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Environmental politics in Chile: legacies of dictatorship and democracy

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ABSTRACT *Standing at the forefront of Latin America's political and economic liberalisation, Chile is held up as a model for the developing world. First in the region to embrace a boldly neoliberal development strategy, Chile's military dictatorship also peacefully gave way to stable, civilian rule and comparative economic success. However, the lens of environmental politics reveals a disturbing underside to the Chilean miracle. Environmental policy, institutions and participation are shaped and constrained by ominous legacies of history, dictatorship, and an economic orthodoxy inimical to sustainability. Democratic rule has opened political space, yet new environmental institutions and procedures exhibit inherited elitist and exclusionary features. Chile's environmental movement likewise demonstrates promise and innovation, but remains grounded in a civil society weakened and atomised by dictatorship and incomplete transition. Still, as the environmental costs of Chile's resource-extractive, export-led development mount, environmental politics may yet present a vital opportunity for social change.*

Standing at the forefront of Latin America's political and economic liberalisation, Chile is often held up as a blueprint for the region's future. Military dictatorship has given way to stable, civilian rule and extended social peace. Its leaders pioneered the neoliberal development strategies that have since swept the region, producing Chile's celebrated macroeconomic stability, non-inflationary growth, and sustained increases in savings, investments and exports.

If Chile is indeed a model for Latin America, the character of its environmental politics, policy and movements likewise holds important lessons. A first glance might be optimistic. Similar periods of sustained prosperity are associated with the cultural, educational and infrastructural achievements that enabled first-world environmental protections and standards. Likewise, a political climate of co-operation, pragmatism and stability should foster both the effective political institutions and the strong civic traditions associated with successful environmental politics everywhere.

This paper offers a sobering test of these hopeful assumptions. Rather than forecasting an imminently green future for Latin America, the lens of environ-

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mental politics reveals a disturbing underside to the Chilean miracle. Environmental policy and action are constrained by the legacies of dictatorship and transition, and by an economic orthodoxy often overtly hostile to sustainability. Chile's environmental laws and institutions reveal an unsettled fusion of participatory aspirations and verticalist traditions. Its nascent environmental movement is likewise a mixture of heady promise grounded in a comparatively weak civil society.

This analysis of Chilean environmental politics consists of three sections. The first lays the theoretical and historical foundation, exploring key political and economic legacies of the country's history. The second section critically evaluates the legal and institutional architecture of environmental politics, revealing new spaces opened by civilian rule, but institutions and procedures often pre-emptive and exclusionary in nature. The third section assesses the prospects for Chile's popular environmental movements, which likewise demonstrate both formidable barriers and promising points of innovation and inspiration.

Politics in Chile: legacies of dictatorship and transition

As everywhere, environmental politics in Chile has developed in a larger political, economic and social context. This section introduces essential elements of Chilean history and political economy. Regarding political history, we are concerned especially with legacies of regime transition (from democracy to dictatorship and back), and how these have shaped relations between the state and civil society. Regarding political economy, our concern centres on Chile's neoliberal orthodoxy, both as development policy and as a broader ideological force.

Chile inherits a long democratic tradition, but an elitist one. At the dawn of General Pinochet's coup of 11 September 1973, Chileans boasted four decades of civilian rule and competitive elections, uninterrupted by military coup, assassination or rebellion. Indeed, with only two brief exceptions, they had experienced 140 years of increasingly democratic institutions. However, this stability was built on a centralised state and a verticalist style of politics. From the presidency to the parliament to the party system, political institutions developed a top-down character, with mass politics tightly controlled from above. Each social sector was politicised and penetrated by strong national parties, impeding the emergence of autonomous base organisations and social movements. Chilean political history thus yielded a comparatively 'overdeveloped' political system, corresponding directly to a comparatively 'underdeveloped' civil society.[1]

By the mid-twentieth century, electoral politics settled into a polarised 'three-thirds' configuration, with party alliances consolidated into left, centre and right wings.[2] Class and ideological positions hardened, making consensus difficult and coalitions less feasible.[3] Instability peaked under Salvador Allende, elected president in 1970. Allende sought to increase mass support for his socialist project with an unprecedented effort to open space for broad citizen participation. However, in a climate of embedded verticalism and deepening class polarisation, his gestures triggered radicalism across the spectrum. Leftist land and factory

seizures prompted counter-mobilisation in the centre and the right, plunging the country into economic decay, strikes, protests, guerrilla opposition, violence and militarisation.

Reacting against this chaos, General Pinochet came to power determined to eliminate social conflict. To foreclose mass politicisation, the military government undertook a forceful and radical restructuring of the Chilean polity, economy and society. Practising the classic 'politics of anti-politics', the regime tightly closed political space and eliminated potential opposition, legitimising repression as a necessary defence against communist subversion.[4] Labour unions, civic associations and opposition parties were weakened or destroyed, their leaders killed, exiled or disappeared.

Behind the repression was a distinct vision of a new social order for Chile, built on the precepts of neoliberal policy and ideology. In policy terms Chilean neoliberalism found its rationale in the formulas of 'Chicago School' economists like Milton Friedman and Arnold Harberger. Its small-state, free-market priorities were infused into the showcase policy reforms of Chile's 'Chicago Boys' in social security, welfare, health and education. Chile also launched the Latin American trajectory of privatisation, deregulation, fiscal austerity, capital mobility, export-promotion and anti-inflationary stabilisation.[5]

In ideological terms, Pinochet's neoliberalism offered a coherent formula for comprehending relations between state, market and society. Informed by thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek and Robert Nozic, neoliberal ideology seeks to restrict the state to a minimum and to maximise the scope of individual freedom. Frustrated with excessive government and with the state's failure to solve problems, state schemes of distributive justice are viewed as inappropriate for universal application. Political leaders should not impose any single utopia; rather, individuals should be free to pursue their own, mediated by exchange relationships in the marketplace. Politics as a whole thus loses relevance as a means of mediating contending values.

