakness. To wit, the expansion of consumption was not based on a sound economic development based on real production, but it had been mainly financed by external loans. Although the Chilean economy experienced growth in the period 1977-1981, this was far from sufficient to cope with the country's increasing financial indebtedness towards the international banks. Politically, the military government had linked her legitimating toward the population with the continuous expansion of the consumption of consumer goods. In 1981, however, the neoliberal model collapsed as a result of a wave of financial speculation and the enormous foreign debt Chile had incurred to the tune of almost 20 billion dollars. A deep economic recession followed, which suddenly interrupted the consumerist boom. This produced great discontent and frustration among the upper and middle classes because the crisis had destroyed the life styles they had developed in the previous years. The economic crisis also activated the opposition to the military government, which in the boom years proved not to be able to counteract the neo-liberal ideological machine.

IV. THE SHORT-LIVED REAWAKENING OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Since 1983, Chile experienced a true resurrection of the old political parties who mobilized the population around the demand for the restoration

of democratic rule. After almost a decade, the outlawed political organizations began gradually to reestablish its partisan activities in an increasingly open manner, while the military government, showing clear signs of weakness, searched for some formula to tackle the new political situation (cf. Valenzuela and Valenzuela, 1986; Cavarozzi and Garretón, 1989). A mass protest against the government, held on May 11, 1983, marked the definitive reactivation of Chilean civil society. Since that historical demonstration, several 'days of national protest' were organized in a monthly basis in Chile's largest cities, demanding the restoration of democracy. At the beginning, the protest movement succeeded in mobilizing not only the popular sectors, but also an important part of the urban middle classes who had become extremely frustrated and angry due to the persisting depression. The period 1983-1988 were glorious years for several actors in Chilean civil society such as labor unions, the squatter movements, women organizations, human rights groups, Indian confederations, and the like. These movements and related NGOs obtained huge financial support of developmental agencies and political organizations from Western countries. The spectacular reactivation of social movements in Chile since 1983 has more recently originated a rich debate about the role of grassroots movements and civil society as large played in the opposition against the Pinochet regime (cf. Oxhorn, 1995; Schneider, 1995; Guillaudat and Mouterde, 1998). Oxhorn, for instance, refers to the paradoxical effect of state repression in making possible the generation of a more relative autonomous civil society. As he indicates; "authoritarian rule causes the multiplication of different organizations in society and, in particular, if the cessation of traditional forms of political activity enhances the autonomy of such organizations to define and pursue their own interests, [a] variegated civil society (..) may actually begin to emerge in embryonic form under the authoritarian regime. (..) Under certain circumstances, the resumption of significant base-level organizational activity is not only possible under an authoritarian regime, but also a direct result of the authoritarian experience itself" (Oxhorn, 1995:6).

After some months of broad opposition activity against the authoritarian regime, the 'days of national protest' began to gain an unexpected radical character, while the democratic opposition parties proved unable to channel and to guide the protest actions of the exalted masses. This was particularly the case in the shantytowns surrounding Santiago where the protests against the government reached almost insurrectional dimensions. Radical segments of the opposition, like the Communist party and the Movement of Revolutionary Left (MIR), actively supported the violent actions of the *pobladores*, as they had chosen for a strategy of 'popular insurrection' to bring down the dictatorship. The government answered this challenge with massive

military operations in the shantytowns that led to the death of dozens of *pobladores*. This demonstration of military power deeply shocked shantytown dwellers, as it resembled the methods used by the military forces following the 1973 coup (Martínez, 1986; Salazar, 1990).

As Tironi points out, “the violence which broke out as a result of the protests of 1983 and 1984 automatically revived in the collective memory the images of the traumatic crisis of 1973” (1990:181). The military government did ingeniously use through the mass media the images of *pobladores*’ violence in order to reactivate the middle class’ fears for chaos and insurrection of the popular sectors. At the end of 1984, most of the manifestation of protests that has been previously observed in Santiago’s middle class neighborhoods had virtually disappeared. Both the ‘threat from bellow’ and the strong recovery experienced by the Chilean economy since mid-1984, deactivated middle class’ agitation, permitting Pinochet to regain control of the situation. In other words, class cleavages did eventually divided Chilean civil society about the desirability to put an end to military rule.

