DISASTER COMMUNITY: *LA CULTURA SÍSMICA* OF CHILE

By
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ABSTRACT
ERIN REBECCAH MAUFFRAY: Disaster Community: *"La Cultura Sísmica"* of Chile
(Under the direction of Dr. Kate Centellas)

Chile lies on the junction of the Nazca Plate and the South American Plate, and the subduction along the two plates causes frequent seismic events in the area. Because the location and timing of earthquakes are virtually impossible to predict, Chileans can only prepare themselves for the inevitable occurrence of seismic events somewhere, at any given moment. Focusing on the magnitude-8.8 earthquake that occurred off the south-central coast of Chile at 3:30 A.M. on the morning of February 27, 2010, I analyze the concept of *cultura sísmica*, how it is interpreted by Chileans, and how the phenomenon assists Chile's recovery from disasters. I argue that *la cultura sísmica* is Chile's interpretation of the broader concept of "disaster community," which, when possessed by a community, allows for a quicker, smoother social and cultural recovery in the case of catastrophe. Drawing from my personal experience both in Hurricane Katrina and the Chilean earthquake, as well as several books on disasters and how communities prepare themselves for and react to worse case scenarios, I examine the components of *cultura sísmica* and how they manifest themselves in the Chilean situation. Using the data collected from conducting 16-question surveys with 32 respondents, I assert that Chile does indeed have a powerful *cultura sísmica* that grows in strength and pertinence with each Chilean disaster. Preparing for and learning well from worst-case catastrophes is an important part of the cultivation of disaster community and will allow areas to alleviate the chaos left in the wake of disaster.

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Introduction

I cringe at the thought of starting a sentence with "On August 29, 2005…" on paper, and I try to refrain from using the phrases "during the Hurricane…" or "after the Hurricane…" as much as possible. My non-"coastie" friends affectionately call the way we "coasties" talk about our experience in Hurricane Katrina "Kat-humor." The disaster still permeates my life and my thoughts in ways I cannot easily explain, but I lived through it. I also lived through another of the worst disasters to happen in the Western hemisphere this decade. In February 2010, I was spending my South American summer in Chile, in between my two semesters abroad, with people who were strangers to me mere months previously. That is when one of the worst earthquakes in recorded history struck off the southern coast of the Maule province of Chile. My experiences led me to the conclusion that when a worst-case scenario strikes a society, a sort of disaster community is formed. Furthermore, in areas where these natural events are anticipated, such as on the Gulf Coast, where hurricanes are ubiquitous, or in seismic areas such as the Southern Cone, this disaster community is a pre-existing phenomenon that enables those who possess it to not only survive, but also withstand the damaging effects of disaster in a resilient manner.

In witnessing firsthand these two great tragedies, in almost completely opposite settings, Gulfport, Mississippi, and Viña del Mar, Chile, I was amazed at the similarities in reaction – and the differences. Outcome is based on input, and cultural input exists in these areas that develops a disaster community, *una cultura sísmica*, which provides the necessary conditions for the consequences of a tragedy to be alleviated in tangible ways.

My personal story of Hurricane Katrina, my own interpretation of the "cultural memory" or "collective memory" of the storm, is deeply intertwined with my experience in the magnitude-8.8 earthquake that struck the southern area of Chile on February 27, 2010. Therefore, I find telling my Katrina narrative crucial to framing my argument. In Katrina, I was a refugee, a survivor, and a *damnificado*.[1]

I was sixteen years old when Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast region of the United States. I am from Gulfport, one of the many cities in my region with names suggestive of water.[2] When my mother demanded that my brother and I evacuate with her as far north as we could get (with many members of my family and their doggies) that Saturday afternoon, we were angry. My brother and I being sixteen-year-old twins with cars, social lives, friends, and importance, we complained to my mother the duration of the ten or so hour trip to Monroeville, Alabama, a trip that should only take two hours but was impeded by the congestion of evacuees. We were used to "hurricane parties," which took place in our home usually. Even during Hurricane George, when we stayed at Mississippi State

[1] Literally "damned"; Chileans used this word to refer to those persons who lost their homes in the earthquake.
[2] For example: Bay St. Louis, Long Beach, Waveland, Ocean Springs

University's investigative branch in Biloxi where our uncle worked, the whole affair had a celebratory atmosphere – food, cousins, toys, and movies.

