Imagining Mobility at the “End of the World”

Noel B. Salazar

Chile’s geographical remoteness has largely defined the imaginaries people share about this Latin American country. Despite its historical image as finis terrae (“the end of the world”), migrants from all corners found their way to these isolated peripheral lands. Thanks to new means of transport and communication, Chile nowadays is as exposed to the global circulation of people, objects and ideas as the rest of the world. Based on a combination of archival research and ethnographic fieldwork, this article traces how old (and originally foreign) imaginaries about Chile as an inaccessible island keep on influencing how contemporary Chileans participate in and frame their perceived exclusion from a plethora of new transnational mobilities, regardless of whether they have the means and freedom to cross imaginary boundaries and real borders or not. Although increasingly under outside pressure, the value of immobility remains at the core of the Chilean social imaginary, geo-politics and cultural life.

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After the creation of the world, the Bible states that “on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done”. What the Bible does not mention, however, is that ... a very disturbed angel came to tell God that something unexpected had happened: Small amounts of all elements used in the creation of the world had been left behind. What to do with those? ... The Almighty ... ordered the messenger to throw them all on one pile, and drop them at any extreme end of the world he had just created. The archangel discussed the matter with his colleagues ... and they hastily flew out to inspect the world. After a quick exchange of ideas, they decided that the Andes, which formed a barrier along the South American continent, seemed to correspond, in some way, to the place the Lord had designated. They took what was left and dropped it behind the huge mountain chain. That was how, between the Andes Mountains and the infinity of the Pacific Ocean, a narrow strip of land arose. (Mende 1952, 170)¹

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Imaginaries of the world and of oneself, as individual or part of society, always go hand in hand (Castoriadis 1975). People worldwide rely on powerful unspoken ideas, from the most spectacular fantasies to the most mundane reveries, to shape multiple, often conflicting, identifications of themselves and of others.² According to Said (1994), geographic imaginaries refer, literally, to how spaces are imagined, how meanings are ascribed to physical spaces (such that they are perceived, represented and interpreted in particular ways), how knowledge about these places is produced and how these representations make various courses of action possible. Indeed, social practices, ideologies and behaviours derived from imaginaries predetermine how people engage with the “Other” (as both people and the places where they live). Historically laden imaginaries—socially shared and transmitted representational assemblages that are used as meaning-making devices—are the “energetic source” (Baeza 2008, 24) that inspires social life, including imaginative and physical travels to distant destinations.

People hardly journey to *terrae incognitae*, but to places and peoples they already virtually “know” through the widely circulating imaginaries that exist about them (Salazar 2010a). Such images and ideas travel through a multitude of channels and provide the cultural material to be drawn upon and used for the creation of translocal connections. Empowered by modern mass media, these imaginaries have become global and have changed the way in which people collectively envision the world and their own positionalities and mobilities within it (Salazar 2011a). While social imaginaries are part of the glue that holds groups together (Taylor 2004), one of the central problems is the lack of correspondence between the projected ideals and aspirations on the one hand and the perceived and experienced reality on the other. No wonder one of the common expressions of the social imaginary are utopias, critical visions of good and possibly attainable social systems, located either spatially (elsewhere) or temporally (in another period) distant.³ As a variation on power, utopias propose an alternative by designing a future that aspires to become (Ricoeur 1986). Usually, they remain poetic fantasies of a desirable but unattainable perfection.

In this article, I take the example of Chile to illustrate the power of (often utopian) imaginaries. During the Southern hemisphere summer of 2009–2010, I was in Chile conducting research on transnational mobilities. The country had just been admitted as the first South American member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the so-called “rich man’s club” of nations and, capitalizing on this, the government was busy preparing its *Chile hace bien* (“Chile is good for you”) campaign to promote Chile abroad. I was interested in the (dis)connections that Chileans make between becoming a “developed” country and (increased) transnational mobility. Interestingly, the people I talked to focused mostly on explaining why they personally wanted to stay put. Many Chileans stress that they are homebound and draw on a metaphor of their country as an inaccessible island, with both its positive quality of insulation and its negative characteristic of isolation, as justification. Much of this imaginary derives from the country’s history.

Chile is a 2,670 miles long and narrow strip of land (on average 108 miles wide) between the Andes Mountains in the East and the Pacific Ocean in the West, the Atacama Desert in the North and the icebergs of Patagonia in the South. This “crazy

geography” (Subercaseaux 1973) has not only determined its territorial boundaries, but also influenced the imaginaries people, Chileans and foreigners alike, have about this Latin American country. I explore how the dominant imaginaries circulating about this country, both inside and outside its borders, were originally “foreign” and are being cyclically repeated throughout Chile’s history.⁴ Below, I briefly sketch the historical genealogy of dominant imaginaries about Chile, many of which are utopian in nature, and then zoom in on the current situation. Ethnographic findings reveal the remarkable influence of old imaginaries of Chile as “the end of the world” on how contemporary Chileans participate in and frame their perceived exclusion from a plethora of new mobilities, regardless of whether they have the actual means and freedom to cross imaginary boundaries and real borders or not. Recent country-branding strategies equally draw on those same imaginaries to represent Chile as exceptional and to position Chileans as “different” from the rest of Latin Americans.

The End of the World (as People Know It)

Ours is a land far away, the farthest of the Western Hemisphere, a real *Finisterrae*. This remoteness ... turned our land a long time ago into a fertile ground for legends in the eyes of Europeans. (Oyarzún, cited in García-Huidobro Mac Auliffe 2008, 139)

Prior to the coming of the Spanish colonizers in the sixteenth century, Northern Chile was under Inca rule, while various Mapuche groups inhabited the central lands and Southern islands. The origin of the word *Chile* is contested. One among many possible linguistic genealogies is the Aymara concept *chilli* (“where the world ends”). For the Aymara, a native ethnic group living in the Andes and the Altiplano, historically it made sense to denote the lands Southwest of theirs as the end of their lifeworld. The Spanish had done the same at home, calling the Westernmost point of the Iberian Peninsula Cabo Fisterra (Cape Finisterre). However, these geographical imaginaries drastically changed when Iberians discovered in the fifteenth century that, far beyond their Western “edge of the world”, there was another land: America. From that moment onwards, the so-called New World became one of the favourite places onto which Europeans could project their wildest images and ideas of paradise on earth and where many of the old continent’s failed utopias could materialize (Fernández Herrero 1994; Scott 2010).