The democratic opposition took major lessons from the ‘days of protest’ that proved decisive for the later adoption of a workable political strategy to put an end to military rule in the country. First, the protests had showed that mass political actions would not bring down this dictatorship, which proved still to be strong and to count on a considerable support from the population. After this experience, the democratic opposition parties chose for a top-down approach, directed rather to the achievement of agreements at the directive levels of the political organizations than the political activation of the masses. Second, the use of violence results counterproductive as this provides legitimacy to the military rulers to repress the people, and permitted the reactivation of the fears of regression to old forms of confrontation. The protest experience also proved that the objective to constitute a single front against Pinochet was unreal: left-wing extremism had clearly chosen for a violent and armed path, while the rest of the opposition had now very convincingly opted for a political outlet. Third, it became manifest that the first priority of the democratic opposition was to constitute as soon as possible a alliance of parties that should have to become a moderate and credible alternative to the military regime. And finally, it seemed very unlikely that the military government should deviate from its institutional agenda as stipulated in its own 1980 Constitution. It implies that sooner or later the democratic opposition would have to accept the validity of that controversial constitution, by fully using the few political spaces permitted by the authoritarian legislation.

In the end, center and moderate leftist political parties managed to regain their control on a large part of grassroots organizations that became

largely subordinated to the general goal to defeat Pinochet at a Plebiscite, which according to the 1980 constitution had to take place in October 1988 (by which Pinochet attempted to obtain the population's approval for the continuation of his regime for another eight years).

The opposition forces were realistic enough not to ignore the fact that Chile as a whole had experienced a profound process of modernization since the late 1970s. So during 1988 referendum, they did not center their campaign around economic issues, but on the human right abuses of the military to which the Pinochet government had no clear-cut answers or explanations. At the eve of the referendum, it was clear that Chilean society has been radically modernized, this being true not only at the economic field. To wit, the new pattern of accumulation introduced by the neo-liberals had indeed helped to reduce the traditional dependency of society on the state, and has stimulated a process of individualization and diversification, enlarging the distance between public and private life. In addition, social organizations had become less politicized, while political parties have become less corporative. In short, Chilean culture had become, in general terms, more pragmatic, more secular, and more individualistic (Tironi, 1990).

V. THE OTHER SIDE OF CIVIL SOCIETY: THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ELITES

When dealing with the role played by civil society in the Chilean transition, the politically influential entrepreneurial organizations have also to be incorporated into the analysis. So while progressive social movements and the popular sectors mobilized themselves in an attempt to bring down the military regime, this other side of civil society directed a considerable part of their financial, political and ideological resources towards the objective of keeping Pinochet in power (cf. Montero, 1997).

O'Donnell *et al* (1986) managed to place the elites back in the center of the political analysis, after more than a decade in which only the study of social movements and the popular sectors under the authoritarian regimes had captivated the attention of most scholars. They strongly emphasize the extraordinary degree of uncertainty characterizing the transition process. In a context of rapid social changes, a set of specific actors may take crucial decisions without having a full understanding of the future significance of these decisions for the evolution of the new political regime. Potter summarizes this elite-oriented approach towards transitions in the following words: “democratization is largely contingent on what elites and individuals do when, where and how. (..) The historical route to liberal democracy is determined fundamentally by the agency of elite initiatives and actions, not by changing structures” (1997:17-18). Indeed, in most Latin American cases, democratic transition has been facilitated by some

sort of pact or pacts (or even clear cut elite settlements such as in the cases of Uruguay and El Salvador) that served to regulate competition and conflict between competing political elites. Peeler, for instance, recognizes the important role played by successful mass mobilization of opposition elites, as their credibility as potential negotiators with the government depends substantially on their ability to mobilize and guide a mass of their followers. This is especially important at the beginning of the transition process, but once political parties retake their pivotal position in national politics, much less room is left for social movements and other autonomous political manifestations (1998:83-88, 193).