The military unleashed a decade of fierce repression to crush Chile's civic culture and refashion land, class and labour relations in accordance with neoliberal priorities. However, the attempt to disarticulate collective mobilisation ultimately backfired. Silencing the national parties left the terrain of protest empty, inadvertently opening space for new popular movements to emerge. Initiated under the protective umbrella of the church, social mobilisation advanced among the human rights, women's, and *pobladores* (shantytown dwellers) movements, eventually spilling over to intellectuals, farmers, environmentalists and other groups.[6] The neoliberal state's withdrawal from multiple social and economic activities further opened space for emerging citizen's groups, as hundreds of grassroots organisations sought to fill the void with independent initiatives in education, health care, nutrition, microproduction, credit, and so on.[7]

In the 1980s new mobilisation from below clashed with verticalist pressures from above. The 1981–82 economic collapse eroded middle-class support and further emboldened social movements, forcing the regime to retreat to a moderated, 'pragmatic' neoliberal strategy.[8] Protests in May 1983 launched a three-year period of sustained popular dissent, an irreversible legitimacy crisis

for the regime.[9] However, the new social movements were only a temporary vehicle for re-politicisation. To challenge the dictator effectively, the locus of opposition shifted back to the national parties. Mass protests helped open space for parties to reconstruct themselves, but the return to democracy then became an electoral process. By the time Pinochet was ousted in March 1990, the parties had returned to their historic position on top.[10]

Chile's re-democratisation provokes strikingly little scholarly debate. There is a general consensus on the breakdown of democracy, the military's project, the nature of the transition and the character of the post-dictatorial 'protected democracy'.[11] For our purposes, contemporary Chilean politics is characterised by three dominant, related trends: a decline in popular participation, the re-consolidation of elitism, and embedded neoliberalism. Let us consider each in turn.

First, as renovated national parties completed the restoration of civilian rule, grassroots forces rapidly declined. Almost overnight, movements lost relevance, retreated to autonomy, or disappeared. Party politics even reincorporated the concerns of *pobladores*, human rights, and women's movements, once prominent grassroots players in challenging the dictatorship.[12] The experience was similar for indigenous, labour, environmental, peasant and other groups. In the wake of such a pronounced decline, 'for better or worse, political parties will ultimately be the decisive influence on the potential for a popular social movement to emerge, in any form'.[13]

Second, Chilean politics has retained its historic elitism. There is a delicate balance within the centre-left *Concertación* coalition that has governed since 1990.[14] To make policy, participants broker compromises in a closed, negotiated process—a 'pact making' style of governance dubbed *cupulismo* (taking place in the apex, or *cúpula*) or *democracia de los acuerdos*.[15] To be efficient and avoid conflict, potentially meddlesome outside influences are excluded. 'Politics in Chile is extremely elitist both in structure and in practice. A handful of leading lights from each party [controls] the political proceedings …, setting the agenda and paying only tactical heed to the opposition and even less to the human rights and other social movements.'[16]

Third, neoliberalism remains deeply embedded in Chilean politics. Although the *Concertación* has maintained a tempered version of the military's economic strategy, the legacy of dictatorship is more profound. Pinochet's neoliberalism has moved beyond the economic realm to penetrate and colonise the political and cultural realms as well.[17] From the earliest days of the dictatorship, Chilean culture endured an ideological onslaught which 'deified the market and glorified the individual'.[18] With the post-dictatorial collapse of grassroots movements, their values of community and solidarity became anachronistic remnants of a shattered logic. In today's individualistic order, participatory values and protest strategies —noble and legitimate under the dictatorship—are now seen as immature, idealistic or inappropriate. Pinochet's vision of a depoliticised society is discouragingly close to the mark. Latin America's typically vibrant mass politics are almost absent and ephemeral. Survey data consistently demonstrate high disconnection and apathy—about politics, politicians and parties.[19] As Interior Minister Enrique Krauss lamented in 1990: 'We have lost the capacity to

mobilise people.'[20]

These are the legacies of history, dictatorship and transition. In spite of Chile's model political and economic achievements, many citizens are alienated or excluded from politics and power. Parties are elitist and social movements marginal. Political participation has been reduced mainly to the act of voting, conceptualised and carried out in market terms. Privatisation and radical individualism have shifted attention to only the most immediate and personal matters. Values of community, solidarity and participation have gone out of style, replaced by an unapologetic materialist consumerism.[21] Chile's historic patterns of elitism and political exclusion have been fused with the imperatives of the General's neoliberalism, setting a difficult stage for the questions of environmental policy and action to which we now turn.

Environmental politics in post-dictatorial Chile: law and institutions

The Chilean miracle has more than one dark side. The restructuring that laid today's economic foundation was based on a decade of repression to refashion the terms of popular participation, land, labour and class. The Chilean economy has since made indisputable strides in poverty reduction, but a rising concentration of wealth, destructive cycles of boom and bust, persistent foreign debt, overexposure to commodity price fluctuations, and the erosion of economic security for many have continued to provide fuel for criticism of the model, even on its own terms.[22]

However, the hardest critic of Chilean development is the land itself. The boom has been fed by the wholesale exploitation of an extraordinary natural endowment. 'In the deforested hills around Puerto Montt, the fished-out shorelines of the South, and the chemical-ridden fields of the fruit belt, even Chile's abundant ecosystem is starting to protest, and … the results are horrific.'[23] Beneath the hyperbole, the Chilean strategy is the age-old, Third World formula of raw material export. Even with diversification into 'non-traditional' commodities (such as wine, salmon, woodchips and luxury produce), the overwhelming bulk of the export platform (roughly 80% across the past dozen years) is comprised of minerals, agricultural commodities and the products of once-lush forests and fisheries. Chile's fiercely unregulated economy provides ample reward for producers who push negative social and environmental costs onto future generations, vulnerable ecological systems or the poorest and most marginalised populations. From the strip mines of the arid north to the scarred forests of Patagonia, the export boom has put the hard squeeze on nature.[24]

The social and ecological contradictions of Chilean development have roots both shallow and deep. Typically in Latin America and other developing regions, environmental concerns have suffered a long legacy of neglect, most overtly under the anti-politics of dictatorship. By today, however, both domestic and international pressures have forced environmental issues onto the national policy agenda.