Most cultures and religions across the globe have myths depicting an imaginary existence different from the hardships of real life, an existence blessed with nature’s bounty, untroubled by strife or want. This happy state or golden age is nearly always placed somewhere or sometime outside normal human experience, often “off the map” in some remote quarter of the world. Such ideas from the Old Testament and ancient Greco-Roman and Celtic myths played an important role in providing at least some of the explorers and early settlers in the New World with a framework useful in understanding, explaining and justifying their activities (Baritz 1961; Aínsa 1999). In the words of Lévi-Strauss, “When they moved into unknown regions they were more anxious to verify the ancient history of the Old World than to discover a new one” (1961, 78). As the discoverers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth

centuries came to venture to the edges of the(ir) world, it was supposed that, eventually, they would encounter some of the mythical geographical utopias and figures whose existence was, at least for a great number of them, beyond dispute. Classical and medieval myths related to the Promised Land were thus miraculously transported to and reincarnated in the New World (Baeza 2008, 255–273); “historical tradition was fed by geographical fable, native legends and old European myths” (Aínsa 1986, 46).

In the age of the discoveries, the whole of the Americas fulfilled the legendary role of the “end of the world”. Yet, the utopian America that had to be was systematically crushed under the real one. With the way the conquest went, North and Central America gradually lost their mythical qualities and the European imaginary of the end of the world moved from the “Far West” to the “Far South” (Franz 2000). As Stuvén writes,

for the Spanish Empire, Chile was one of the least important colonies; it was extremely far from the centres of power and it was a region of intermittent warfare. Who wanted to go to Chile? Very few. And this inevitably influenced and still influences the Chilean character. (2007, 47)

Established by Spanish conquistadors in the 1540s, the “captaincy-general” of Chile (part of the Viceroyalty of Peru) developed as a small and neglected agrarian colony on the fringe of the Spanish American empire (Collier and Sater 2004). Chile was a poor colony (Invernizzi Santa Cruz 1987), and Diego de Almagro (credited as one of the first European “discoverers” of Chile), Pedro de Valdivia (the first royal governor of Chile and founder of Santiago) and other colonizers after them never found the extensive gold and silver they had imagined to exist (partially based on the widespread legends of King Solomon’s mines and El Dorado). On the contrary, the conquest of Chile probably cost Spain more blood and treasure than all the rest of America.

Despite this harsh reality, Chile became one of Europe’s ultimate utopian playgrounds, both in fiction (for writers and armchair adventurers) and in reality. Many wrote convincingly about Chile without ever having been there themselves (Roa and Teillier 1994). A remarkable example is that of *La Découverte Australe par un Homme Volant* (1781), by Restif de la Bretonne. This French author imagined a utopian society in the fabled Southern Land (somewhere in Patagonia) where everything is the antipode of Europe. The enchanted city of the Caesars (a prosperous and rich city full of gold, silver and diamonds), too, was believed to be located somewhere in Chile. In the book *En Magellanie* (written in 1897 but only published in its original version in 1985), Jules Verne depicted a European expatriate who forsakes his monastic existence in the last unsettled corner of the earth, an island at the Southern tip of South America, to help a shipwrecked colony of nearly 1,000 immigrants. The novel explores the idea of anarchy as a form of social organization, and the problems that make it impossible or possible to apply this utopia. The story of Orélie-Antoine de Tounens (1825–1878), on the other hand, seems invented but has been well documented. This French lawyer and adventurer travelled to Chile in the nineteenth century, assuming the title of King of Araucania and Patagonia in 1860 (whether self-proclaimed or elected by Mapuche groups is disputed). The Chilean authorities put him

on trial and fittingly diagnosed him as suffering from monomania—a type of paranoia in which the patient becomes excessively fixated on one idea.

Once Chile was firmly established and recognized as an independent country, it started creating its own “ends of the world”. In 1888, it annexed to its territory the Polynesian Rapa Nui (Easter Island) or *Te Pito o Te Henua* (“navel of the world”), one of the planet’s most isolated inhabited islands (more than 2,175 miles West of continental Chile). Since 1940, Chile also claims part of Antarctica. In 1984, it founded Villa Las Estrellas, the first Antarctic village with its own town hall, hotel, day-care centre, school, scientific equipment, hospital, post office and bank. This makes of Chile a tri-continental country: America, Oceania and Antarctica (Canihuante 2006, 60). Interestingly, some of these remote sites are now fulfilling the imaginative role that mainland Chile once fulfilled. Take the Juan Fernández archipelago (415 miles off the Chilean coast). One of the islands is not only known for serving as inspiration for Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), it also made the global headlines in 2005 with the spectacular (but concocted) news report that a ground-penetrating georadar robot had discovered an old pirate gold treasure worth 10 million US dollar (Knight 2005).⁵ More recently, it gained popularity because some believed it to be Apocalypse Island, from where the Mayan gods would watch the “end of the world” in 2012 (<http://www.apocalypseisland.com/>). These three iconic places of Chile, Robinson Crusoe Island (renamed as such in 1966), Easter Island and Antarctica, were imaginatively captured in Cristobal Cornea’s (2007) coffee table photo book with the telling title *Chile, la ultima frontera* (“Chile, the Ultimate Frontier”).