This process of negotiation between regime and opposition elites can evolve into what Higley and Gunther have called 'elite convergence', representing a series of deliberate, tactical decisions by rival elites that have the cumulative effect of creating elite consensual unity. As they point out, the opposition elite can arrive at the conclusion that there is no way to challenge their rivals' hegemonic position except to beat them at their own game. Thus, "they decide to compete according to the regime's rules of the game, implicitly or explicitly acknowledging the legitimacy of its institutions" (Higley and Gunther, 1992:xi-xii, 24-30). This is precisely what happened in Chile as the democratic opposition to Pinochet implicitly accepted the rule of the game imposed by the authoritarian regime by deciding to challenge the government by using the few legal mechanisms allowed by the 1980 constitution (particularly the 1988 plebiscite and the subsequent 1989 general elections).

It is important to stress here that the concept elites is generally used to indicate political elites, *i.e.* representatives of the regimes (both military and civilians) and leaders of the opposition political parties. Time and again, the role played by economic elites and their associations in the course of the transition process is generally neglected – Cardoso (1986) and Campero (1991) being among the few exceptions.

If we look at the Chilean case, the negotiations between some civilian officials of the military government and the *Concertación* coalition, certainly was a decisive step towards the restoration of democratic rule in the country (cf. Cavarozzi, 1992). However, the strategic position adopted by entrepreneurial groups towards the democratic opposition during the transition process became also dramatically important.

As mentioned before, the 1981-1983 economic crisis had produced the formation of active political opposition to the military government who then had to deal with a major political challenge coming from the center and the left. Many entrepreneurs, who feared the consequences of widespread changes in the political and economic spheres, responded by

renewing their political support for Pinochet. They followed the main strategy adopted by all the major national entrepreneurial organizations such as Sociedad de Fomento Fabril (SFF) and the Confederación de la Producción y el Comercio (CPC). Their pressures on the government to adopt a 'pragmatic' economic policy in answer to the crisis were directed at defending both their own immediate economic interests and the political regime as well. According to many entrepreneurs, the government's persistence in maintaining neo-liberal policies (as it initially did) would not only continue to destroy hundreds of enterprises, but would also strengthen the radical sectors of the opposition. To strengthen the extreme left could have unforeseeable consequences, putting in danger even the very existence of the free market system in a period of great political uncertainty (cf. Campero, 1988).

The outbreak of the economic crisis brought with it a national political debate on issues of social justice and social inequality in Chile. Indeed, these questions were at the center of political debate, as it had become evident that the neoliberal model had brought affluence for a few and poverty for large sections of the Chilean population. In other words, the distribution of the fruits of progress and modernization had taken place in a very unequal manner. Amidst a climate of growing opposition against the military government and its neoliberal model, entrepreneurial organizations decided to play a more active role in the political discussion by initiating a strong defense of the free market system and its alleged potential to eliminate poverty.

For the first time since the military coup, entrepreneurs felt that they were alone in the defense of a market-oriented society, as both right-wing political parties and the military government itself proved unable to generate a firm ideological answer to the criticism coming from the opposition forces. By entering into debate with the moderate forces in the opposition the entrepreneurs hoped to reduce distances and to prevent their radicalization.

As the 1988 plebiscite came closer, the entrepreneurial organizations intensified their discourse of modernity and social development, by stressing the achievements of the Pinochet regime with respect to economic modernization. The entrepreneurs supposed that the economic theme would prove decisive in that plebiscite, assuring victory for the government because of the strong recovery of the Chilean economy since 1984.

The defeat of Pinochet during the plebiscite of October 5, 1988 produced a veritable earthquake for the government's supporters who had been convinced that Pinochet would receive strong backing from the population. After a short period of confusion and hesitation the

Confederación de la Producción y el Comercio (CPC), under the leadership of its president Manuel Feliú, decisively initiated what he called 'the battle of ideas' in defense of the liberal project the future of which had become very uncertain. Pinochet's defeat meant that general elections had to take place in December 1989 which, in its turn, could easily be won by the opposition (cf. Montero, 1998).