Leaving the yellow house was absurd. My brother and I only later realized just how much we absolutely adored that place. Our house was supposed to be the safe place; my relatives' pictures, documents, and memorabilia littered the bottom story of the lovely home my parents built for our family. My mother nagged my brother and me to bring our clean clothes, which she had spent that Saturday morning folding, upstairs. It did not cross our minds that moving all of these things, and our bird's cage, to the highest point in our house might be necessary. That is how sure we were that nothing could happen to our fortress. Our home was the safe haven. This feeling of absolute, ignorant security was shattered within days of the argument of evacuation. I was in our hotel room, in the middle of the final chapter of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, when I was summoned into the next room to hear the news that my house had flooded. I promptly went back to my book and cried as I read about Dumbledore's death; immersing myself in fiction was appropriate to suppressing the emotion that threatened to break through the numbness.

In the moments leading up to our departure, church groups invaded our evacuation site – the hotel. Within these moments, I had an experience that would change my life. At sixteen, I was no stranger to charity work. In this moment, however, as the young teenagers smiled at me and handed me chicken fingers, I realized that I had never really thought about how the people I was "helping" actually felt. It was a humbling experience, to say the least.

Even knowing that our home was destroyed and that we would find out what it meant to need charity, we were optimistic. We planned on helping others. My mother sprang into action within mere hours of the horrifying news. My father was safe, but still on the Coast due to his job[3], and my mother, brother, and I needed to return to him and what was left of our home as soon as possible – and with a plan. From Monroeville, Alabama, my mother gathered supplies – water, nonperishable food items, gasoline, clothing – and we loaded up the cheapest, largest camper we could buy. Already, our sense of disaster community had kicked in.

My uncle helped us load our camper and attach it to my dad's SUV in which we had fled the Coast. We then helped him load my grandmother and her few personal items into his vehicle. He was taking her to Birmingham, where we have relatives. My uncle followed us some of the way home until it was time to turn off and head toward our unaffected family in Alabama. Thank goodness he was following us, because a short time after we departed, one of the tires on the camper blew out. Sparks flew up toward the extra gasoline in the gas cans my mother had purchased. Responding to my uncle's honking, we pulled over screaming. He changed the tire for us, and we continued on our journey, quite shaken up. This was to be the first of many stops we had to make before we would reach what was left of

[3] My father works for Mississippi Power, and during the aftermath of the hurricane, he was a very, very busy man. His job title at the time was "Area Manager for Hancock County." Hancock County is the county between the county that contains Gulfport (Harrison County) and Louisiana. Focusing beyond the media coverage of Katrina as a disaster for the city of New Orleans, investigation into the physicality of Katrina clearly shows that this area (Hancock County) was one of (if not the most) devastated areas from the disaster. Needless to say, although my mother, brother, and I returned to what was left of our home in a small camper the day after the storm ceased, we did not see my father for awhile.

our home. Heading down Highway 49, my mother, brother, and I had to stop to move tree branches, road signs, and general debris to push through the route. No cars joined us on the road; it was a long journey.

Although cell phone service was terrible at best, I had received several messages already, all resembling the one I received from one friend that read, "I'm okay, but Erin….. your house." I thought I was prepared for what I would see, and driving up to it, the damage did not appear so bad. I had seen similar hurricane aftermath before – debris, fallen trees. The yellow house looked much the same, until we got close. I remember two things distinctly from our homecoming: first, the smell. My mom had bought a 25-pound bag of dog food for our senile, but incredible, toy poodle the day before we left. In addition to the water being from the bayou (Bayou Bernard) and therefore inherently smelly, the dog food was plastered to the walls along the 6.5-foot water line. My relatives' pictures and belongings were scattered, some as far as our neighbors' yards. The windows were all blown out, and the clothes that my mom had demanded we take upstairs, an order we neglected to obey, were gone. All of the furniture on the bottom story was pushed into the corner of the kitchen and the corner of my parents' bedroom, a clear indication of the water's flow. The second thing I will never forget is the footprint. There was a footprint in the mud in the middle of my living room. Although there is no way to tell whose it was, as neighborhood friends had been to our house already to check up on us, I think it was one of my brother's friends.

The more I reflect on my story, the more I understand, and with the help of a colleague, I now have an idea of why those two memories are seared into my mind.

The smell is obvious; smell is one of the strongest senses connected to memory. The footprint, however, is more complex. The reason the footprint stuck out to me is that seeing a random person's footprint in the middle of my living room floor felt like a horrible intrusion. My family was going through one of the most intimate, emotional moments of our lives, and smack in the middle of our home was a dirty footprint. Disaster is like that; it is an intrusion into people's lives. The instinct to remove an intruder is strong, and this desire to get rid of the intrusion is one of the driving forces behind disaster community.