Domestically, democratisation opens space for legitimate political discourse on environmental threats and concerns. Environmental costs are by now inescapable, palpably demonstrated each day as nearly a quarter of the country's

population chokes under a noxious cloud of pollutants in the Santiago airshed. Scientists and communications media have begun to test the waters of public criticism. Formal and informal environmental education have increased environmental consciousness, behaviour and debate. Though limited in political clout, a symbolically significant 'green caucus' has emerged in the Chilean parliament.

International pressures have come from Chile's neighbours and more distant forces. Environmental awareness and activism are rising sharply throughout Latin America, no longer easily ignored by national leaders. Increased tourism and communications technologies have fostered contacts with European, North American and other forms of environmental thought and action. More instrumentally, Chile's pragmatic leaders are interested in the expansion of regional trade regimes, which, like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), are likely to take form with nominal environmental requisites, side agreements or institutions. Chile's 1997 free trade agreement with Canada was in fact premised on the anticipation of an environmental accord.

Although a comprehensive survey of Chile's legal and institutional architecture is beyond my scope, I offer here an introduction to and critical analysis of the environmental regime in practice.[25] As everywhere, new and existing institutions at all levels of government are enmeshed in environmental law, policies and norms, including those of transportation, economic development, health, sanitation, public works, foreign relations and natural resources. However, for our purposes the landscape of Chilean environmental law and institutions is remarkably simple. The centrepiece legislation is *Ley No* 19.300, the 1994 general environmental 'framework' law. The associated institution is the National Environmental Commission (CONAMA), a decentralised body comprised of a central directorate and a set of regional commissions (the COREMAS).[26]

Environmental law and institutions are thus astonishingly new to Chile. Before the 1990s no consequential environmental regime existed. The return of democratic governance raised hopes for at last confronting a legacy of severe neglect. The successive *Concertación* governments of Patricio Aylwin (1990–94) and Eduardo Frei (1994–2000) projected a positive environmental discourse, emphasising sustainability and stewardship, as well as participation, transparency, accountability and efficacy. To their credit, they presided over the rapid creation of an impressive and sophisticated body of norms, procedures and institutions, addressing virtually every major area of environmental concern. The framework law is infused with idealistic norms of prevention, participation, gradualism and the 'polluter pays' principle.[27]

These principles, policies and entities will look familiar to students of environmental policy from Europe or North America. Much of the architecture is borrowed from a first-world model of 'administrative rationalism' predicated on the regulatory capacity of the welfare state. From the conservationist and preservationist impulses of the early twentieth century, to the landmark environmental legislation of the 1960s and 1970s, this model relies on the familiar strategies of advocacy, education, lobbying and litigation that characterise mainstream environmental politics and policy throughout the wealthy north.

However well intentioned, administrative rationalism has so far been of only limited efficacy in Chile. Such institutions presuppose a healthy political

pluralism and a viable, first world regulatory state. However, they have been constructed and put into practice in a polity and society in which elitist and neoliberal principles, practices and priorities prevail. That contradiction tends to render their best intentions stillborn. So often the Third World pattern, an immense gap appears between what is written on paper and what is practised on the ground.

Neoliberalism leaves its mark in several ways. Globally, it informs environmental discourses ranging from 'free-market environmentalism' at the libertarian end of the spectrum to the less ideological 'ecological modernisation'. In the former, environmental degradation is understood as a side-effect of excessive government and poorly specified property rights. The solution is not regulation or management, but instead the creative expansion of private property rights into the remaining commons (land, air, water, species).[28] More pragmatic models of 'green capitalism' harness market forces, but within a policy context established by an effective state. Pollution prevention and green goods offer opportunities for profit. But rather than relying purely on the invisible hand, the state sets the parameters, introducing and co-ordinating market-based incentives such as green taxes, carbon sequestration, pollution permits, depletion quotas, emissions trading, wetlands mitigation, and the like.[29]

Such market solutions factor importantly into Chilean environmental policy. Consistent with Pinochet's vision, the state role is to be minimised. In several policy areas the focus has been on property rights regimes to 'get the prices right' and avert the 'tragedy of the commons'.[30] To their advocates, environmental protection can best be achieved through privatisation, export promotion and the maximisation of economic growth.[31] But to their critics, such free-market environmental policy experiments have had disastrous results for urban air quality, watersheds, agriculture, forests and fisheries.[32]

More directly, the austere neoliberal state offers chronically limited funding to environmental institutions, whose leaders likewise lack political clout. Government officials concede the paucity of the most basic environmental infrastructure —scarce water treatment, virtually no limits on the discharge of pollutants, no limits on toxic pesticides, no certified dumps for industrial or mining waste, no 'right-to-know' laws, and so forth.[33] In a deregulated political climate, meaningful enforcement power is almost non-existent—a far cry from successful European-style ecological modernisation. This lack of state capacity and autonomy is in fact a defining feature of the Chilean business climate, prized by developers and business interests unaccustomed to constraint.[34]