The tactics followed by the entrepreneurs were directed at obtaining the largest number of concessions from the moderate opposition parties and even from the labor movement. Already in October 1988 the CPC had initiated talks with the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) and the Central Democrática de Trabajadores (CDT) to discuss future social and labour agreements. At the same time, the CPC began talks with representatives of the 'Coalición de Partidos por el NO', the coalition which united all the political forces which fought Pinochet during the 1988 plebiscite (which later became the 'Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia' during the December 1989 general elections). It is important to stress here that within the major opposition parties (the Christian Democratic Party, PDC, and the Socialist Party, PS), as well as in the labor movement, there was a positive disposition to negotiate with both the military government and the entrepreneurial organizations. This was the result of a large process of ideological re-conversion experienced by the PDC and the moderate socialists during the military dictatorship (cf. Silva, 1993). For this purpose, the opposition forces had to reduce or eliminate the profound distrust existing within entrepreneurial circles about their economic plans for the near future. The greatest fear among the entrepreneurs was the possible dismantling of the neoliberal economic model by the future democratic authorities, and the re-adoption of a statist and dirigist economic model. The entrepreneurs also feared the generation of a confrontational climate in the country as a result of the re-establishment of democratic rule and the subsequent overflow of political and social claims from radical sectors. This 'rain of claims' that they visualized could also be the product of the populist stance the future democratic authorities might adopt in order to maintain the political support of the masses. This possible scenario increased the sense of threat among the entrepreneurs who feared that the securities they had obtained from the military regime on private property protection could be in danger. But this was not their only fear. They had also serious apprehensions about the negative effects such politico-social instability could have on the economic stability achieved by the country under Pinochet.

During 1989 there were numerous contacts between the Concertación parties, the labor unions and the entrepreneurial organizations. What did

become clear was that none of the country's major actors was interested in polarizing the political situation and creating a climate of political instability. The political forces participating in the *Concertación* were convinced that it should be possible to achieve consensus on a large number of issues and that the return to democracy did not have to mean a reversal in terms of economic development and social stability.

The victory of the *Concertación* coalition in the general elections of December 14, 1989 marked the beginning of a new chapter in Chile's political history. For the entrepreneurs, a new political scene was inaugurated, full of uncertainties about the real objectives of the new government, and above all, about President Patricio Aylwin's authority being able to prevent a polarization of the political process.

VI. THE (SELF-) RESTRAIN OF CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER DEMOCRATIC RULE

Contrary to what was broadly expected, the restoration of democratic rule in Chile was not followed by a strong revitalization of civil society. On the contrary, one of the most striking features of the new Chilean democracy have been the growing depoliticization of civil society and the marked absence of national political debates. This phenomenon of increasing depoliticization has been the product of a complex blend of past and current political experiences faced by the people, as well as a consequence of the neo-liberal modernization project and its ideological impact on the people's political behavior.

As I mentioned before, the origins of this process of political deactivation has to be sought during the Pinochet regime, when systematic repression against any independent political expressions inaugurated a dark period of 'forced depoliticization'. Paradoxically, state repression eventually led to the emergence of a firm response from certain sectors of civil society, expressed in the germination of active social movements and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in defense of human rights in general, and in an attempt to ameliorate the social conditions of the rural and urban poor.

Another factor contributing to the further depoliticization of Chile's civil society following democratic restoration has been the negotiated nature of the transition, as democracy was finally achieved following a series of bargains between the democratic forces of the *Concertación* coalition and representatives of the military regime. During these negotiations the opposition forces involved did tacitly or explicitly agree in not actively encouraging political effervescence among the people. Furthermore, several democratic political leaders came to regard the continuation of the masses' political demobilization as a prerequisite for achieving an ordered and

peaceful democratic transition and to guarantee governability under the new democratic scenario.

Also strong calls for political moderation came from academic circles. For instance, O'Donnell and Schmitter recommended, among other things, to provide the armed forces with a honourable role in accomplishing national goals, whilst political parties were asked to leave behind their traditional role as agents of mobilization to become instruments of social and political control of the population (O'Donnell *et al.*, 1986:32, 58). They furthermore recommended that democratic leaders should not affect the interests of the dominant groups, and not threaten the institutional existence, assets, and hierarchy of the armed forces. With respect to the left-wing forces, they advised them to accept the political restrictions of the transition process, leaving for them only "to hope that somehow in the future more attractive opportunities will open up" (Ibid.:69).

