

Why do I remember the barrio?

Simply because, although I am very happy living now in Scotland, I still feel that I am emotionally anchored to it. I refuse to lift the anchor which attaches my spirit to this place. I don't know if the same kind of emotions invades your minds. In my case, and it may be because I now live abroad, the nostalgia for the barrio Esperanza is still very strong. So much so that I dream all the time, that one day I will return to it to tell its new inhabitants our stories we witnessed here during our childhood. They would, I think, make an excellent story-line for a tango.

What is the aim of this letter? -A letter?

The plan is to try to regain something of our friendship left in the air with my departure from Chile to Peru in 1974. The plan is to tell you my personal story in Peru and Scotland, the country I arrived in 1974 together with a group of Chileans political exiles. The plan is to tell you what happened afterwards. I suspect that my story is embedded in the cultural, social, economic and political history of our country.

You may ask why I left Chile for Peru.

I have to blame Pinochet's "golpe de estado" for my departure from Chile and – incidentally – can I remind you of our Peruvian friend Victor Hugo? At the end of 1973 Yolanda Huapaya Correa, Victor's mother on seeing that the news coming out of Chile was not good, decided to invite me to stay in Lima. My "aunt" Yolanda, as I used to call her, sent me a Braniff International ticket and some of you, along with many other friends, came on the evening of the 24th of January of 1974 at the Cerrillos Airport to wish me good luck and say good-bye - and what a good-bye it was! I was drunk with alcohol, apprehension and sadness. It was my first ever trip in an aeroplane and I was very anxious. In Chilean: I was "cagado de miedo".

Before departing for England, I spent nine very complicated months in the fascinating Peruvian capital in the company of the lovely Huapaya family whose solidarity was very important to me. You may remember that many of our friends knew Victor Hugo's family, as they had visited Lima before me: el pelao Orrego, el chico Luis, el Lalo Farías, el Raúl Videla, el Juan Carlos.

Everything in Lima was lovely for the first three months. I had a visa and the Huapaya family was extremely kind to me. During this period very bad news began to arrive from Chile about the atrocities being committed by the Pinochet regime and I become extremely worried. Needless to say, when I left Chile I was already very worried about the things that were taking place in our country. You may remember that several people we knew had already gone missing – meaning that we knew they had been detained, but without knowing their whereabouts and the reasons behind their detention. At the time none of us could work out why they were being held.

Soon, it was not only bad news that began to arrive from our country but, shortly my arrival, Peru was flooded with Chileans, many of whom had fled in fear of their lives. I began to meet many of our compatriots here, each of them with a sad story to tell about themselves, a relative, a friend or a friend of a friend.

From a distance, the situation in our country seemed even more dramatic. For example, I had the opportunity to meet a Chilean by the name of Mario Grez* who had fled Chile hidden in the undercarriage of an aeroplane. Can you believe the desperation of Mario? His case was, of course, all over the Peruvian press.

Most Chileans were very well received by the Peruvian people, considering that we were supposed to be “revolutionaries” and that our country had been, in the 19th century, an enemy of Peru. Those who arrived from Chile said that they belonged to different leftwing political parties and were a rich mixture of people with different social backgrounds. My social-political background was confined to doing more or less what Allende asked us to do as workers - to support his social policies through the ballot box. I channelled my energy into a pro-Unidad Popular Catholic Workers’ organisation called “La Juventud Obrera Catolica”. Remember how Rolando and I used to invite you to JOC for meetings and social gatherings?

I am telling you all this because, when I spoke to Perico on the phone, he was a little concerned that so many Peruvians were now arriving in Chile as a result of the bad economic situation in their country. Perico said that ‘they’, the Peruvians, were now taking jobs as they were considered, by the Chilean bosses, to be a much cheaper labour alternative. I told him not to be too touchy about it and to consider the fact that thousands of Chileans in many parts of the world had also “taken the jobs” of the locals. It was hard for me to say this to Perico because I know so well that he and the rest of you, and indeed all of the working classes had never been privileged in what we all call so proudly “our country”. Today “our country” is owned by a clique and by big multinationals who owns everything including strategic resources such as the water of Chile which now belongs to Endesa, a Spanish multinational. Now, (2008) our government of “La Concertación”** intend to allow a multinational to demolish a pair of glacier to extract gold and other minerals. (We were not supposed to save the environment?) The project is called PASCUA LAMA. The whole operation is being planned by Barrick Gold, a multinational with close links to the Bush family.