Peopling the End of the World

The great founding myths of the nation were forged by the agrarian bourgeoisie of the central valley in the upsurge of their power facing the people that were south of the “frontera”. Among them is the otherness of the country, its character of difference with respect to the rest of the Latin American countries, the homogeneity that designed a country that was white and reduced to the central zone, and the character of European culture in our identity. (Pizarro 2003, 103)

The poem *La Araucana* (1589), by the Spanish soldier Alonso de Ercilla (1533–1593), helped in giving rise to the myth of Chilean exceptionalism. Although Ercilla himself was barely a year and a half in Chile, his epic poem that sang the Spanish Empire of Philip II already senses Chile as a nation. In the seventh “song” of his *Canto general* (Neruda 1950), Pablo Neruda recycled Ercilla’s materials and vision of Chile, crediting the Spaniard (whom he called the “inventor of Chile”) with having been able to see through the tangle of history thanks to his poetic efforts to provide a suitably heroic counterpart for the Spanish.⁶ The social–historical imaginary of Chile as an extraordinary country, be it for its natural beauty, its political achievements, its culture, its military victories, its resilience in time of adversity and numerous other qualities, has deeply influenced intellectuals and artists alike (cf. Stuvén 2007, 55).

Once independent, liberal Chilean politicians fought the colonial stigma that defined their country as the poorest and most miserable region of the New World (Invernizzi

Santa Cruz 1987), turning this imaginary by means of geographical uniqueness to make Chile a “happy copy of Eden” (as evoked in the national anthem). They redefined the country in the political sphere as the antithesis of South American reality, thanks to the institutional stability of the ruling elites. While the name of Chile in the colonial era had been associated with loss, isolation, violence and insecurity, after independence it represented not only the republican ideal, but also stability and order (Sagredo Baeza 2006). In other words, the natural condition and the geographic location of Chile conditioned not only its colonial image and development, but also its organization as a Republic. In 1830, the French naturalist Claude Gay was contracted to travel throughout Chile for three and a half years, investigating everything from geography and geology to demographics and industry. His monumental *Atlas de la historia física y política de Chile* (published in thirty volumes between 1844 and 1871) not only mapped out the country’s political and natural past but also greatly contributed to the Chilean cultural identity (Mizón 2001).

Many of the foreign descriptions of Chile after the country had become independent refer to the extreme South, for the simple reason that, before the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, the Strait of Magellan was the main route for steam ships travelling from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific (Canihuante 2006, 86). The ruling elite used this focus on the “cold” Southern part to distinguish the country from its Latin American neighbours. Following the lines of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European discourses linking climate to racial development, Chilean authors insisted upon the tropical character of neighbouring countries in contrast with the (European-like) temperate climes of Chile. In the War of the Pacific (1879–1883), Chile defeated Peru and Bolivia and won its present Northern regions. During the war, Chileans articulated the difference with the two other countries in terms of climate, representing their climates, cultures and races as tropical, whereas the more temperate clime of Chile, by implicit contrast, produces greater sobriety and by extension, a higher level of modern civilization (Beckman 2009). This kind of reasoning was backed up by the argument that the word *Chile* actually goes back to the Quechua word *chiri* (“cold”) or the Aymara word *ch’iwi* (“shadow”).

Chile’s claims to exceptionalism are also linked to its imagined whiteness (Pizarro 2003). Chileans like to think of their country as “a northern country, serious, very serious. From there to myth, there is a step that passes through the negation of all indigenous roots” (Joaquín Edwards Bello, cited in García-Huidobro Mac Auliffe 2008, 32). Culturally and demographically, Chile ranks with Nicaragua, Venezuela, Mexico and Paraguay among the most predominantly mestizo nations of Latin America (somewhere between 40% and 65% of the population). The national myth of a white society free of *mestizaje* has crumbled, with most Chileans now stating that people in Chile are not white or Indian but “Chilean” (mixed). According to the 2002 population census, less than 5% of the Chilean population considered themselves indigenous, although most show varying degrees of mixed ancestry (INE 2003). That same census indicates that only 17% of the current migrants in Chile are of European descent. The popular misconception that *criollos* (natives of (pure) European ancestry, mostly Spanish) form higher percentages of the population is due primarily to the concentration of this category in the larger urban centres and in the overt and articulate landowning and

professional classes (with many of these people still having European passports). In the popular media, too, you will mostly see only “white people”.

The Spanish conquistadors were among the first international immigrants that arrived in Chile, but they are usually not recognized and named as such (Cano and Soffia 2009). While colonizers also carry with them the flag of their country of origin to try to impose it on foreign territory, migrants in general mostly seek utopia in supposedly ideal places (the imagined Promised Land), often escaping from realities of submission and misery, if not persecution, that push them to leave their native place, without titles or belongings (Aínsa 1999). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Chile received many Spanish migrants, mainly from Extremadura and Castile and León, together with a small group of slaves from African descent. In the eighteenth century, people from Basque Country arrived, together with British and French traders. Most scholars, however, only start using the concept of migration when Chile gains independence and welcomes European soldiers and maritime traders, particularly English, French and Italians (but also Dutch, Greeks, Portuguese and Scandinavians), which in turn facilitated the spontaneous arrival of other Europeans. Many European governments sponsored migration to Chile.

The waves of immigrants who left Europe between 1850 and World War I helped to reinvigorate the “foundational spirit” of the Promised Land; Latin America returned to be the space and time of utopia. Nevertheless, Chile developed as a socially and culturally insular country unaccustomed to the presence of large numbers of foreigners. Its geographic isolation, which set up the first European immigrants as arbiters of who could arrive next, engendered early migration policies that were discriminatory. The first Chilean governments had two main motives in attracting European migrants: the colonization of the South of the country (finishing the task that the Spanish colonizers had begun) and the widespread belief that the Europeans, as hard workers, would automatically bring with them development (including “improving the race”) and modernization.⁷ Although the overall number of immigrants during this early period was relatively small, their presence transformed the country technologically, economically, religiously and culturally. In 1824, the government enacted a law to encourage Europeans (primarily Swiss, Germans and English) to establish factories in urban centres as well as to populate sparsely inhabited Southern areas. The evaluation of this policy has been mixed. While some recover the contribution of prominent migrants and settlers to Chilean society, others report the failure of the modernization project (Cano and Soffia 2009).