The *cupular* or top-down nature of the democratization process, which has been often portrayed as an 'elite settlement' (Highley and Gunther, 1992), produced a deep disillusion (and a subsequent demobilisation) among many people who had participated in the formal social movements and other organizations of the popular sector, who had expected a more participatory process of democratic reconstruction. This, together with the conscious decision of political leaders of maintaining the legacy of political demobilization, has certainly played an important role in the further depoliticization of society following the restoration of democracy in the country.

The good economic performance of the democratic governments has also helped to deactivate civil society. During the last decade, the dramatic improvement in the general socioeconomic conditions and living standards of the Chilean population has also generated a marked political apathy among many people. During recent parliamentary and municipal elections (voting is compulsory), many people who attend voting-stations do not vote for any candidate (by leaving their vote void or by invalidating it). Moreover, there is more than 1,5 million youngsters, and a half million adults who have not even enlisted themselves on the electoral register. Although the Chilean political class has become alarmed by the increased political indifference among the population, there are observers who explain this phenomenon as just being the consequence of the high levels of political and economic stability existing in the country, as is the case in most Western democracies. In any case, what one generally can observe is that the disenchantment with democracy has not resulted in the adoption of anti-system attitudes, but has rather strengthened the general mood of apathy and apoliticism.

On the other hand, the restoration of democracy and the country's good economic performance led to a radical reduction of international financial support to hundreds of non-governmental organizations which had arisen during the Pinochet regime, and to numerous cultural, political and productive activities which were deployed by civil society. So the deactivation of Chile's civil society after 1990 has also to do with the severe 'financial dehydration' affecting the popular sectors' side of civil society. In addition to this, many mass organizations and NGOs lost their best cadres as following democratic restoration hundreds of them found a new job at state institutions and in the government. This severely affected the capacity of civil society to formulate its goals and to maintain the existence of many grassroots organizations.

As Chile successfully introduced market reforms (even before the international financial institutions began to recommend it and to demand it from developing countries), and the country has not required special financial support packages, actors such as the World Bank and the IMF have not even got the chance to propagate the expansion of civil society activities in Chile, as they have done in other parts of the world. And finally, due to the relatively high levels of efficiency characterizing the Chilean state institutions (having the lowest levels of corruption in the developing world), and the relatively good functioning of local governments and institutions in general, no urgent and powerful call for a more active involvement of civil society in national affairs has emerged. As we shall see in the final section, one of the few exceptions to this general pattern has been the question of human rights.

VII. THE DETENTION OF PINOCHET AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTION

Following the restoration of democratic rule, the expectation among popular organizations that the new authorities will bring to justice those responsible for human right abuses during the military governments, kept them mobilized for a while. However, the specific way in which the Aylwin government finally dealt with the highly controversial question of human rights' abuses also contributed for many years to the demobilization of the human rights movement.

The Aylwin government had to be extremely cautious in handling this matter as the specific nature of the Chilean transition made very difficult to find an adequate solution for the human rights problem, without producing a negative impact on the military-civil relations and the repudiation of one of the two (or both) parts in which Chile is divided. One part of the population, including the armed forces and the social sectors which supported their authoritarian rule, do still evoke the thesis that since

September 11, 1973 Chile was in a 'state of internal war'; hence, all that occurred during those years was the unavoidable result of the war waged by the armed forces against subversive groups. The other part of Chile - including the *Concertación* parties, the left-wing movement, the human rights organizations and the rest of the population – considered that the armed forces had been responsible for the systematic violations of the most elemental human rights.

In contrast to other countries in the region, the Chilean military went back to their barracks with full confidence and even with a certain triumphal mood. In their opinion, they had proved their competence, efficiency and reliance by having established a political calendar (according to the 1980 Constitution) and for having kept themselves faithful to its outcome (lost of 1988 referendum and 1989 elections, and reestablishment of democratic rule in March 1990). Moreover, they were also proud of having modernized Chilean economy and society and knew that around half of the population had supported their rule. They were also confident that the democratic authorities could not bring them to justice as Pinochet had passed in 1978, an amnesty law granted for all the crimes committed until that moment. It is common knowledge that the greater number of the most flagrant human rights abuses occurred during the Pinochet regime (including the cases of 'disappearances') took place in the period 1973-1978. Indeed, Chilean Supreme Court had already confirmed the validity of the 1978 amnesty law.