The upstairs was less dismal, but just as smelly. All of the fallen trees landed in only one spot fortunately. Unfortunately for me, that spot was my room. I looked very quickly at the destruction in my room, and I am not sure what I did next. I would describe the next two months as the blurriest period of my life thus far; the brain tends to suppress memories of desolation. The blurry part began after looking at my room. I know I shed many tears in this time period, but at that particular point I think I was still in shock. Self-centered as I was/am, I could not help cursing my bad luck to have all of my things ruined. My parents' possessions were mostly ruined too, but seeing the things that specifically belonged to me triggered egocentric self-pity. I could have salvaged many of my personal items, but to me the intruder – Hurricane Katrina – tainted them all. I did not even pause to see whether or not two irreplaceable items – a journal I had kept since kindergarten and a "portfolio" of middle school poetry – were destroyed. I wanted to bulldoze the yellow house; we all did.

I stayed with a friend for the next few weeks, and my brother did, too. Our mother stayed in the camper (the second one we bought due to the cramped space of the first one). Looking back, I cannot believe I left my mother there to face the demons of hurricane aftermath, power outage, and desolation. The friend I was staying with thought the hurricane aftermath was fun. We were out of school for at least a month. For me, it was like a war zone. I remember the military men riding around on tanks with guns. I remember painting "no trespassers, looters will be shot" in my cute, 16-year-old handwriting on a piece of what used to be our fence. Martial law was instated, which means if we felt threatened, we could shoot. We borrowed a gun from our neighbors across the street. I had never been in close proximity to a real firearm in my life, but the gun stayed in a drawer, uncomfortably close to where I slept.

Once we established that our house did not need to be bulldozed, the next step was to gut our house as much as possible in order to make the job doable for whomever we would eventually hire to rebuild. A few of our relatives from Alabama (members of the same family my grandmother was staying with) drove down with a huge trailer full of supplies. More important than the supplies, however, was the manpower they offered us in removing several things from our house – specifically the garage. My mother's (brand new) Volkswagen and my Chrysler Sebring were stacked on top of each other in the garage from the flooding. Our male cousins brought a chain and a huge truck and were able to get our cars out. The other thing they helped us with is probably my mom's most distinctive memory: we had an enormous freezer in our garage, stocked with all kinds of meat and other food items.

Due to the power outage and the heat characteristic of the Gulf Coast in September, everything in the freezer was rotten. I did not go into the area where the freezer was, but my mom described the smell and consistency of its contents as reminiscent of an animal carcass. The job was not for the faint of heart, but our cousins helped complete it anyway. They became a part of our disaster community, and looking back, I see many examples during my experience of the positive aspect of such a community.

So many people helped us in addition to our cousins, though it was hard to appreciate at the time. As I mentioned before, the camper we initially bought ended up being entirely too small for three to four adults and a dog; we needed a new one, and we needed it fast. My mother was able to communicate through someone who had cell phone service to find another camper. A father and son, whose names I do not remember, but I am sure my mother does, drove down a huge, beautiful (though I thought it hideous at the time) fifth wheel trailer/camper from somewhere in Alabama. They were part of our disaster community, too, and they did their part to help us.

My church's youth group ended up finishing the gutting of our house after most of the very heavy things were gone. Churches are a form of community in and of themselves, but when disaster strikes, they become assimilated into the disaster community. My youth group removed all of the small possessions and furniture we did not want to salvage that was left upstairs. They threw everything in my room out of the window; I wonder to this day who found my journal.

Although the friend with whom I stayed for much of the remainder of 2005 was insensitive with her words, she and her family helped me immensely. Giving me a place to stay that was not camper nor moldy house was an enormous deed. My friend is one of five children, and their house was packed, but they made room for me anyway. Another perfect example of the embodiment of disaster community is my grandmother in Waveland, who had more than 15 people staying in and around her home after Katrina. She told me later that she was miserable, but she knew that because her home was safe, it was her responsibility to open it to other people.

Katrina did not affect most of my close friends' homes. They did not lose personal possessions, so they shared with me. Within days of the storm, I had built a basic wardrobe, albeit eclectic, from various friends' gifts of clothing. I still have some items that they gave me. Oftentimes in disasters, redistribution of resources is necessary, and the fact that my friends felt my need enough to warrant parting with some of their own personal items, or resources, attests to the inexpressible, but nonetheless present sentiment of disaster community.