The CONAMA is thus charged with a task fundamentally in contradiction with the neoliberal model of development.[35] The entire environmental framework is run through with powerful structural incentives that incline the state to side directly with business and development interests, to the detriment of environmental protection. For example, to meet the neoliberal mandate that government agencies be self-financing, the forestry agency (*Corporación Nacional Forestal* —CONAF) finances itself by taking a portion of the revenue from the unsustainable 'chipping' of southern Chile's spectacular native forests, destined for export as paper pulp. 'The institutional structure of CONAMA … ensured that the ongoing collaboration between the state and business would henceforth apply to environ-

mental issues as well. It privileged the interests of socio-political forces who sought to block any innovation in environmental policy out of fear that it might have a negative effect on economic growth.'[36]

Chile thus suffers from a problem of 'agency capture' that far exceeds developed country norms. This assertion is uncontroversial, the documentation almost overwhelming. One compelling illustration comes from southern Chile's Mapuche Indian territory, where a series of controversial hydroelectric projects on the Bio Bio River threatens to inundate wild lands and displace the region's indigenous people.[37] The ex-director of the federal indigenous agency published a scathing personal account chronicling direct executive intervention by President Eduardo Frei to manipulate the composition and votes of the agency's directorial board, firing project opponents to ensure a vote favourable to Endesa, the Spanish industrial consortium behind the RALCO dam.[38]

For every such high profile case, researchers have collected dozens of less dramatic studies from every region, documenting myriad environmental conflicts in hydropower, forestry, fisheries, land development, mining, industry and transportation.[39] Specific cases include the downstream health and environmental damage caused by mining operations at Amayapampa and Capasirca, the ecological devastation of commercial salmon farming, unregulated pesticide use and associated health costs to farmworkers and communities in the Central Valley, the clash over a major highway project that threatens Santiago's historic Bellavista neighbourhood, and the destruction of native forests, particularly the mismanagement of Chile's spectacular southern temperate rainforests.[40]

Just as new environmental institutions are premised on assumptions about states and markets that clash with the reality of entrenched neoliberalism, so too does the ideal of citizen participation confront Chile's entrenched elitism. Given the narrowness of Chile's guardian democracy, the environmental framework law demonstrates an impressively democratic aspiration. It is almost unique among Chilean laws inasmuch as it specifies and institutionalises a regular means of popular participation in the formation of public policy.[41] But again, a wide gulf separates the *de jure* from the *de facto*. Because no meaningful mechanism exists to enable the envisaged citizen participation, environmental policy making instead demonstrates the classic elite consensus style of *cupulismo*—centralist and non-participatory.[42]

This verticalism is most clearly demonstrated in the process of environmental impact assessment (EIA). The EIA is the principal opening that the framework law provides for citizen participation. However, analysts charge that in practice the EIA is most often used pre-emptively, to avert conflict. It gives the surface appearance of participation, but serves instead to anticipate, demobilise, and deflect local opposition, thus attaining a measure of legitimacy for controversial 'megaprojects'. Again, the framework law is inherently cautious and exclusionary where environmental concerns might challenge economic priorities.

> [The framework law] appears rather myopic in placing the burden of gathering data on the environment, via the [EIA], in the hands of the private sector. The type and timing of the data will depend on what the new investment projects choose to present. Furthermore, the various firms and industrial sectors will have an incentive

> to massage the data and to manipulate the choice of indicators … In short, the data can quickly become contradictory, confusing, and/or unreliable.[43]

Failures of the environmental assessment process have provoked contention in the cases of agency capture noted above, as well as in other highway developments (such as the Temuco bypass in southern Chile); in forest management, wood chipping and cellulose paints; and in hydroelectric facilities like RALCO. Sabatini and Sepúlveda chronicle the deficiencies of citizen participation in a number of EIA cases, including the GasAndes pipeline project, the Golden Spring cellulose plant on the island of Chiloe, the Puchancavi copper smelter and thermoelectric plant, and the Escondido mine near Antofagasta.[44]

The lessons from such analyses are mixed. On the one hand, they demonstrate that threatened communities have been able to resuscitate a sense of participation, in spite of a depoliticised political climate. The environment is now a legitimate issue of public debate, firmly on the policy agenda. However, the law's participatory mechanisms tend to exclude precisely the groups most directly affected by proposed developments. In practice, it remains largely a closed, negotiated process between the private sector and the ruling elite. The problem of agency capture is magnified by the absence of democratic channels and authentic pluralism. Environmental participation in Chile's *democracia de acuerdos* has become instead an empty promise, masking incestuous co-operation between the state and the entrepreneurial interests, who typically see their projects approved along favoured lines.

The Chilean environmental movement

In addition to institutions, laws and policy, our understanding of contemporary environmental politics must take into account the view from the bottom up. We now shift our attention to civil society, to consider the history, character, promise and limits of Chile's environmental movement as it navigates a political landscape shaped by the legacies and institutions explored above.

Environmental NGOs are relatively recent players in Chile. A small, northern-styled conservationist impulse first surfaced in the 1960s and 1970s, as environmental consciousness escalated globally. A second generation of scientists and activists emerged in the early 1980s, comprised of academics purged from the universities by the military. As with other popular movements, environmentalists gained a foothold and expanded by taking advantage of opposition spaces generated during the era of popular dissent. But the military's near-total neglect of environmental concerns, combined with the cautious popular politics of the time, relegated environmentalism to the margins both culturally and politically.

An important precursory moment in Chilean environmentalism was the 1983 'Scientific Congress of the Environment', organised by the environmental NGO the Centre for Environmental Research and Planning (CIPMA). In spite of tight media control, the event garnered substantial publicity. The military regime responded to rising environmental concern by creating the National Commission for Ecology in 1984. However, environmental protection remained a low priority, and the commission's goals went unfulfilled. The modern environmental move-

ment could not take meaningful shape until the return to civilian rule, when it was spurred on by a larger and higher-profile gathering, the 1989 'First National Meeting of Environmental Action Organisations'.