One of the first decisions adopted by Aylwin as president was to use his prerogative of mercy to liberate most of the political prisoners. Those who were convicted by military tribunals for grave offences (assassination of military personnel and civilians) obtained a new trial in civil courts of law. The next step was to establish what really happened with the victims of the military government. For this purpose, the Aylwin government announced in April 1990 the formation of the 'Commission for Truth and Reconciliation' in order to investigate all the cases of human right abuses culminating in death. This Commission was chaired by Raúl Rettig, a prestigious legal expert, and comprised a group of experienced jurists from several political orientations. The Armed Forces expressed their discontent with this investigation as they considered it in contention with the 1978 amnesty law. The government rejected this objection by arguing that the Rettig Commission was not judging anyone but just trying to establish the truth. On March 4, 1991, President Aylwin addressed the nation in an historic TV broadcast in which he informed the Chilean people about the main findings of the Rettig Commission. It established among other thing that 2,279 persons had been killed, victims of human rights abuses. Aylwin

ended his address by asking for forgiveness from the families of the victims, in the name of the entire Chilean nation (cf. Oppenheim, 1993:210-22).

Despite the country's good economic performance and the clear improvements in the conditions of the poorest social sectors during the Aylwin government, the immaterial issues of the past remained almost intact in the minds of the Chilean population.

President Eduardo Frei treated the human rights question as has having been 'solved' by his predecessor Aylwin, concentrating his attention to the further internationalization of the Chilean economy and the political and commercial integration of the country into several regional and international organizations. Despite these attempts 'from above' to eliminate from the political agenda the question of human rights abuse committed in the past, human rights organizations (and particularly the Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos, representing the relatives of people who 'disappeared' during the Pinochet regime), maintained the pressure on the government to provide some solution to this problem (see Ensalaco, 2000).

Nevertheless, it was definitely Pinochet's detention in London what abruptly reopened the national debate on the issue of human rights abuses during the military government. The radical left and many human rights groups immediately organized large public campaigns and demanded, through the mass media, the re-opening of many legal cases against military men who had participated in gross human right violations during the dictatorship.

In addition, the government sent some discrete signals to the judiciary, urging it to show some real action demonstrating its independence and inclination to do something about the human right issues. Perhaps this is also related to the international attacks about the inability or incapacity of Chile's judicial system to deal with the human rights issues.

Chilean human right organizations argued that the *Concertación's* goal to achieve reconciliation within the Chilean nation had failed because the human rights question had not been treated satisfactorily by the Aylwin and Frei governments. In their opinion, Chile was now paying the price for its attempt to cover up the past.

With the return of Pinochet to Chile in March 2000, the pressures of human rights organisations and a growing part of the public opinion on the government to punish Pinochet increased dramatically, putting the country's political stability and the state-military relations under severe strain. Pinochet found a quite different country than the one he had left in October 1998. The victory of the Socialist Ricardo Lagos in the second round of the

presidential elections held in January 2000 made Pinochet's political future very uncertain. The elected president was one of his most fervent opponents during the military regime. So the joy of the General's supporters following his return to the country was constrained by the real prospects that he could be legally prosecuted in Chile.

President Lagos decided to put the fate of Pinochet in the hands of the Chilean judicial system. By rejecting any possible political solution to the Pinochet case (as the Right had demanded) and by passing the decision to the legal system, the mobilization and activation of a part of civil society became less intense. At the same time, Lagos attempted to reduce the tensions with the armed forces. For instance, during 2000 he was able to establish a remarkable good personal relationship with the chief of the army, General Ricardo Izurieta. This generated a favorable climate between the two leaders to discuss in a direct way a series of pending issues. This direct line of communication had certainly facilitated the historical agreement achieved on 12 June 2000 within the so-called 'Mesa de Diálogo'. This was a high-level discussion group established in October 1999 by the Defense Minister under Frei, Edmundo Pérez Yoma, in an attempt to bring new life into the difficult process of reconciliation among Chileans. One of the mesa's main objectives has been to find a workable way to recover the bodies of the one thousand political adversaries who disappeared during the military regime. For the very first time since the restoration of democratic rule in 1990, members of the armed forces, legal representatives of human rights organisations, and a group of highly respected 'wise men' from different religious and social backgrounds, have held for many months a series of difficult discussions. Following Pinochet's return to Chile this initiative was almost completely paralyzed and many people expected it would soon end in a total failure. However, the rapid improvement in the relations between the Lagos government and the military leadership made this agreement possible. In this historical agreement the Chilean armed forces recognize for the first time since the 1973 coup the human rights abuses committed during their regime. They also promise to gather and to provide within a period of six months (later extended for another month) all the information available within the armed institutions about the location of the bodies of the *desaparecidos*.