I am certain that the Peruvians are not going to be privileged in Chile either. On the contrary, they will be more exposed to nasty exploitation and racism and this is bad news for them. After all Chile has always being a very racist country. Racism is entrenched in our national identity, in our psychology as Chilean People, and in our own history. You and I know well that the Mapuche people and the working class poor could say a great deal about racism in our nation.

Ivan asked me on the phone another valid question. **How did I manage to come to Scotland from Peru?** Well... Life in Peru became very difficult for me, as many things began to change for the worse after my visa expired.

*There is a video-film (Salto al Vacio-2007) about this experience and was directed by Pablo Lavin. In June 1974 Mario Grez Rivas, a young worker, escaped military controls at the local airport and fled from Chile, tied with a belt to the landing gear of a Boeing 707 headed to Lima. After enduring extreme temperatures, he arrived in critical conditions to the Peruvian capital, where he still had to face the attempts of the military authorities to bring him back to his country. Un salto al vacío approaches the events from three standpoints: the recreation of facts, the reflection of Alberto Zeiss –the actor who does a research to play the lead character–, and the current testimony of Grez himself.

** La Concertación, a left-centre-right political coalition, took power after the departure of the Pinochet’s dictatorship.

A new, harsh reality in my life, and in the life of thousands of other Chileans, began to emerge. We were no longer welcomed by the Peruvian Government and we certainly did not want to return to Pinochet's Chile. In Chilean language: "volver a Chile ni a palo", "tai ma' hueoón", "ni cagando", "ni loco"

I will tell you more about my Peruvian experiences on another occasion, as it is a very long story, but what is important here is to state that the whole of the Huapaya-Correa family gave me a great deal of support when I was in need and, naturally, I remember them with enormous pleasure and gratitude.

Do you remember Ana Maria? She had been a girlfriend (polola) of mine and used to live in Ivan's cité. I have just been reading a lovely letter of support she sent me from Chile to Lima with an address in Ecuador where I could contact a friend of a friend of hers, as I was planning at that time to go to that country to get a visa in order to re-enter Peru. I was in Ecuador in April 1974 and for about ten days. Ana kindly had responded to a dramatic letter that I had sent to her explaining my very precarious situation in Lima. To cut the story short, it was impossible for me to remain in Peru. An irritable Peruvian Consul, one very stormy Quito afternoon - with lightning more powerful than I had ever seen in my life - gave me a visa for a couple of days - sufficient for me, in his view, to be able to cross his country by road in order to reach Chile. I remember very well that a blonde Chilean woman in that Peruvian Consulate office in Quito smiled at me and said rather sarcastically, ¿Y por qué arrancas de Pinochet? I told her that I was not escaping from anybody and that I was not a criminal and that she should know better what was really taking place in her own country. I left the Consulate with a storm in my stomach, very angry with the Consul and very offended by this good-looking Chilean woman who was either a Pinochet informer working in the Peruvian Consulate or just a bitch, flirting with the Peruvian Consul who looked very European to me. The type of "criollo" accustomed, in his own country, to insult, with racial overtones those Peruvians who did not share his skin colour and cultural background. As a Creole he treated me in the manner that he would treat a "serrano": with disdain!

I left Quito submerged deep in thought, but not before saying good bye to a lovely Chilean family who had generously accommodated me in their flat for nine days and to the pleasure of watching colour television for the first time in my life. About this time, Ecuador, a beautiful and interesting country, was changing its economy from a banana producing to an oil producing country. (Thirty five years later I can see that oil brought to Ecuador poverty and as a result hundred of thousands of Ecuadorians had had to migrate to Europe in search of work.)

When I returned to Lima from Ecuador I decided to remain there and, by doing so, I automatically became an illegal immigrant with all the negative implications this new status was going to bring me.