The immediate post-Pinochet climate of optimism, openness and opportunity prompted an exhilarating surge of energy. The *Concertación* government's inspiring environmental discourse and creative legal initiatives raised the hopes of environmental activists. They strengthened ties with educational, women's, indigenous, workers and peasant organisations. Taking advantage of high profile global issues (climate change, the ozone hole, acid rain, species extinction, deforestation, desertification), they also forged alliances with sympathetic parliamentarians and political parties. Their conceptual influence left a notable imprint on the Aylwin government's presentations at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.[45]

However, the climate for Chilean popular politics quickly turned inhospitable. Like all social movement organisations, the greens suffered from the rapid collapse of popular participation. According to Lucy Taylor, the disintegration of social movements in the 1990s followed a general pattern of breakdown into three sectors: the co-operators—willing to compromise and work closely with the *Concertación*; the intransigent—taking principled, non-negotiable positions; and the critics—caught in the middle, taking varied and independent positions, hence prone to criticism from both sides.[46] Although Chile's environmentalists define themselves similarly, the lines between co-operation and criticism are blurrier, and the nomenclature is distinctive, aligned on a spectrum of environmental vision. In their own language and conceptual schema, there are three main sectors of popular environmentalism: the conservationists, the environmentalists and the ecologists.[47]

The 'conservationists' practice accommodation and moderate criticism, represented by groups like the National Committee for the Defence of Flora and Fauna (CODEF) and the Defenders of the Chilean Forest.[48] They are prestigious and well established; CODEF dates back to 1963. Their interests, strategies and style of operations are familiar to observers of the North American conservationist/preservationist tradition, emphasising habitat protection and defence of wild areas, through research, advocacy and education. The commitment to ecosystem preservation can be militant, although conservationists typically avoid ideological battles. Like their first world counterparts, they have a scientific and biological orientation, seldom focused overtly on structural causes of degradation or strategies of national development.

The 'environmentalists' include organisations like the Casa de Paz (CIPMA) and Fundación Terram. As a group they are more explicitly policy oriented, some reformist, others more critical. They consider a broader array of environmental problems (energy, agriculture, pollution, hazardous wastes, indigenous people, transport and planning, etc), situated in a larger social, economic and political context. Operational strategies emphasise research, education, advocacy, coalition building, lobbying and litigation. Some readily engage conflictual issues, offer controversial analyses, and stake out highly critical ground. Others tend towards compromise, attempting to reconcile tensions between communities and elite interests. This diversity reflects a mixture of administrative rationalism,

ecological modernisation and participatory green policies and values.

The 'ecologists' are the so-called '*duros*' (hard-liners), represented by groups like the Institute of Political Ecology (IEP), National Ecological Action Network (RENACE) and Chile Sustentable. Formed by refugees of university repression in the 1980s, they carry forward a tradition of criticism. They conceive the environmentalist crisis broadly, to encompass issues of social and ecological justice. They find the roots of crisis in the priorities of neoliberal development, reinforced by an exclusionary political system. Sustainability and environmental restoration can only be reached through greater equity and a more responsive democracy. These in turn demand not accommodation, but dramatic changes in the political system and economic development strategy. In vision and tactics, they do not shrink from confrontation, hoping that sharpening environmental conflicts might herald the regeneration of a more vibrant civil society.

While these divisions in style and substance sometimes produce tensions and rivalries, other factors have more seriously undercut the potential of the environmental movement.[49] As with all social movements, lack of funding is a chronic source of weakness. When the over-arching goal of ousting the dictator evaporated, so did the money. Social organisations have also suffered a brain drain, as the talented and highly motivated NGO activists of the 1970s and 1980s have been drawn to attractive opportunities in government service or the private sector. Finally, the *Concertación's* environmental institutions have fostered a 'wait and see' attitude that has taken some of the wind from the sails of environmental urgency.

The hardest blows come from the resurgence and consolidation of Chilean elitism and neoliberalism. Moderate conservationist groups have struggled to adapt a North-American focus, style and strategy to the Chilean context. But the first-world conservationist tradition presupposes viable pluralism and an effective state, both severely undercut in Chile. It is difficult to make a persuasive case for a regulatory state in a radically deregulated country, particularly when outside voices are excluded from essential decisions. As a consequence, reformist organisations often fall prey to *cupulismo*, seeking compromise with elite military and business interests, neither of which has demonstrated sensitivity to ecological concerns. For example, CIPMA has been criticised for working with mining and other private interests, a history of collaboration blamed for weakening environmental institutions.[50] To their critics, moderate organisations 'remain chained to the logic of consensus, trying to reconcile an unreconcilable position between environmentalism and the interests of the business world'.[51]

Neoliberalism and elitism also present broader cultural barriers. To penetrate the complacency of depoliticisation, environmentalists may raise polemical voices, yet protest and confrontation have fallen out of favour. Statements like 'they should stop fighting and work things out' or 'they shouldn't interfere with the experts' are commonplace. Local environmental conflicts are frequently perceived as unnecessarily radicalised, or dismissed as NIMBYism.[52] Environmentalists can easily be seen as negative, defensive and unable to deliver a resonant or positive vision. In Pinochet's marketplace political culture, where every individual competes to realise his or her own utopia, the vision of a just and ecologically sustainable future is a hard sell—a product rooted in unfashion-

able values.

Nevertheless, in spite of the legacies that present such sobering challenges, we must also recognise that popular environmental politics presents nascent but noteworthy points of inspiration and innovation. Indeed, the very persistence and expansion of a significant counter-hegemonic movement is itself an impressive testimony to the tenacity and creativity of Chilean scholars, citizens and activists. It implies future opportunities for those who will stand in defence of values of transparency, participation, solidarity, equity and sustainability.