The Mesa de Diálogo represents the largest and most important direct involvement of various sectors from civil society in national affairs since the restoration of democratic rule in 1990. In addition, for the first time in Chile's democratic history, political parties did not play a direct role in an important national event, as they were consciously not invited to participate in its deliberations. The Mesa initiative was strongly criticized by both

Pinochetista circles and by sectors of the radical left. While these rightwing groups saw it as an act of treason on the part of the armed forces to Pinochet's legacy, the radical left qualifies it as a strategy directed to obtain a 'punto final' for the human rights question in Chile. The Mesa initiative also produced a painful schism within the human rights movement itself. Thus while some representatives accepted the invitation to participate at the Mesa, others strongly rejected it. But finally the Mesa de Diálogo survived all obstacles and reached its goal to find the ways to obtain the required information from the armed forces about the whereabouts of the *desaparecidos*, and the location where their bodies can be found. On January 6, 2001, the armed forces handed President Lagos an extensive report with the information gathered by these institutions among active and former military personnel about the fate of these people. It is expected that this information would lead to finding of the remains of about 200 *desaparecidos*. It was again the legal system that would be in charge of the excavations and that would decide if this information could lead to further legal prosecution of the people involved in these disappearances. In the meantime, Pinochet continues his legal battle in the courts of law in an attempt to avoid further criminal prosecution.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the pre-1973 Chilean democracy, state-civil society relations were characterized by the dominant interface of a well-organized system of political parties. Representatives and organizations of civil society had to negotiate with political parties, in a patron-client fashion, in order to defend their interests *vis-à-vis* the parliament and the government. Prior to the coup, Chile never experienced the existence of, or rather an independent or autonomous civil society in this manner. As de Riz has put it, 'Chilean political history, unlike any other in the Southern Cone, developed with, and through, the political parties' (de Riz, 1989:57). This state of affairs led Garretón to state that in the former democracy the political parties formed 'the backbone' of Chilean society.

The military government deliberately destroyed this traditional pattern of state civil-society relations. By proscribing and repressing the existing political parties, civil society lost its main intermediary between the state. In addition, the systematic application of state repression to any dissident or contesting force in the country impeded for many years the generation of strong opposition voices coming from civil society. On the other hand, during the Pinochet years Chilean society continued to be divided in two fronts, as it had been the case during the Allende government: the Right versus the Left, conservative versus progressive forces, supporters versus

opponents to the military rulers. In this manner, the possible gestation of opposition forces within civil society was not only repressed from the state but it was also aggressively contested from other sectors within civil society itself.

The cultural impact of neoliberalism on the Chilean people cannot be sufficiently stressed. All forms of collective actions for solving national problems were systematically attacked by the regime's ideologues (through the mass media, educational system, etc.). Participation in public affairs was equated with to populism, anarchy and chaos. In contrast, the achievement of personal socioeconomic improvement by following individualistic strategies was strongly encouraged by the regime's technocrats. The message was: society had not to direct its attention and energy in trying to get things done by the *state*, but each individual had to make an efficient use of his own abilities to achieve a better life within the confines of the *market*. The force obtained by the neoliberal discourse in Chile (not equaled in any other Latin American country) was directly related to the visible success of the neo-liberal reforms implemented by the Chicago boys (also an exception in Latin America). As the policies proved to work, many Chileans were well disposed to believe and to follow the new path of development offered by the regime. This phenomenon weakened even further the readiness of sectors within civil society to aggregate their social and economic demands and to exert pressure against the government.