To avoid being caught, I had to do a lot of strange things and to put up with innumerable unpleasant experiences. But life can be a Pandora's Box and one day on a Lima bus, I saw from a distance a red haired guy studying his Chilean passport. He looked happy and I assumed he was Chilean, so I nervously approached him. He turned out to be a nice individual and I confided my problem to him. He suggested that I should do what he had already done. He told me that The United Nations had

just opened an office in Lima to help Chileans who did not wish to return to Chile. (The barbarous Pinochet had by now become known all over the world.) I paid a nervous visit to this office in the centre of the city and found that what my compatriot had told me was true!! The office was packed with very worried Chileans, some with foreigner spouses. At this point, I decided to take to my heart the meaning of one of the verses of our Chilean National anthem: “o el asilo contra la opresión...”, “*better asylum than oppression*”. I decided to ask for asylum in Lima, as Chile was no longer a *sweet fatherland*, as another verse of the same anthem suggests.

In Lima I came to the sad conclusion that in the new Chile of Pinochet I was, like million of others, effectively regarded an enemy of the nation. My political ideals were incompatible with the new ultra right-wing regime installed in Santiago. Pinochet’s Chile resembled very much fascism and Nazism and it was shown by the type of terror tactics that the dictator employed against the working classes. Thousands and thousands of Chileans came to the same conclusion in Lima and in many other South-American capitals and, like me; they too decided to seek political asylum. At this stage, it was a great gamble for everyone concerned. In my case, I was an only son and I had an old mother to support. We Chileans in those days were forced by special circumstances to think with our head rather than with our heart. It was a difficult thing to do. I become a political refugee and as such it had painful implications. The worst was the terrible thought that I, perhaps, was never going to see my mother again. Nevertheless, and closing my eyes, I decided to apply to come to Britain, hoping that this country could not only shelter me but allow me to find a job, to help my mother economically and, very importantly, allow me to tell the world that a fascist dictatorship had subjected our country to a regime of terror. Most Chilean exiles did exactly like me.

In Peru we came automatically under the protection of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). This organisation provided us with some money for our maintenance and arranged accommodation in private houses. I ended up along with other Chileans in the house of a very nice Peruvian family: the Chingolos. We stayed there until my application to come to England had been processed and accepted by the British Government. To my surprise I was accepted by the British Government to come to their country along with 2,999 other Chileans. (Not all coming from Peru, but from Chile and other areas of South America such as Argentina). I thought at the time, without false modesty, that they, the British, at least were taking in a valuable Chilean citizen who had been a hard worker in his own land and had a desire to do the same in Britain.

As I told you, on the phone, everything was accomplished thanks to a combination of factors, including good luck. The acceptance came after about three weeks and I remember very well that I had mixed feelings about it: I was very happy and very sad at the same time. It was all very strange. It was as if my mind did not know what to do with the good news. I just could not handle the processes of sorting out my emotions, the excitement and the fear of travelling to a faraway country, culturally very different from my own. After all, I was travelling to England!! the land of the English language!!, a centre of power, prestige and imperialism, the land of Charles Chaplin and The Beatles, my heroes.

The period before departure was agonising, as the image of my old mother being left behind to her own devices was a torture in itself. I was her only relative and she was the most precious person I had. Still it hurt me very much to know that I had to leave this fragile woman behind in a country submerged in uncertainty, terror and desperation. When I left Chile she was living then in an old “conventillo”, those horrible places that you and I know so well.

During Christmas 1978, in an unprecedented statement from a Chilean bishop, we heard their statement directed to all of those who had left the country either voluntarily or through enforced exile abroad since the military coup, unequivocally affirming the church’s support for the refugees.

“We, the bishops of Chile, remember you with affection, we wish you the best, and await your return...many and varied are the causes that took you away from your country, some looking for work or for a better financial position. Others went because you did not want to go on living under the regime in power at the time of your departure. Others had to go into exile so as not to be imprisoned or stay in prison for political reasons”. (Chile Committee for Human Rights, Newsletter no 20)

Just before the departure for England, we were given in Lima the following memo in Spanish. September 1974. (My translation)

Memorandum about the reception of Chilean Refugees

Those refugees who have a person in the UK who is willing to make all the necessary arrangement can be received by the British Council’s representatives helping the refugees in conjunction with other voluntary organizations.