The first admission of immigrants to Chile was carried out selectively. In 1845, an immigration law (*Ley de Colonización*) prescribed how the migration process was to unfold (Zavala San Martín and Rojas Venegas 2005). The 1854 census shows approximately 20,000 foreigners, most of them German colonists in the Region of the Lakes (predominantly village artisans and agriculturalists). Their settlements in the South of Chile are a good example of how agricultural colonies were formed that transpose religions, customs and architecture.

When these settlers wrote to their loved ones who had remained in Germany, they often evoked the illusion of a promised land, relying on a pan-Germanic ideal in which

southern Chile was merely inserted as an extension of the Black Forest that, of course, the weather conditions and southern flora made them recall with nostalgia. (Baeza 2008, 265)

That the government was attracted to the idea of German immigration, then unprecedented in Chile, was due mainly to the vision and perseverance of a young German merchant-marine officer, Bernhard (Bernardo) Philippi, a foreigner without political influence or social connections when he arrived in Chile. This same man was responsible for the actual recruiting of many of the immigrants in Germany (Young 1971). Most immigrants ended up as labourers in the fields or the mines.

In 1882, the immigration effort was reinforced through the establishment of the country's *Agencia General de Colonización* (General Immigration Agency) in European ports such as Bordeaux, Hamburg and Antwerp, offering Chilean land in uncultivated areas to settler families. Despite these efforts, relatively few immigrants actually came—between 1889 and 1907, for instance, only 55,000 arrived, while Argentina received well over 2 million in the same period. Those who did immigrate increasingly came on their own account, and not, as occasionally in the past, as part of government-sponsored immigration schemes. Although some Chileans had opposed colonization projects because they did not want immigrants (such as the Germans) to create ethnic enclaves, this is sometimes precisely what happened. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Yugoslavians from the Austro-Hungarian Empire settled in strength in the far South (Magallanes) and the Norte Grande (Antafogasta). They were followed by a sizeable group of Italian migrants who, between 1880 and 1930, settled all over the country.

The years between the 1907 and 1952 censuses are also notable for the growth of immigrant population of Arabs (fleeing conflicts in the Ottoman Empire, which then included Syria, Palestine and Lebanon) and Asians, arriving through a more spontaneous process. Enough Arab migrants settled in Chile that by 1930 this group accounted for more than 15% of the foreign-born population, and by 1952 more than 20%. This migration was largely undocumented, and because the migrants were non-white, they were not welcomed with the open arms as their European predecessors. Chilean society largely rejected and discriminated against these new groups of migrants, who were considered both culturally inferior and an economic threat to the ruling class (Doña and Levinson 2004). Clearly, certain people were welcome, others less so. Just as Chileans had earlier discouraged the immigration of Jews and Italians (considered to be congenitally dishonest moneygrubbers and criminals, respectively), they rejected the Japanese as well, citing the dangers of the Yellow Peril—and not forgetting blacks, whose presence, the politician Malaquías Concha believed, “would enervate the vigour and corrupt the intelligence and character of the nation’s inhabitants” (Collier and Sater 2004, 171).

Chile, a “Cool” Place

The notion that Chile is atypical of Latin America has been omnipresent in public discourse, media representations, and tourist and business marketing to the rest of the world. In opposition to the reputation of Latin America as tropical, informal and multi-ethnic, such discourses represent Chile as culturally, racially, and climatically

more like Europe. Chile is “a good house in a bad neighbourhood”. It is a First World country located in the postcolonial South by some cosmic mistake. (Staab and Maher 2006, 105)

Responding to a changed context—the industrialization of the 1940s and the end of World War II—Chile did not need colonizers any longer but specific types of migrants. The 1952 migration law is very explicit about which kind of migrants are needed to contribute to the country’s new economy. Internally, the country went to a rapid succession of divergent political utopias in the second half of the twentieth century. From 1964 to 1970, there was a “revolution in liberty” (a social-Christian utopia) under Eduardo Frei, from 1970 a “Chilean road to socialism” (a Marxist utopia) under Salvador Allende, and from 1973 to 1989 a “silent revolution” (a neoliberal capitalist utopia) under Dictator Augusto Pinochet. The decree-law of 1975 replaced migrants by four desired groups of foreigners: students, tourists, workers and residents. Paradoxically, this type of policy served to both diversify the foreigners in Chile as to filter access (for political and ideological reasons). More importantly, the dramatic political changes turned Chile from an immigrant to an emigrant nation.⁸ In fact, Chile is most known not for the flow of people into its borders (never more than 2% of the total population) but for the many who have left it (Martínez Pizarro 2003).

Pinochet’s new social, political and economic order discouraged many new immigrants from entering. During the economic and political crisis that followed the coup, hundreds of thousands of Chileans fled the repressive political regime or were forced to leave. They left for Argentina, USA, Venezuela, Canada, France, Italy, Sweden and Australia. It is estimated that during the period 1973–1985 in between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Chileans left their country, voluntarily or forced (Jedlicki 2001). At the same time, the military dictatorship used the argument of distance to dismiss all foreign critique: one should not listen to what is being told about Chile abroad; nobody understands us because we are different (Pizarro 2003, 106). After having endured the difficult seventeen-year dictatorial period (1973–1990), Chile could no longer be proud of being the country with the longest democratic tradition in Latin America (since its Constitution of 1925). The military regime had isolated Chile even more from the world. The only sector of society that was successful in creating a positive image abroad was the business sector, which could boast the successes of the “Chilean miracle” (having turned Chile into one of the most prosperous nations of the continent). The way in which the state took it upon itself, after the return to democracy, to “reinsert” Chile into the international community was partly influenced by the rising migration from within South America, the majority of immigrants (around 60%) coming from neighbouring countries, especially from Peru and Argentina.⁹ This led to a return to the older claims of exceptionalism, namely Chile’s non-tropical status.