My family lived first in the camper, then in a rental house in Biloxi, and then in a rental house in Woolmarket before returning to the yellow house. We were lucky in that we were only displaced for about a year, and we only had to move a couple of times; most people were not that fortunate. The house is better than ever, other than a room or two that never came back to life. We have a room upstairs that originally served as an office, but its post-Katrina function is storage; the room contains our pictures we salvaged from Katrina still in the boxes we used to move them. The room serves as a reminder of the insecurity we face living in an area

prone to hurricanes; it is the embodiment of the hole left in our home and our lives by the intrusion of Katrina. This is not uncommon in a disaster community; our reluctance to unpack, even years later, represents our knowledge that another hurricane will come one day.

My brother and I were the only kids in the house, and we left for college the fall after we moved back into our home. Suddenly, I found myself making the decision on where I would like to spend a year abroad to complete the requirements for my major. I was only obligated to go for one semester, but moderation is not my *forte*. My experience in Katrina framed the outcome of my decision to stay for a year – experiencing an earthquake.

Due to the swine flu scare of that year, 2009, Central America was more or less out of the question for me. I asked the advisors at the study abroad office two questions: Where will I be the safest (for my family)? Where is there little-to-no English spoken (for me)? We narrowed it down to Chile, Argentina, or Uruguay. Several of my classmates were already going to Argentina, and I had heard that Uruguayans have a very distinct accent that may hurt oral proficiency exams.[4] I typed the name of the places into "Google Image." Valparaíso, Chile, popped up in all its port-city glory. I made the decision relatively quickly, and before I knew it, off I went.

I arrived in Viña del Mar, Chile, on July 19, 2010, with my entire immediate family. The only female child, as well as the youngest (if only by thirty minutes), I

[4] The person who warned me of the Uruguayan accent must not have had experience with Chileans; Chilean Spanish is very unique, and I will discuss that in the following chapters.

was surrounded by worry. We tried to make our way through the city with my minimal Spanish. We met my host mother, and I went to orientation at my school, Pontifícia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. After a week, it was time for my actual family to leave me. There were tearful goodbyes as my host mother and host brother confusedly looked on, wondering why my crazy family would not/could not eat the *antecuchos*[5] they had prepared for us. My parents, brother, and cousin were too upset over saying goodbye to me to socialize and eat.

I spent my first semester developing relationships with my host family, Chilean friends, and other international students, as well as struggling with the particular Chilean brand of Spanish. I went home for a bizarre Christmas visit – going home is always a strange feeling after being gone for so long. I wanted to spend the South American summer (North American winter) in Chile, so I rented my host family's apartment in Viña del Mar while they visited various friends in the northern part of the country. My mother stayed for two weeks, then I had two weeks by myself in the apartment. I developed close relationships with several Chileans and my Japanese friends in those weeks. My host family finally returned home from the north, and my host sister, who lived in Santiago at the time, came to visit for a weekend. On February 26, 2010, I did not go out to enjoy the Chilean *carrete*[6] like I normally would have on a Friday. I had recently returned from a camping trip, and I was exhausted.

[5] "shishkabobs"
[6] "party"

Around 3:30 A.M., everything started trembling. I was already accustomed to the *temblores*[7], so I was not concerned until I realized that this one was different. The shaking did not stop like it normally did; it grew stronger and scarier. I remained in my bed sitting halfway up, looking at my door, wondering what I was supposed to do. The first voice I heard was my host mother: *"¡Erin! ¡Sálte! ¡Sálte!"*[8] We went to the front door of the apartment, and my host brother put himself in a protective stance around the women. Later, he told me that I looked like a koala bear, clinging to the frame of the door. He kept saying something along the lines of "Calm down, calm down, it will stop really soon." He later told me that he was thinking something entirely contradictory. I remember my host brother and sister arguing over whether or not we should leave the 10-story apartment building. We were on the seventh floor, so we decided to stay, and we looked for lights and cell phones to see what would happen next.

My first question: "Do you think this will be on the news?" My host brother: "Our news, yes. Your news, probably not." A few minutes later, we heard sirens and saw what looked like fires in the distant *cerros*[9]. Actually, yes, it would probably be international news. We spent the next few hours trying to communicate with the rest of the *familia*; our calls confirmed that my host sister's boyfriend in Santiago, his mother and little sister in Buin, my host mother's parents, sisters, and brothers in the Huasco Area, and my host brother's girlfriend and her family in the northern

[7] "tremors"
[8] "Get out! Get out!"
[9] "hills," more specifically, "neighborhoods set on hillsides"

Serena area were alive and safe. My host family then began to address the problem of getting information to my family and friends in the United States.