Normally, the refugees will be temporarily accommodated in a hotel and then will be told to approach the respective government agencies such as the Employment Offices and Supplementary Benefit Offices.

Accommodation always represents a problem and it is expected that the refugees will make their own efforts to find an appropriate place to stay.

It must be said that in the UK there exists unemployment and it is a fact that in many cases, especially those who do not speak English, refugees must be prepared to accept a lesser type of employment than that to which they may be accustomed.

Economic help given will be for basic maintenance.

British Embassy, Consular Section, Lima.

On the 18th of September of 1974, our independence day, I was at the Jorge Chavez airport and to say good bye to me was Linda, a very nice Peruvian girlfriend I had at the time and almost all the members of the Huapaya-Correa family. I left Peru and our American continent on a British Airways plane with the remark on the BA’s ticket: “Chilean refugee”. The plane, of course was full of Chileans refugees, (During this time, British Airways was doing very good business with the Chilean refugees, taking in their airplanes many hundreds of them from Lima to London, with the fares being met by the UNHCR). The majority of the passengers on board the BA plane were Chileans, among them a number of elderly people including an old Greek man married to a Chilean woman. There were several families with their children and some married men whose wives and children were still in Chile. I remember one of them: Martin, who eventually went to live in Newcastle.

All of us showed clear signs of stress on the airplane and I could see in the faces of many passengers that distinctive, fixed expression of anxiety. It was a very sad moment indeed for all of us. What people were thinking at the moment of take-off? I do not know.

As our departure was on the Chilean National day and although it was a very depressing day for all of us, I felt that it was right to try to create an atmosphere of festivity. I took out my Tizona guitar and began to play and sing, with many of my compatriots joining in. I played Chilean music: "Cuecas" and "Tonadas" and I think that people's spirits began to brighten up a little. For the first time, I was playing my guitar on an aircraft and the British crews did not seem to mind.

We were all aware, on our journey to Antigua, the only stop before London that we were leaving behind families, friends, strong emotions and material things. I departed on this British plane with the vivid image of my old mother, the bombing of the Presidential Palace by British-made Hawker Hunter jets, and the young soldiers patrolling our streets in their army vehicles, looking as sinister and menacing, on their uniforms, as any Hitler's soldiers.

London, one of the greatest cities of our world, was patiently waiting for us on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean but were we ready to live in Britain? This was the great unknown which awaited us when we arrived in London. "Talca, Paris and Londres" goes the Chilean saying, I knew a little bit the town of Talca and now I was about to get to know London!!! Perhaps one day Paris and all of this, because of a terrible act of authoritarianism carried out by the Chilean Armed Forces against us the working classes.

England (London)

We arrived at Heathrow airport in London on the 19th of September of 1974 with a new social status: 'Chilean political refugees' or 'exiles from Pinochet's Chile'.

As soon as we arrived in London we were met by a Join Working Group set up to care for refugees. The J.W.G. was formed in 1974 and it comprised of a number of humanitarian concerns. The J.W.G. was, of course, politically motivated and as such it was well respected among all Chileans. We were legally admitted in Britain by the Government of the time. It was the Join Working Group, however, and in coordination with the local Chilean Solidarity Campaign and the Chileans themselves, which was in charge of our welfare. The people working for the J.W.G. were extremely nice and tried their best to make us comfortable. Anne, Sally, Gordon (Some people names that I remember) worked very hard on our behalf. I could see solidarity at its best!!.

Our group was accommodated in a hotel at 23 Princes Square, London W2. The day after our arrival, we were taken to the nearest police station to register our names and our address. Our names were registered in a green small book, under the care of the British Council. This small book called the Certificate of Registration was produced by the Home Office.

This was our first official British document and contained our photograph and the official statement: "*leave to enter the United Kingdom is hereby given for 12 months: 19th of September 1974**".