Probably the most emblematic example of this strategy was the enormous chunk of iceberg that was towed from the Antarctic sea to the 1992 World Fair in Seville, Spain, to serve as the ultimate proof of Chile’s lack of *tropicalismo* (cf. Dorfman 1999).

The iceberg was apparently intended to evoke associations of Chile as a cold place that shared not only a climate but also cultural and economic qualities with Northern

Europe—a place technologically advanced enough to master nature and move the unmovable. It was a sign of prosperity and progress intended to distance Chile from the image of Latin America as indigenous, exotic, underdeveloped, and riven by ethnic and political conflict. (Staab and Maher 2006, 105)

The iceberg formed part of a broad strategy of nation-branding to improve the international image of Chile after the dictatorship (Fermendois 2005, 425–491). This campaign promoted the Chile that the country itself aspired to be “cool”, sober, technically advanced and efficient—in other words, profoundly modern and, thus, more closely related to England (“the English of the Pacific”), the USA (“the Yankees of South America”) or France (“Talca, París y Londres”) than to Bolivia or Brazil (Subercaseaux 1996).¹⁰ The iceberg symbolized a country that

started to jump on the train [of modernity], eager for closer contact with the developed world ... The culture of Chilean ‘cosmo’ began—the aware and travelled Chilean—which was first advanced by the returnees but, over the years, took off on its own. (Contardo 2008, 272)

Such type of image building has become a key feature for all post-dictatorship Chilean governments. Of course, this is also partly a reaction to the changing dynamics of mass communications since the 1990s, in which the promotion of image seems of more importance than conveying content. Advertising, image building and branding have penetrated all sectors of society, and the state has been one of the first institutions to adapt to this new logic, by becoming the main promoter of Chilean modernity. An important player in this respect is ProChile. This Trade Commission of Chile, responsible for implementing and enhancing Chile’s trade policy abroad, was founded in 1974 (start of the dictatorship) and belongs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interestingly, one of the first things ProChile did in 1990 was supporting the project *Imagen País* (Country Image). This programme, developed by a committee of the government agency for economic development to further develop the image of Chile’s role as a member of the globalized world, first focused on the USA, but afterwards broadened its scope to include Europe (specifically Spain and the UK).

Since 2000, the tone and content of Pro-Chile’s campaigns have changed considerably. Instead of the triumphalist discourse on modernity and regional exceptionalism, it has increasingly stressed the Latin American character of Chile, focusing on themes such as solidarity and concern for the welfare of the region. This change of externally projected image seems to be the result of pressures from the political Left, which resisted the monolithic approach to Chilean society of the previous campaigns (as exclusively white and Western), as well as of negative reactions from neighbouring countries such as Bolivia (Peña 2003).¹¹ In 2005, the *Imagen País* campaign launched the slogan *Chile Sorprende, Siempre* (“Chile, All Ways Surprising”). This catchphrase was used until 2008, when the publicly funded Fundación Imagen de Chile was created, a new institutional framework designed to provide general coordination of all activities involving Chile’s image, both at home and abroad. The foundation’s most recent international campaign, launched in September 2010, and entitled “Chile hace bien” (meaning both “Chile is good for you” and “Chile does things well”), recycles many of the old imaginaries discussed above.

The influence of Fundación Imagen de Chile was outspoken in President Sebastián Piñera's discourses surrounding Chile's bicentennial in 2010 and the "image management" of the dramatic story of the thirty-three San José miners who were freed after having been trapped for sixty-nine days (longer than anyone in recorded history) in a collapsed copper-gold mine in the Atacama desert (Franklin 2011). This came only months after Chile had been hit by one of the strongest earthquakes ever measured worldwide, the government's handling of which had been sharply criticized. Although most of the rescue expertise and equipment was foreign, the Chilean authorities, with the help of around 2,000 journalists, masterfully turned the whole miner rescue operation into a global promotion and product placement for Chile. It is estimated that more than 1 billion people worldwide watched the rescue coverage on live television and online (where they added millions of comments on social network sites)—grainy footage from inside the mine and the Fénix rescue capsule (constructed with design help from NASA and a copy of which was exhibited at the Expo 2010 in Shanghai) that was remarkably similar to that of the first moon landing.

President Piñera was intimately involved throughout the rescue operation and told the freed miners: "You are not the same after this, and Chile won't be the same either." Indeed, the miners, mostly poor Chileans working under dangerous health and safety conditions, and symbolically "trapped in the belly of the earth" became global celebrities. Chile, on the other hand, skyrocketed nineteen places in the Country Brand Index (an annual study that explores how nations manifest as brands conducted by global brand consultancy FutureBrand in partnership with BBC World News). Juan Gabriel Valdés, the executive director of Fundación Imagen de Chile, had quickly understood the potential of the miners' story for the image of Chile. Already in August 2010, he commented:

We are an unknown country in global terms. With this [the miners' story], people get to know that Chile is a mining country, that there is a desert, a company under the name Codelco with the technical capacity to face this, that there is a democratic government and that the country is participating. There are a number of elements involved in the information, but, above all, it picks up the idea of heroes and this is an attractive idea in the world, especially in one more devoid of romanticism and idealism ... [The miners' story] is equivalent to those facts that are comparable to the Titanic, notable events like the astronauts. (Valdés, cited in *La Tercera*, August 29, 2010)

The rescue of the miners was the event in Chile most covered by global news media in history. It gave the imagineers a unique opportunity to stress, once again, Chile's exceptionalism.