Likewise, recent years have witnessed increasing politicisation, in a number of acute environmental conflicts. The most innovative, creative and participatory environmentalism on the planet is often forged in just such local conflicts.[53] For Chilean activists, the learning curve has been steep. Environmentalists are working with a new generation of dedicated attorneys, pushing levers into the cracks of Chile's framework law, determined that it one day function in practice the way it appears in print.[54] Local conflicts have thrust dozens of new grassroots and community groups into the limelight, attracting attention both domestically and internationally.

New international alliances likewise bring fresh energy, perspective and resources to the reinvigoration of Chilean civil society. One such moment was in April 1998, when 34 heads of state gathered in Santiago for the second Summit of the Americas. The leaders of hundreds of environmental, labour, human rights, women's, indigenous and other grassroots and popular movements from across the Americas held their own parallel 'Summit of the Peoples of the Americas', to articulate a more democratic and sustainable model for inter-American economic integration.[55] Since then, burgeoning international linkages have enhanced the work of Chilean activists involved in conflict over deforestation, land titles, displacement of *campesinos* and indigenous people, workplace hazards, local toxic exposures and so forth.

In a political culture that emphasises consensus and conflict avoidance, the sharpening environmental conflicts now shaking the country from north to south are increasingly difficult to ignore. In that space, Chile's environmental NGOs and activists are explicit in their call for a revitalisation of civic life. They strive to rescue and build upon whatever fragments of Chile's participatory experience remain, having survived the brutality of dictatorship, and persisting still amid the apathy and verticalism of civilian rule.

Conclusion

We see the legacies of dictatorship and transition imprinted indelibly on Chile's environmental laws, institutions, policy processes and popular participation. These legacies confront the future in an indeterminate mixture of promise and peril. On the downside Chile maintains a political economy often inimical to sustainability, with past and current rewards geared to those who most effectively externalise the negative environmental and social costs of production. The neoliberal state often lacks the autonomy and capacity to correct market failures, and its legal and policy architecture tends to maintain an exclusionary stance towards rival priorities. Persistent elitism, alienation and depoliticisation weaken

civil society, undercutting the vibrant civic participation that has elsewhere made the emergence of environmental politics one of history's most transformative social experiences.

Still, even Chile's narrow democracy has opened significant space for environmental policy, discourse, education and action. Although its impressive legal and institutional architecture has fallen far short of its original democratic aspirations, forces are at work to narrow the gap between ideal and practice. Environmental movements have survived and endured in a harsh political landscape. Their message can only increase in resonance, as Chileans are daily reminded that Pinochet's marketplace is neither perfect nor neutral—the utopias of some have come at the cost of dystopias for many others, including nature itself. Poisoned water, smog-choked air, eroded slopes, lifeless soils and mountains of toxic wastes and tailings all bear inescapable witness to an ominous environmental debt and to the unsustainability of the current path.

Environmental concerns are gaining a stronger foothold in popular consciousness and political practice. The election of Socialist Ricardo Lagos to the presidency inspires cautious optimism. Even given the verticalist heritage of the *Concertación*, Lagos represents a party, discourse and political tradition of pragmatism and broadened participation. Symbolically, his appointment of Adriana Hoffman to head the CONAMA, over the clamorous protest of business and military leaders, places one of Chile's most respected environmental voices in a significant and visible position. The administration has also sought to honour and reinvigorate Chile's international commitments, as demonstrated in joint efforts to enhance compliance and broaden participation in the Canadian trade relationship (the Canada–Chile Agreement on Environmental Co-operation—CCAEC). Such actions lend credence to the prominence of environmental issues in the new administration's policy statements, which have indicated a greater commitment to boosting regulatory, enforcement and participatory mechanisms.

For Chile and other nations inheriting legacies of political exclusion, elitism, weak or captured states and atomised civil societies, we must remind ourselves that historic legacies, however sobering, are not immutable. If Chile is indeed a model for the Third World, its environmental future has yet to be written. It will be shaped in part by the weight of history, but also by the values and actions of its citizens, activists, scholars and policy makers. Even for countries shackled with legacies of authoritarianism and incomplete transition, environmental politics may yet present a vital opportunity for social change.

Notes

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[1] This verticalism is attributed to territorial acquisition, power concentration in Santiago, rigid social stratification, and the mining economy and industrial drives of the past two centuries. See B Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; and M A Garreton, *The Chilean Political Process*, Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1989.

[2] B Burnett, *Political Groups in Chile*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1970.

[3] L Oppenheim, *Politics in Chile: Democracy, Authoritarianism, and the Search for Development*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993.

[4] B Loveman & T M Davies, *The Politics of Anti-Politics*, Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1996.

[5] Chile was thus a significant harbinger of broader trends in Third World political economy. These neoliberal policy priorities were subsequently imposed on all debtor nations by creditor countries and international financial institutions, as requisite conditions for renegotiating foreign debt in the 1980s and 1990s.

[6] On Chilean popular movements and the transition, see: M A Garreton, 'Popular mobilization and the military regime in Chile', in S Eckstein (ed), *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989, pp 259–277; B Loveman, 'The political left in Chile 1973–1990', in B Carr & S Ellner (eds), *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993, pp 23–39; J M Puryear, *Thinking Politics: Intellectuals and Democracy in Chile 1973–1988*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994; B Loveman, 'The transition to civilian government in Chile', in P Drake & I Jaksic (eds), *The Struggle for Democracy in Chile*, Lincoln NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, pp 305–338; P Oxhorn, *Organizing Civil Society: The Popular Sectors and the Struggle for Democracy in Chile*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995; and P Guillaudat & P Mouterde, *Los Movimientos Sociales in Chile 1973–1993*, Santiago: Ediciones LOM, 1998.