We were told to renew the British document every year for the next four year. After that, we were going to be given a permanent residence. My own Chilean passport was retained at the Home Office until 1978 year in which, I would receive my permanent residence in Britain and, if I wished, I could apply for British citizenship any time after that. During this period I managed to travel for holidays to France and Italy on a Travel Document, a special United Nation Document issued under to the Geneva Convention of 1951**. (This document stated that I could travel all over except Chile)

At the hotel I began to meet many Chileans with many horrific stories to tell and while there we heard the terrible news that the former Army General Carlos Pratt, a soldier loyal to President Allende, had been blown up in his car by a bomb in Buenos Aires on the 30th of September. He and his wife had been killed by DINAs, Pinochet's feared secret police. We were all sad for the horrible death of General Pratt and his wife.

Dear friends, this is part of my story, as I remember it. It deals with my departure from Chile to Peru and from here to England. It was a very difficult and painful decision to leave Chile as it was a very difficult and painful decision to leave Peru to come to England. It involved so many sensitive issues about life. It meant parting physically and emotionally from your culture and your roots: language, customs, family, traditions, family, friends and places. In fact, from all the things that one enjoys and loves in one's own land.

Now to the question not mentioned in our telephone conversation. ***Do I still remember Chile?***

Of course! I do remember it. But how exactly do I remember it? Why do I remember it? How do I perceive this country from a distance? What is Chile for me? Or what have become of my Chilean-ness after all these years? These are all difficult questions which deserve to be treated with utmost seriousness:

The extraordinary story of the working class people of our nation in the last thirty years revolves, as you know, around the figures of Salvador Allende, General Augusto Pinochet and the so-called governments of "La Concertacion".

Salvador Allende came to power primarily with the help of the working class and some progressive sectors of the middle class. He caught the political imagination of the poor and the disadvantaged people not only of Chile but of the world. Allende made the Government of the United States paranoid.

* an immigration status granted to a person who does not hold right of abode in the United Kingdom, but who has been admitted to the UK without any time limit on his or her stay and who is free to take up employment or study, without restriction. When indefinite leave is granted to persons outside the United Kingdom it is known as **indefinite leave to enter (ILE)**.

** The **United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees** is an international convention that defines who is a refugee, and sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum. The convention also sets out which people do *not* qualify as refugees, such as war criminals. The Convention also provides for some visa-free travel for holders of travel documents issued under the convention

Augusto Pinochet, on the other hand, managed to seize the imaginations of the government of the United States (as thanks to him their paranoia came to an end) and the bourgeoisie. The criminals, the dishonest, the opportunists and the powerful found solace in the regime. The Judiciary, in Pinochet's time, acted brazenly against the interests of those suffering at the hands of the dictatorship,

The coup, organised by the Armed Forces came with the civic support of the middle classes grouped around the Christian Democratic Party, and the traditional parties of the right grouped around the upper classes. The coup had the backing of powerful business people such as Agustin Edwards Eastman, the president of El Mercurio, and the owners of "la papelera" The Matte- Larrain family.

The Allende and the Pinochet periods were characterised by profound ideological divisions in the soul and the mind of all of us Chileans. Salvador Allende and Augusto Pinochet were responsible for the splitting up of our nation roughly between two main camps: 'baddies' and 'goodies. Who were the "baddies" who were the "goodies"? It all depended on which side of the political divide you were on. What was clear is that, by the 1970s the right-wingers were not prepared to give up power easily to the Allendistas.

During the Allende period, the economy put in place to help the most needed in society looked promising for a while, and then it became more and more problematic. What we all know is that in Allende's time there was hyper-inflation, black-market and, for a while, long queues everywhere even to buy the essentials. Everything was very unpleasant for us and an embarrassment for Salvador Allende. Politics in Chile became a nasty affair. *Who was to blame?* This is a point of great controversy, of course.

How one can forget that just before Allende was invested by the congress as president of Chile, some right-wing terrorists killed the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General Rene Schneider? Their intentions was clear: a) to prevent Allende coming to power by making the Armed Forces react against a democratic, political and economic process designed to help people like me and you. b) To alter dramatically the climate of peaceful co-existence among the Chilean people and c) once Allende was in Government, to create as much chaos as possible in order to bring down his democratically elected government. Who can forget that dreadful October of 1972 when the right-wingers paralysed the economy by disrupting the traffic of goods up and down our long and narrow country?