Outside Influences

The Chilean, because of his islander complex and his feeling of belonging to an isolated world, has tended a little to think that the world is the map: here is Chile and the rest is the map. Thus, in reference to the map, Chile always wins: we are the biggest, the most able ... Because, if one faces the map, one is much better than the map. We have not experienced what the world is. In one way or the other, we have invented the world and it has not interested us. (Montt cited in Stuvén 2007, 57)

Apart from the various migratory movements described above, rapid developments in technologies of transport and communication have made Chile much more connected to the world than it ever was before.¹² In other words, “modernity no longer allows using one’s geographical condition as an excuse. Chile is in constant contact with the world” (Stuven 2007, 47). As some argue,

Chile keeps on being an isolated country, but it has been globalizing through communications and, in this sense, the isolation of Chile has become less dramatic, but it keeps on being a relative reality. The isolation expresses itself in that, in general, all references are made towards Chile, inwards. (Emile Duhart, cited in Stuven 2007, 49)

Critical observers have argued that Chile needs more outside influence (Gonzalo Rojas, cited in Stuven 2007, 56). A research conducted by the United Nations Development Programme revealed that 38% of Chile’s youth is little open to what is foreign and has never considered living abroad (PNUD 2003, 13–14). This is especially true for girls and people belonging to the middle or lower social classes. Another 33%, however, is highly open to what is foreign (PNUD 2003, 14–15). These are predominantly younger boys from the middle and higher classes. Youngsters living in the capital display the most cosmopolitan attitude, and here socio-economic differences are not at play. The researchers explain these findings by pointing out that younger people do not have family duties and can still fantasize about going abroad. They also have access to very different resources the moment they imagine their future horizon (Salazar 2011b).

The people I talked to in Chile stress strong family bonds as a reason to stay put: “I wouldn’t leave, in my case I’m rooted in my family and I’m not desperate to leave the country.” Of course, many people in Chile do not have the means to travel; at the same time, there are many scholarships these days and other opportunities created to facilitate transnational mobility. Juan, a young history student from a wealthy Chilean family I interviewed has many travel abroad opportunities but no concrete plans. He likes to think about it, but seems afraid to realize the trip. One of the reasons Juan gave me for this was that he is afraid that “seeing Chile from the outside can be a disenchanting experience” (referring to the fact that there is a danger of not recognizing one’s own lifeworld or frame of reference anymore if one stays abroad for too long). Even if he acknowledges how valuable the experience abroad can be, out of compliance, Juan prefers to stay in Chile. As Isabel, a young, middle class woman living in a small Chilean coastal town frames it: “I have always believed that I won’t stay in Chile my entire life. I have thought about living abroad in the near future, but I’ve never really planned anything.”

This type of comments is not surprising given the long history of imaginaries depicting Chile as a paradise on earth, whether utopian or not (Pizarro 2003). Aínsa’s description of the Golden Age, where immobility was conceived of as a guarantee of paradise, may enlighten us here:

It was simply a matter of being born and dying within the narrow limits of one’s own shores, of being satisfied throughout one’s life with the products of one’s native soil and, above all, of not knowing about or having the curiosity to know about what was

outside the precincts of daily life. The felicity of the Golden Age was guaranteed by isolation and self-sufficiency but also by that lack of curiosity toward what might exist beyond the limits of one's own immediate world. The rationalization is simple. If primary needs were satisfied on one's own shore there was no reason to look for new worlds outside the native plot of ground. (Aínsa 1986, 28)

The difference nowadays is that Chileans (like people in other countries) do not need to physically travel abroad to know what is going on outside of their country. If they do not go to the world, the world comes to them, in the form of foreigners (be they migrants or visitors) and global media. In general, Chileans look up to foreigners, although they are very selective in which type of foreigners they welcome (see above).

As indicated earlier on, Chilean emigration from the end of the 1960s until the beginning of the 1990s was primarily political. In the 1980s, this group of political migrants was extended by postgraduate students (brain drain) and economic migrants from the middle classes (which were quickly becoming poorer). These groups facilitated the arrival of larger groups of economic migrants in the 1990s and later (Yépez del Castillo and Herrera 2007). Since the 1990s, the percentages of Chileans travelling abroad and the influx of foreigners into the country have dramatically increased. Chileans temporarily leave the country to study, work or simply travel abroad, being convinced that, in the words of Carolina, a middle aged mother of three, "travelling opens your eyes and enables you to look at things from a more global perspective". However, "when Chileans travel, they do not particularly strive to know; Chileans arrive abroad and start contacting other Chileans" (Manuel Montt, cited in Stuvén 2007, 58). Moreover, not all Chilean emigrants are able to move away from the Chileanness that they carry deep in their hearts and minds.¹³ In sum,

the self-referential word is typically Chilean. It does much good for Chileans leave, but they are afraid of doing so. Not of physically leaving, but of leaving their environment, their frame of reference. The independent type or drifter is very little Chilean. (Emile Duhart, cited in Stuvén 2007, 55)

Chileans abroad play an important role in all of this, as is given voice in the influential literary work of Allende (2003) and Dorfman (2011). Officially, they number around 1 million or about 6% of the Chilean population (DICOEX 2005), and many of them maintain strong ties with Chile and have helped many Chileans to get rid of the provincialism they were bound to by trivializing the idea of travelling abroad and by showing that the geographical boundedness can be overcome by technical and economic means (Castillo Sandoval 2005). Reinforcing the latter argument are "the nouveau riches in Chile, who began to emerge after two decades of sustained economic growth, unveiled a nascent cosmopolitanism that served as a social climbing tool for a small but vocal segment of the population" (Contardo 2008, 272). Travel became one of the elements relatively easy to access for that segment of the population just below the Chilean upper class that likes to show off. For this class of "cosmopolitan mobile" people, the model is not the Chilean *cuico* (upper class, wealthy or snobbish people), but the global high society that travels, uses the latest technological gadgets, eats out in restaurants and knows about wines. Career-builders look up to the USA, while

Europe sounds “chic” (but is a second option or an ideological first choice). Holiday-wise, many travel within Chile, as it is generally believed that “we have everything in Chile, except tropical beaches” (interview with Solange Fuster, Regional Director of Sernatur). If people travel outside the country, young Chileans go on beach or carnival holidays to Brazil, the Caribbean and Mexico, families with kids to Miami, couples travelling alone on round trips to Europe (always including Spain) and elderly on international cruises. The newest trend is no longer to go on holidays to rest, but to gather radically different experiences (for example, travels to the Amazonian rainforest, India or the Middle East).