The sudden collapse of the economy in 1981 that witnessed negative growth of 14 per cent that same year reawakened civil society. The key element upon which the regime had attempted to legitimize its very *raison d'être* that of being the successful provider and guarantor of economic growth and development suddenly evaporated. This explains at least the readiness of some sectors of the large middle classes to temporarily join the opposition movement that emerged in response to the economic crisis. They did not suddenly become concerned with the human rights issues, nor did they abruptly realize that Chile needed a democracy, but they became frustrated and even angry with the military government because their living standards had been severely hit by the recession. However, the radicalization among the popular sectors finally frightened the middle classes who were traumatized with the memories of intense class struggle as it took place during the Allende years.

In the period 1983-1988 the involvement of civil society in national affairs radically increased as a large variety of social movements made use of the political space which emerged following the economic crisis and the subsequent (temporary) weakening of the military regime. However, the

relative autonomy achieved during that period by social movements was only the product of the inability of the opposition political parties, at that time, to regain their control of the political developments. Only when the date for the 1988 referendum came closer did the democratic opposition parties, such as the Christian Democratic Party and the Socialist Party, manage to obtain the direction of most of the social and political forces who opposed the military regime. So following Pinochet's defeat at the referendum, the social movements and the popular sectors were no longer the big protagonists in the battle against the authoritarian regime. In fact, the most important role played by the social movements in the Chilean democratic transition was indirect and unintended: as a result of the radicalization of this section of civil society in the period 1983-1988, the military government realized that it was in its own interest and in the interest of the social sectors it represented, to seriously consider the possibility of accepting a possible triumph of the moderate forces of the opposition, in order to avoid a insurrectional situation in the country. The moderate opposition took a similar conclusion about the situation created by the radicalization of the social movements: the need to deactivate them and to conduct the further advancement of the transition process 'from above', without the mobilization of the masses. It was in this particular situation that both the governmental and the moderate opposition elites were disposed to reach a transitional pact with each other, without the inclusion of the mass movement. It facilitated the relatively smooth nature of the Chilean democratic transition (without armed confrontations, without civil war, without severe street clashes between supporters of both camps, and without requiring foreign political and/or humanitarian interventions as it has been the case in other Latin American countries).

Following the democratic restoration, the *Concertación* governments have made no real attempt to reactivate civil society or to expand their role in the political realm. The reasons for this was the conviction that the reactivation of civil society could lead to an uncontrollable process of social confrontation which, by its part, could seriously jeopardize the political stability in the country and the consolidation of democratic rule. So although the *Concertación* governments have been able to radically improve the social situation of millions of Chileans (for instance, the existence of extreme poverty has been dramatically reduced in the last decade), this has occurred without much of public participation. A series of social problems have been depoliticized, translated into technocratic terms, and attacked by making use of a 'bottom-down' approach (the so-called *asistencialismo*).

The democratic authorities, however, have been less successful in dealing with difficult 'immaterial' issues, such as the struggle of the indigenous people (particularly the Mapuches) for cultural self-determination and respect from the Chilean population, and even more strongly, the question of the human rights abuses committed by the former military regime. These are normally excluded from consideration in matters concerning high levels of economic growth and state efficiency. As we have seen in this paper, the attempts of the democratic governments to give a 'solution' to this problem 'from above' (through the Rettig Commission, and other initiatives) finally failed. Since the restoration of democratic rule a decade ago, human rights organizations have persistently maintained their demands for justice and punishment for those who are responsible for the crimes. The presentation early this year of the armed forces' report to the Mesa de Diálogo in which their horrendous methods to get rid of the bodies of the disappeared are described, shocked a significant section of Chile's public opinion who began to support the positions defended by the human rights movement. However, if the Lagos government declares 'closed' the question of the disappeared after the presentation of the armed forces' rapport, and the judicial system finally decides that Pinochet cannot be prosecuted for medical reasons, it can be expected that in the coming period the human rights movement will gradually lose both its strength and its ability to generate solidarity and support for its cause within the rest of Chilean society.

Notes

- 1 A group of young Chilean technocrats who became the main designers and executors of the orthodox neoliberal economic policies applied by the government of General Pinochet since 1975. They eventually evolved as key ideologues of the regime as they attempted to provide an ideological answer for the coexistence of economic liberalism and political authoritarianism (see Silva, 1991; Valdés, 1995).

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