What happened during the years 1970-1973 was due to factors which had nothing to do with the working class people but a great deal to do with the nasty activities of the bourgeoisie being in the opposition and the mistakes made by the leaders of Popular Unity. Other people have others ideas about the cause of the coup: According to Frederick M. Nunn: *"It would not be too much of an exaggeration to consider Pinochet's coup as the culmination of the executive-legislative struggle that had its origins over a century ago" **.

*Jose Venturino Lastarria, Literary Memoirs,Oxford University Express,2000

Nothing, can justify, however, the horrible atrocities of the Armed Forces against its own people. We know that, thirty five years after the coup, millions in Chile dare to justify the atrocities of the dictatorship. Despite everything, Pinochet became, for many in our country, a positive cultural and political icon. This is to me the unpleasant side of Chilean culture and society. At this point, my “chilenidad” collapsed.

Was Salvador Allende wrong to carry out deep reforms in our country?

We must not forget that the social reforms engraved in the UP economic policies were part of their political manifesto before the elections. Salvador Allende began to nationalise some private industries, to implement deep agrarian reforms and to nationalise the copper industry. These social and economic policies in the political programme of the Popular Unity, however, alienated the opposition and the United States in the same way as their political manifesto alienated the working class people because it took care of their interests.

United States’ reactions

In the international arena, the actions of Salvador Allende and Augusto Pinochet made the government of the United States react - in one way or another: First, with an iron fist against the government of Salvador Allende and then favourably towards the Pinochet dictatorship. In both cases, the government of the United States freely interfered in our domestic affairs. The United States habit is to interfere in the domestic affairs of many countries of the world and they simply have not right to do so! But, of course, they are an imperialist country and as such they act accordingly. This American interference in Chileans internal affairs in the 1970s brought hardship, deaths and disastrous consequences for millions of working class people in Chile and Latin America. In Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, American interferences have so far (2008), cost the lives of thousand and thousand of people.

“La transición”, “La concertación” “la desorientación”.

With the departure of Pinochet in the 1990s, and before Chileans could enjoy full democracy, they had had to endure a long period known as la “transición”: a negotiated political settlement between the Pinochet regime and the opposition who formed “La concertación”, a left and centre-right political coalition. With the passing of time this coalition moved towards the right to the dismay of many of those who fought against the Pinochet regime. It has done so because the Christian Democratic Party, an important political member of the coalition and instigator of the coup in Chile in 1973, has put its weight behind it. Nobody knows when la “transición” will end (2005). No one can explain why the rich, during this period, have got richer and richer.

It was a lie when the politicians in the Concertacion, said that, after the departure of Pinochet, they would create a more egalitarian society. By 2004, Chile was voted the 15th worst offender in the world in terms of wealth distribution among its people. In other words, in our country exists an incredible economic gap between the haves and the have nots: those who have a lot, including astronomical salaries, and those who barely manage to survive with the money they earn. The gap narrowed in the year 2008? Chile still shows general discontent with the high levels of income inequalities in a supposed to be a prosperous economy.

We also must ask ourselves: why do we find in Santiago of Chile the hardest working population in the world? Why the press and the media still controlled by three right wing conglomerates? Why are so many criminals from the Pinochet regime still free? Why Pinochet was never put to prison? Why Pinochet ended up, after he left power, with millions of dollars deposited in American banks? and how he came to own all these money?

In spite of everything Chile, during the Allende's period, maintained democracy and freedom of the Press.

In spite of the increasing social and economic difficulties and social tensions, democracy and freedom existed during the Popular Unity period: people could vote, parliament could function, and the opposition could express their doubts in their newspapers, their magazines, their radio stations and on the state television. Mass demonstrations in favour of the government and against it were allowed. In Allende's time there was no repression against anyone, no concentration camps, no torture, no disappearances of people. There were deep political debates in all circles. In Allende's time, his political opponents were free to plan his downfall and his death. The military could, without any restraint, not only plan the murder the President of Chile and the leaders of Popular Unity but to kill thousand of Chileans. In Pinochet's time, people had to obey orders and freedom and democracy came to an end. Poverty and hunger began to be prominent in the lives of millions of Chileans. The plunder of the assets belonging to the Chilean state began with the Pinochet period.