Interestingly, arguments against transnational mobilities abound. First, since Chile is doing relatively well economically within the wider Latin-American context, potential migrants are looking beyond the continent’s borders. In other words, there is nowadays little incentive to migrate and those wishing to do so need substantial financial resources. Second, although Chile portrays itself as cosmopolitan, in reality the knowledge of foreign languages is very limited. This, in turn, limits job and study opportunities abroad. Third, after 9–11 it has become hard to obtain visas and other official migration documents. While these are technical barriers to emigration, there is also a mental barrier: the idea that everything is very far (cf. Pizarro 2003) and consequently expensive (although Chilean people got used to credit).

Interesting, in this context, is the discourse about the so-called *negritos de Harvard* (dark-skinned people who studied in Harvard). This derogatory term, more Chilean than from the USA, is used to denote those middle or lower class Chileans who got the opportunity to study at prestigious foreign institutions but are perceived as not deserving to be there—the idea being that they got the opportunity not because of their excellence but because of political correctness (Castillo Sandoval 2008).¹⁴ Sociologist Villegas nicely describes how those who studied abroad fare when back in Chile: “the lower-level manager ... who is waiting for the traffic light to change while trotting there where vehicular traffic stopped his movement ... Stationary jogging, without moving, is a wonderful and insuperable metaphor for the meaning of their restless and ceaseless toil” (Villegas 2008, 44). Thus, although studying abroad is generally considered as something “positive” in Chilean society, the concept of the *negrito* shows that if one does not fit within the stereotypic profile of those entitled to study abroad it is (discursively) punished.

Even if the Chilean attitude towards foreign ideas, objects and people is highly ambivalent, it is hard not to recognize their influence in contemporary Chilean society. After the defeat of all great collective utopias, individualistic consumerism is probably the most popular utopia in contemporary Chile (as evidenced by the incredible popularity of huge shopping malls and the increased cultural influence of the USA). This has given rise to cultural counter-reactions such as McOndo, a literary genre embodying strong images of urban and popular culture while referencing the effect that consumerism—a world of McDonald’s, Macintoshes and condos (Fuguet 2001)—has had on the modernization of the Latin American world.¹⁵ McOndo was created as a critique against the expectation that all aspiring Latin American writers set their tales in tropical jungles where the magical and real happily coexist. It is

probably not a coincidence that the movement was started by a Chilean writer (as it nicely follows earlier reactions against *tropicalismo*).

Conclusion

Chileans are not always aware of how out-of-the-way their country is, both on a map and in the world. They forget that this is Chile's most distinguishing feature, which has determined its history... It is debatable whether Chile is beautiful or ugly, rich or poor, orderly or chaotic, whether its dominant gene is Araucanian or Spanish, but the enormous distance that separates it from the centres of thought and future events is its primary characteristic. So it was yesterday, so it is today. And tomorrow? (Serrano, cited in García-Huidobro Mac Auliffe 2008, 124)

Culture is situated at "the intersection of social experiences and collective imaginaries" (Palet and Velasco 2002, 36). The findings described in this article illustrate how both practices and imaginaries of (im)mobility emerge as sources constitutive of cultural meanings beyond being a mere extension or transfer of them. Imaginaries are signified and resignified, indicating both socio-cultural continuities and rupture. In the words of Baeza, "social imaginaries are never definitive and, for this reason, the construction of today's reality, for sure, is not the same as the one we will have tomorrow" (2008, 288). Even when a person is place-bound, his or her imagination can be in movement, travelling to other places and other times (Salazar 2010b). By extension, it can be argued that even when one is in movement, one's imagination can be focused on a singular place (for example, people in the diaspora recreating their imagined homeland) and that these imaginaries of fixity can influence one's experience of mobility. Anthropological analyses of mobility are thus best combined with complementary studies of the institutional locus of power over the domains that promote and constrain it (Salazar and Smart 2011; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013).

In the case of Chile, the constant recycling of old (and originally foreign) imaginaries of immobility and isolation, a play upon the nostalgic longing for rootedness (cf. Castillo Sandoval 2005), serves as cultural protection. While with the stories of the iceberg or the miners Chile wants to show the outside world how it can move the unmovable, the dominant domestic discourse in Chile stresses that not being on the move (transnationally) is the quintessential characteristic of what it means to be a "real" Chilean. As Brubaker argues, "the politics of belonging are generated not by the movement of people across borders, or by the movement of borders across people, but by the *absence* of movement or mobility—in social space, not geographical space" (2010, 70). The powerful landowning elite in Chile concentrates an extremely high proportion of the national income and is marked by what Torche (2005) calls "elite closure"—a significant barrier to long-range downward mobility. That the overall social mobility is relatively high in Chile is thus largely inconsequential, because it takes place among classes that share similar positions in the social hierarchy of resources and rewards.