My Chilean family took care of everything. Although my parents in the U.S.A. felt like days passed until they knew if I was OK, only about six hours passed between their waking and their hearing news from Chile. Considering the loss of power in a large chunk of the country, as well as lack of Internet connection and cell phone communication, six hours is impressive. My parents received two emails that Saturday afternoon from my host brother's girlfriend and my host mother's brother, confirming in broken English that I was alive and safe.

The next few weeks were blurry, similar to the months passed in 2005 directly after Hurricane Katrina. Although I knew myself that I was in no immediate danger, the news coverage of looting and the images of disaster reminded me strongly of my home disaster. My parents wanted to bring me home, but aftershocks were daily, and safety in traveling remained an issue. Communication, however, was restored within a couple of days, and my family and I spent hours on Skype, video-chatting. I watched them cry, and I repeatedly assured them that I was fine, at least physically.

The decision to stay in Chile for the remaining semester was not easy. One day I would be convinced the best thing would be to leave and spend a whole semester off, as I had already missed the deadline to do a semester at Ole Miss. My parents bribed me, although bribery is not the right word, as they wanted to protect me and keep me safe. They wanted me to be happy. Sometimes, I thought the idea of going home was fantastic. I guess a clinical diagnosis for that time period would be

"post-traumatic stress disorder." I had flashbacks and dreams about my experience in Katrina; in fact, I did not remember most of the things I related above, such as how desolate my mother's situation alone in our camper was, until then. The atmosphere of disaster was stifling. I did not leave our apartment for several days and retreated into fiction once more (*The Poisonwood Bible*). Left alone with my thoughts and the feedback from my family and friends in the U.S.A., I feared the chaos and destruction left in the wake of the earthquake.

The news in Chile related cases of looting, riots, and continued tragic casualties of the disaster. However, the Valparaíso area is about a four hour drive from the epicenter of the earthquake, depending who drives. After several isolated days in my room, my host mother announced that it was time to take a drive. I needed to see, according to her, that the area in which we lived was OK. I was skeptical, but I allowed them to drive me around the city. One of the most striking sights was an outdoor fountain; it was running. I had convinced myself that, like after Katrina, water would be a commodity to be rationed, and I would not be able to access as much as I wanted to shower or even drink. That fountain shattered the illusion of scarcity.

We then went to *la Católica*, the university at which I studied, and I was amazed to see dozens of young people collecting supplies and loading them into vans. Distracted by my own desperate situation during Katrina, I was unable to recognize and appreciate the similar quick response characteristic of disaster community in my own home. In Chile, however, I did not lose anything, and I was stunned at this rapid, powerful, grassroots, response.

In the weeks following the earthquake, I spoke to several individuals about the disaster. My main question: How did Chileans recover from such a disaster and go on to live their lives? The answer, as explained to me: Chileans experience earthquakes every generation, and they have *la cultura sísmica*.[10] These kinds of disasters, I was told, were expected. It reminded me of the hurricane culture, our version of disaster community, at home. We are used to disaster recovery, and so are Chileans. Their disaster community manifests itself in *la cultura sísmica* of Chile; I did not coin this term. My Chilean family and friends spoke of this term to me, and I decided it would be riveting to investigate.

Are Chileans conditioned to form a "disaster community"? I believe *la cultura sísmica* of Chile allows Chile's inhabitants to look to the positive aspects of worst-case scenario. Chileans are more likely to focus on the solidarity, heroic stories, and community formation that accompany earthquake disasters. Through *la cultura sísmica*, the emotional and societal toll of disaster is alleviated.

Methodology

To assess the question of whether or not Chile has a *cultura sísmica*, and how it is locally defined and understood, I had to do some background research. I read several books on theories about how humans and governments respond to disasters. I also read about "disaster syndrome," which is characterized by the common symptoms affecting whole populations after a disaster, manifested in a similar manner of suffering and subsequent response (Erikson, 1976). This analysis

[10] "seismic culture"

is decidedly not about disaster syndrome, although disaster community is affected by disaster syndrome; disaster community is a way to respond to and alleviate the harms of disaster syndrome.