The Popular Unity's efforts

The Popular Unity government, on the other hand, made an enormous effort to ensure that the poor could manage to eat properly, could read more, and have better education. In addition, the government made an honourable effort to encourage Chileans to appreciate their culture and to learn about their history from the point of view of the working class. This meant distancing oneself from the point of view of the bourgeoisie who were always trying hard to accommodate Chilean history to their liking and interests.

Artists were encouraged to develop theatre, cinema and music. But above all, the Popular Unity government wished the population to think and act collectively with a view to build, in the long run, a socialist state. This ideal, however, was one of the main points of contention for the right-wingers in their successful resistance against the Allende government. Socialism was a way to get rid of so many privileges held for centuries by the bourgeoisie in our society. The Pinochet dictatorship, on the other hand, helped to legitimise the political and economic hegemony of a minority class culturally different from the working class.

Contrasting attitudes

Like the Allende government, the Pinochet regime too demanded deep cultural, economic, social and political changes in society but in the case of Pinochet, it was in order to benefit a tiny sector of society: the bourgeoisie and the entrepreneurial class. The dictator encouraged deep changes by the use of extreme force and terror, with the blessing of the United States. Allende, on the other hand, encouraged deep reform by the use of the ballot box and without the help of the former Soviet Union or Cuba. But that did not mean that Allende did not seek to have close political and commercial relationships with both countries and the rest of the so-called socialist block. The

opposition to Allende spread the word that Chilean children were going to be taken by force to these countries. Nothing of the kind happened in three years of “socialism in Chile”. In Pinochet’s time, his army occupied our nation and during the time of La Concertación, thousands of Chilean working class babies have been given away to foreigners for adoption. *Why?* Because, of the poverty affecting the working class families. This happened at a time when the Chilean economy had been receiving a lot of good press abroad. If the economy had done so well then why were Chilean children being given away? Nobody knows what happened to these babies once they arrived in Europe or the United States. We become exporters of copper, wine, salmon, fruits and babies.

Pinochet’s capitalism

The Pinochet period was epitomised by the encouragement of his brand of capitalism: a type of culture based on terror, murder, deceit, business aggressiveness, ignorance, resentment, hatred, money, speculation, individualism and by the encouragement of an American economic model which has helped to create in Chile great economic contrasts and great resentments in Chilean society. This neo-liberal, model ignored, among other things, basic human rights such as workers’ rights in their places of work. This model in the year 2008 has brought the world on its knees. Millions around the world are now suffering the consequences.

Chile, an ideological battle ground

Chile, has been in the last 35 or more years an ideological battle ground whose winners are undoubtedly the bourgeoisie who have managed, using force and more democratic means, to relegate to a back seat the political and economic aspirations of the majority of people: the working class. It is sad to know that, during the dictatorship, millions of people struggled very hard against it and many people gave their lives in order to get democracy restored but all for what? To get: “*café con piernas*”? Trendy coffee houses in the middle of town, with naked waitresses.

Political apathy

One sad consequence of the dictatorship is the political ignorance and apathy of a great number of the new generation of Chileans. A full generation of Chileans had been brought up knowing nothing about democratic values, knowing nothing about worker’s rights and knowing nothing about the atrocities in their country under Pinochet. Millions of young people who opposed the dictatorship, however, were soon disenchanted with the governments of “La Concertacion”. They felt that that this “democratic” government had failed them miserably on so many fronts: education for example.

‘Chileans’ and ‘Chileans’ (confusion about our own nationalism)

Allende’s and Pinochet’s actions left visible marks on the culture of our generation as it contributed to the rise of such questions as what type of people we were and who have been the ‘real’ Chileans in the last 35 years.

Any answer will show that everything is relative and a point of heated argument. Pinochet’s coup, among other things, produced in us a psychological confusion about our own nationalism.

Who were the “real Chileans” in 1973?