[7] J A Abalos *et al, Una Puerta Que Se Abre: Los Organismos No-gubernamentales en la Cooperación al Desarrollo*, Santiago: Taller de Cooperación al Desarrollo, 1989; and B Loveman, 'Chilean NGOs: forging a role in the transition to democracy', in C Reilly (ed), *New Paths to Democratic Development in Latin America*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995, pp 119–144.

[8] E Silva, 'The political economy of Chile's regime transition: from radical to "pragmatic" neoliberal policies', in Drake & Jaksic, *The Struggle for Democracy in Chile*, pp 98–127.

[9] A Varas, 'The crisis of legitimacy of military rule in the 1980s', in Drake & Jaksic, *The Struggle for Democracy in Chile*, pp 73–97.

[10] M A Garreton, 'The political opposition and the party system under the military regime', in Drake & Jaksic, *The Struggle for Democracy in Chile*, pp 211–250; and A Valenzuela & P Constable, 'The Chilean plebiscite: defeat of a dictator', *Current History*, March 1989, pp 139–153.

[11] P Oxhorn, 'Recent research on Chile: the challenge of understanding "success"', *Latin America Research Review*, 34 (1), 1999, pp 255–271.

[12] Oxhorn, *Organizing Civil Society*; C Schneider, 'Chile: the underside of the miracle', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 26 (4), 1993, pp 30–31; and J Petras & F I Leiva, *Democracy and Poverty in Chile: The Limits to Electoral Politics*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994.

[13] Oxhorn, *Organizing Civil Society*, p 282.

[14] The key *Concertación* parties are the Christian Democrats (PDC), the Socialist Party (PS) and the Party for Democracy (PPD).

[15] This can be translated as 'consensus democracy', 'democracy by agreement' or 'pacted democracy'. See Petras & Leiva, *Democracy and Poverty in Chile*; Oxhorn, 'Recent research on Chile'; and L Taylor, *Citizenship, Participation and Democracy: Changing Dynamics in Chile and Argentina*, New York: St Martin's, 1998.

[16] Taylor, *Citizenship, Participation and Democracy*, p 81.

[17] For example, the 1980 Constitution defines property, social and welfare rights and responsibilities in libertarian terms, separates political participation from a more legitimate social participation and so forth. See Chapter Four of Taylor, *Citizenship, Participation and Democracy*, for a complete discussion of the infusion of neoliberal values into the Chilean Constitution.

[18] Taylor, *Citizenship, Participation and Democracy*, p 52.

[19] Petras & Leiva, *Democracy and Poverty in Chile*; Taylor, *Citizenship, Participation and Democracy*; Oxhorn, *Organizing Civil Society*; J Collins & J Lear, *Chile's Free Market Miracle: A Second Look*, Oakland, CA: Food First, 1995; M Cooper, 'McChile: General Pinochet still rules: twenty-five years after Allende', *The Nation*, 23 March 1998, pp 10–23; and A Riquelme, 'Voting for nobody in Chile's new democracy', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 32 (6), 1999, pp 31–33.

[20] Quoted in Oxhorn, *Organizing Civil Society*, p 271.

[21] T Moulian, *Chile Actual" Anatomia de un Mito*, Santiago: Ediciones LOM, 1997.

[22] For economic critiques, see Schneider, 'Chile: the underside of the miracle'; Collins & Lear, *Chile's Free Market Miracle*; Cooper, 'McChile'; D Green, *Silent Revolution: The Rise of Market Economics in Latin America*, London: Latin America Bureau, 1995; P Vergara, 'In pursuit of "growth and equity": the limits of Chile's free-market social reforms', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 29 (6), 1996, pp 37–42; and H Fazio, *Mapa Actual de la Extrema Riqueza en Chile*, Santiago: Ediciones LOM, 1997.

[23] D Green, 'Chile: the first Latin American tiger', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 28 (1), 1994, p 15.

[24] For data and descriptions of the environmental crisis, see Collins & Lear, *Chile's Free Market*

Miracle; R Quiroga, *El Tigre Sin Selva: Consecuencias Ambientales de la Transformación Económica de Chile 1974–1993*, Santiago: IEP, 1994; M Lowy, 'Shredding Chile's forests', *Multinational Monitor*, 16 (1), 1995, pp 16–19; R Quiroga & S Van Hauwermeiren, *Globalización e Insustentabilidad: Una Mirada Desde la Economía Ecológica*, Santiago: IEP, 1996; M Claude, *Una Vez Más la Miseria: ¿Es Chile un País Sustentable?*, Santiago: Ediciones LOM, 1997; M Claude, *Cuentas Pendientes*, Quito: Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano, 1997; E Silva, 'Democracy, market economics and environmental policy in Chile', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 38 (4), 1996, pp 1–34; E Silva, 'The politics of sustainable development: native forest policy in Chile', Venezuela, Costa Rica and Mexico', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 29 (2), 1997, pp 457–494; R A Clapp, 'Waiting for the forest law: resource-led development and environmental politics in Chile', *Latin American Research Review*, 33 (2), 1998, pp 3–36; and M A Altieri & A Rojas, 'La tragedia ecológica el "milagro" neoliberal chileno', *Persona y Sociedad*, 13 (1), 1999, pp 127–141.

[25] For thorough documentation of Chile's environmental regime see Silva, 'Democracy, market economics and environmental policy in Chile'; M Castillo, *Régimen, Jurídico de Protección de Medio Ambiente*, Santiago: Ediciones Bloc, 1994; M Castillo, *El Derecho a la Información Ambiental: Un Derecho Humano Básico en Chile y en Las Americas*, Santiago: Organización Panamericana de Salud, 1996; CONAMA, *Perfil Ambiental de Chile*, Santiago: CONAMA, 1994; and CONAMA, *Gestión Ambiental del Gobierno de Chile*, Santiago: CONAMA, 1997; T Tomic & F Toledo, 'Modernización, desarrollo, y medio ambiente', in C Toloza & E Lahera (eds), *Chile en Los Noventa*, Santiago: Dolmen, 1998, pp 253–282.