The national imaginary, linking perceived geographical distance from the rest of the world to imagined difference of others (in first instance Latin American neighbours), clearly discourages transnational mobility. After all, such mobility reduces "distance"

and, thus, has the potential to threaten the imagined Chilean cultural unity. Immobility is thus at the core of the Chilean social imaginary, geo-politics and cultural life. The difficulty Chilean returnees have faced when trying to reintegrate after their period abroad only proves the point: “Returnees are also foreigners” (Pizarro 2003, 110). The Andes and other physical boundaries serve as a real barrier for those who stay: a horizon for those who choose to leave. However, in a global context in which geographical mobility becomes almost normative for any form of achievement, be it economic, academic or personal mobility, it will become harder and harder to keep Chileans from moving.

Meanwhile, Chile keeps on speaking to the imagination. The image-making machine of Chile’s exceptionalism labours unabatedly. Chile can now also claim to be the first South American country with a female (ex-)president and the first to join the OECD, the international economic organization of high-income countries. Whereas most of the earlier image-building came from the outside, the recent country-branding campaigns illustrate how Chileans themselves are now firmly controlling which image of their country they want to circulate around the globe. This image is far from self-referential but increasingly more in dialogue with the broader global context. Chileans have developed an almost pathological fascination for finding out how their country is being perceived abroad and the need to correct the “errors” made in this exercise. The heavy earthquake of February 2010 was a reminder of how fragile the image of a country can be and how hard it is to change negative imaginaries. The dramatic rescue story of the thirty-three miners showed exactly the opposite.

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Notes

- [1] All translations in this article are my own.
- [2] For an overview of the intellectual history and contemporary uses of the imaginary in anthropology, see Strauss (2006) and Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen (2009). Despite their frequent references to the imaginary, contemporary anthropologists have been less concerned with imaginative processes than with the product of the imagination.
- [3] Thomas More (1478–1535) coined the term *utopia* for an ideal, imaginary island nation somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean whose political system he described in *On the Best State of a Republic and on the New Island of Utopia* (1516). The seemingly perfect socio-politico-legal system stood in sharp contrast with the contentious social life and chaotic politics in Europe at the time. More’s book is not only the forerunner of the utopian literary genre, wherein fictional ideal societies and perfect cities are detailed, it also inspired people to set up real intentional communities that attempted to create ideal societies.

- [4] I carried out fieldwork and archival research in Chile in December 2009 to January 2010 (supplemented with data from previous visits to the country since 1998). The study mainly took place in the capital Santiago, supplemented by short stays in Concepción, Valparaíso, Viña del Mar and La Serena. The method used involved various types of free-flowing interviews with key informants and other significant actors in the field of transnational mobility (mainly migration and tourism). Ancillary data gathered include secondary sources, audio-visual data, news media, documents, archives, websites, etc. In addition, I used exhaustive notes and personal diary entries to record all my findings.
- [5] In this context, there is a nice example of how imaginaries are mistaken for reality. On his first trip to the Juan Fernández archipelago, Chile's President Sebastián Piñera referred to Robinson Crusoe as a person that had actually lived there (El Mostrador 2010).
- [6] I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me. Neruda's project can be seen as one promoting the "mobility" axis: Chilean identity and history, while dear to the poet's heart, and central to his own sense of self, should not be regarded as isolated but as connected.
- [7] In *La Raza Chilena* (1904), Palacios argued for the immigration only of those "races" that would blend with Chileans, excluding all matriarchal races and those from warm climates (including *iberos*, blacks and all Latin races) in favour of Nordic and Germanic races, which he denoted as *godos* or Goths (Larraín 2001, 95). This type of ideas was recycled in Chilean laws regulating migration. A law approved as late as 1953 (DFL 69, creating a Department of Immigration) still stated that "selective immigration will contribute to perfect the biological conditions of the race".
- [8] There had been two earlier important phases of Chilean emigration: transitory emigrations (1810–1840) and more massive emigrations related to the gold rush in California (1840–1850) (Cano and Soffia 2009).
- [9] Peruvian (and Bolivian) migrants are looked down upon and discriminated against because they are seen as indigenous, which in the dominant social imaginary equals dark skin, ugliness, laziness and poverty.
- [10] While the exact origin of the phrase "Talca, París y Londres" is contested, from the moment Talca was connected with the capital by rail at the end of the nineteenth century, its proud inhabitants for a long time imagined their city to be like cosmopolitan Paris and London. This has since become a common reference when talking about how European-like Chile and Chileans are.
- [11] Another reason could be the partial acceptance and manipulation of Chile's enduring image in Western popular culture as a wild and tropical country. Classic examples include Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901), or the Hollywood movies *Adventure* (1945), with Clark Gable, and *The Sea Chase* (1955), with John Wayne.
- [12] International flight connections have existed since long. PANAGRA (Pan American-Grace Airways, now defunct) and Air France started flying to Santiago in 1929, followed by Condor in 1935 and the British Overseas Airways Corporation (now British Airways) and KLM in the 1940s. In 1946, LAN-Chile started with international flights to Buenos Aires, in 1956 to Lima and in 1958 to Miami (Canihuante 2006, 64). As far as business is concerned, Chile became a member of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1994 and currently has twenty-one commercial bilateral agreements with fifty-seven countries (including the free trade agreement with the USA, signed in 2003). The country also has a state-of-the-art telecom infrastructure and regulatory system, and the highest mobile telephony and Internet penetration rates in Latin America.
- [13] This is an idea I borrowed from Roberto Castillo Sandoval.
- [14] Of course, this type of discourse sounds even more offensive since Barack Obama became president of the USA, because he could also be classified as a *negrito de Harvard* (Obama is a graduate of the Harvard Law School, where he was the president of the prestigious *Harvard Law Review*).

- [15] The term *McOndo* was introduced by the Chilean writer Alberto Fuguet, as a play on the name of Macondo, a town featured in Gabriel García Márquez's famous magic realism novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Magic realism is a literary genre commonly associated with contemporary Latin American writers and Chile has, in Isabel Allende, one of the most famous authors.

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