Pinochet’s actions made it clear that the “real Chileans” were his Armed Forces and his civilians’ supporters. ***Who were we then?*** A terrorised mass accused, a thousand times by the Pinochet regime, of not being Chileans. That is individuals without rights to live in peace in their own country and exposed to terrible human rights abuses and exploitation by the “real Chileans” which also included the national and international entrepreneurial class. It was the “real Chileans” and their millions of dollars, who helped to build a new nation as they wanted it to be: without the participation of the working class people in the so called Chilean economic miracle. I am not impressed by the “Chilean economic miracle”.

The “Real Chileans” and the flagless mass.

Pinochet’s actions made us discover, with almost mechanical precision, that we were not, after all, a nation of good people. (A strange thought though) The “real Chileans” demonstrated that their nation was full of cowards, traitors, assassins and opportunists. The Government of Allende, on the other hand, demonstrated that the Chileans of the 1970s were imprudent people for trying to challenge, armed only with emotion and fragile ideologies, the hegemony of a very reactionary bourgeoisie well established and organised inside the Armed Forces, the Catholic Church, the judicial system, the entrepreneurial class.

Idealism in the 70s

The Chile of the 1970s was full of “naïve” people at the service of many ideals that sought to put right many wrongs thing in our society. I admired Allende, the “naïve” inside the Popular Unity. The Chile of the 1970s was full of left-wing politicians who decided to ignore the profound ideological divide that existed between the United States and the former Soviet Union. The Chileans working class was caught in the middle of this. What is extraordinary, however, is that the Cold War agenda was not used by Salvador Allende and us, his “naïve” followers, as an excuse to stop trying to build a more just society. In this sense, Allende was not a coward, the “naïve” were not cowards. Allende and the “naïve” were courageous people. Salvador Allende and his supporters were audacious and the “real Chileans” made them pay very dear for it.

The audacity of Allende and the flagless masses consist of:

In the 1970s there was nothing wrong in making the Chilean peasants feel that under the government of Salvador Allende they would cease to be serfs in the country side. In other words, the feudal system imposed on the “campesinos” by the “hacendados” classes was going to stop immediately. Similarly the exploitation, to the advantage of the big American multinational, of our main natural resource (copper) was also going to stop immediately. The government of Chile was entitled to nationalise the copper mines if it was in the interests of the Chileans people. The “real Chileans” and the United States thought otherwise. By ignoring, however, the dangers involved in challenging the United States in the ideological and the economic arena, the UP’s politicians, including Allende, were also ignoring the fact that the United States had always used violent means in Latin America to stop anything which they might perceive as going against their interests.

Who was Augusto Pinochet and who were his supporters?

I can build a political and a psychological profile of Augusto Pinochet and many of his collaborators in the Armed Forces by drawing on the figures of: Adolf Hitler, Francisco Franco, Benito Mussolini, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Raul Videla, the “gorillas” from Uruguay and several American Presidents responsible for the deaths of millions of people around the world.

Betray

I would have never imagined that a Chilean Army General could use the multi-million dollar Army, under his command, to kill Chileans on behalf of the interests of a few and the interests of some multinational companies belonging to a foreign power. This was simply an act of betrayal on the part of the Chilean Army. I would have never imagined that millions of Chileans could support Pinochet actions. The spectacled singer Patricia Maldonado said Pinochet saved us from “a disgusting and repellent government”. (La Cuarta, 6th of Dec.2006). I would disagree totally with Maldonado. The world and I know that the Pinochet dictatorship was in fact: disgusting and repellent for what it did against the People of Chile. Maldonado is a “real Chilean”.

My Chilean-ness (Mi Chilenidad)

As I said before, whatever Allende did during his mandate, nothing could have justified the atrocities committed by the Chilean Army under the leadership of Pinochet. It follows that it will be very difficult for me to build my ‘Chilean-ness’ around the company of Pinochet and supporters like Patricia Maldonado. It was these “real Chileans” who, in 1973, celebrated with champagne the end of democracy and freedom in our country. It was they, and their actions that put in power an Army General who after of 17 years of reign went to accumulate a fortune of about 30 millions dollars without telling them. It was these “ real Chileans” and their conduct that helped to diminish in my mind and my consciousness the idea of my nationhood. I wonder how many of my compatriots have the same feelings. “Chilean pride” lost all its meaning in my own imagination. But let me say that Chile is my family, ‘our barrio’ and all our common experiences as friends - full stop.