[26] Law 19.300 in the *Ley sobre Bases Generales del Medio Ambiente*, CONAMA is the Comisión Nacional del Medio Ambiente, and the COREMAS are Comisiones Regionales del Medio Ambiente.

[27] Silva, 'Democracy, market economics and environmental policy in Chile'; and Castillo, *Régimen Jurídico de Protección de Medio Ambiente.*

[28] T Anderson & D Leal, *Free Market Environmentalism*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991.

[29] A Weale, *The New Politics of Pollution*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

[30] F Sabatini, 'Conflictos ambientales en América Latina: ¿Distribución de externalidades o definición de derechos de propiedad?', in F Sabatini & C Sepúlveda (eds), *Conflictos Ambientales: Entre la Globalización y la Sociedad Civil*, Santiago: CIPMA, 1997, pp 49–74.

[31] Tomic & Toledo, 'Modernización, desarrollo, y medio ambiente'; and O Sunkel, *Sustentabilidad Ambiental del Crecimiento Económico Chileno*, Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 1996.

[32] Collins & Lear, *Chile's Free Market Miracle*; M Claude, *Una Vez Más la Miseria*; and Silva, 'Democracy, market economics and environmental policy in Chile'.

[33] Juan Escudero, spokesperson for CONAMA, interviewed by the author, 2 June 1998, Santiago. See also Tomic & Toledo, 'Modernización, desarrollo, y medio ambiente'.

[34] Claude, *Una Ves Más la Miseria*; Altieri & Rojas, 'La tragedia ecológica del "milagro" neoliberal chileno'; and Quiroga, *El Tigre Sin Selva.*

[35] Claude, *Una Vez Más la Miseria*, pp 198–199.

[36] Silva, 'Democracy, market economics and environmental policy in Chile', p 25.

[37] R U Morales *et al, RALCO: Modernidad o Etnocidio en Territorio Mapuche*, Temuco: Instituto de Estudios Indígenas, Universidad de la Frontera, 1998.

[38] Domingo Namuncura's account is revealed in his book, *Ralco: ¿Represa o Pobreza?*, Santiago, Ediciones, LOM: 1999.

[39] Good representative collections include Quiroga & Van Hauwermeiren, *Globalización e Insustentabilidad*; C Padilla & P San Martin, *Conflictos Ambientales: Una Oportunidad para la Democracia*, Santiago: IEP, 1995; and P San Martin, *Conflictos Ambientales en Chile*, Santiago: IEP, 1997.

[40] On mining, see R Nuñez & C Jungwirth, *Oro y Sangre de Amyapampa y Capasirca*, Santiago: IEP, 1997. On salmon farming see M Claude & J Oporto, *La Ineficiencia de la Salmonicultura en Chile*, Santiago: Terram, 2000. On pesticides see M E Rozas, *Plaguicidas en Chile: La Guerra Química y sus Víctimas*, Santiago: IEP, 1995. On the urban highway see L Sagaris & R Araya, *Costanera Norte: ¿Qué Ciudad Queremos?*, Santiago: Obervatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales, 1997. On forests see M Lowy, 'Shredding Chile's forests'; Silva, 'The politics of sustainable development'; and Clapp, 'Waiting for the forest law'.

[41] Juan Escudero, spokesperson for CONAMA, interviewed by the author, 2 June 1998, Santiago. See specifics in CONAMA, *Perfil Ambiental de Chile.* I say 'almost unique' because only one other body of law provides any such opening: the 1993 Indigenous Law (*Ley* No 19.253).

[42] Claude, *Una Vez Más la Miseria*; F Sabatini, '¿Que hacer frente a los conflictos ambientales?', in Sabatini & Sepúlveda, *Conflictos Ambientales*, pp 299–317.

[43] Silva, 'Democracy, market economics and environmental policy in Chile', p 14.

[44] Sabatini & Sepúlveda, *Conflictos Ambientales.*

[45] Claude, *Una Vez Más la Miseria*, p 200.

[46] Taylor, *Citizenship, Participation and Democracy*, p 116.
[47] Manuel Baquedano, Director of the Instituto de Ecología Política (IEP), interviewed by the author, 28 May 1998, Santiago. See also Claude, *Una Vez Más la Miseria*, pp 203–210. The classifications I present here are subject to interpretation, and may not reflect the way some organisations might define themselves.
[48] *Comité Nacional pro Defensa de la Fauna y Flora*, and *Defensores del Bosque Chileno.*
[49] Claude, *Una Vez Más la Miseria*, pp 201–203.
[50] See Silva's critique of CIPMA in 'Democracy, market economics and environmental policy in Chile'.
[51] Claude, *Una Vez Más la Miseria*, p 213.
[52] Not In My Back Yard.
[53] D Ghai & J M Vivian, *Grassroots Environmental Action: People's Participation in Sustainable Development*, London: Routledge, 1992; and B Taylor (ed), *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995.
[54] This is demonstrated in several of the cases of environmental conflict noted above, particularly in court challenges to environmental impact assessments. Lake Sagaris, journalist and community activist, interviewed by the author, 29 May 1998, Santiago; and Marcelo Castilla Sánchez, environmental attorney, interviewed by the author, 2 June 1999, Santiago.
[55] F Rosen, 'People's summit in Chile brings together diverse organizations', *Mexican Labor News and Analysis*, 3 (1), 1998, pp 1–3; and Victor Menotti, 'Santiago's other summit', *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, 29 April 1998.