The goal of this analysis is to show how Chileans, by and large, treat what I call "disaster community" through their embodiment of *cultura sísmica*. A disaster community is one in which individuals come together to form a unit in order to persevere through a worst-case scenario; it is characterized by comradeship and reciprocity, as well as a positive attitude overall, despite the negative sentiments associated with destruction. *La cultura sísmica* is Chile's particular brand of disaster community; solidarity is the key component of this phenomenon, although *la cultura sísmica* also contains plenty of features characteristic to a general disaster community.

I gleaned information about Chile as a whole, as well as the sentiments that can be loosely connected on a countrywide scale. Because I first learned of *la cultura sísmica* through casual conversation with Chilean contacts, I believe the best source for information about what constitutes a "*cultura sísmica*" and whether or not Chile has one is Chileans themselves – an emic definition. In addition to reflections upon first-hand observations, I designed a survey[11] with the ambitious goal of immersing myself in the dialogue of *la cultura sísmica* without feeding the answers that would serve my purpose best. The first seven questions are designed to get a literal, concrete illustration of the subjects' sense of place during and immediately following the earthquake. The next nine questions pertain to the subjects' abstract

[11] See A-1, A-2.

thoughts and emotions with regard to his or her familiarity with, opinions of, and emotional responses to Chile's *cultura sísmica* and how it was employed (or not) to produce (or not) a positive, appropriate response to the earthquake in the individual, private, public, and governmental sectors.

Due to time constraints and networking issues, however, my sample population for the surveys I conducted is decidedly homogeneous. I began recruitment using the social networking tool of Facebook. I wrote personal messages to each and every Chilean person I had "friended" during my time spent abroad. This included those persons who I may have only met once (often the case) through international student functions, mutual friends, travel, or *carrete*. I included a more or less uniform *párrafito*[12] about who I was[13] and told them I was writing my thesis about the February 27, 2010 earthquake (referred to as *"el terremoto"* much like Hurricane Katrina is referred to as "the hurricane" in the Gulf Coast region of the United States, at least partially due to the fact that both events were in the top-ten strongest of their kind). I requested their email address if they were willing to participate in a survey.

The response I received was overwhelming. In addition to the pleasantly-surprising and heartwarming response "Erinita! Of course I remember you! How

[12] "little paragraph"

[13] If I thought they might not be sure, I included a section about who I was. A sample message (taken verbatim from an actual message) can be found in the Appendix (A-3, A-4). I left it in the original format in which it was sent, including minimal capitalization, possible grammatical errors, punctuation errors, and slang. The reason I wrote the message the way I did was to try to make the subjects feel more comfortable with me. I wrote it how I usually type when I am messaging with them on any Internet communication tool, and as I had some online communication with roughly 95% of my would-be subjects during my time in Chile, I thought they might interpret formal grammar and vocabulary as impersonal.

great to hear from you! I hope you are doing well!", I was impressed by how many were actually willing to help me. Of the 80 or so individuals I messaged on Facebook, about 45 responded within the next 48 hours with an email address. At least five responded with multiple email addresses and recommendations of Chileans who would be willing to help me. Of the 40-something surveys I sent out, I was able to collect 32 usable responses. All of my respondents were young adults, ages 19-30.

While my sample group is not statistically representative of the Chilean population as a whole, I believe it serves as a good indicator of countrywide sentiments. The majority of my respondents are *universitarios*[14]. College in general serves as a nexus of society. Because college students come from diverse backgrounds, and in the university setting ideals between old and new, rural and cosmopolitan, traditional knowledge and formal education, meet and clash, it is the task of the college student to reconcile the differences between these schools of thought; my respondents (for the most part) were in the middle of this process at the time of the survey.

For all intents and purposes, this more or less uniform sample of the population constitutes my primary research. Young people represent the future, and these same university students and their peers will be the ones to shape and employ *la cultura sísmica* in the years to come.

[14] "college students"

Chapter Two

Introduction

The term "disaster community" is a meshing of different terms and ideas. The two separate words are the key elements of the term. In this case, it is important to define both. Ripley characterizes the term "disaster" by the literal translation of the Latin components of the word: "ill-starred" (2009: x). Clarke's definition of "worst cases" is a good translation for disaster; worst cases involve a body count and a lack of controllability (2006:21). He further suggests that worst cases are comparable. The worst cases of Hurricane Katrina and the February 2010 earthquake fit these criteria; both produced a body count, and both lacked controllability. Because both hurricanes and earthquakes are natural disasters, their occurrences are beyond human control. This lack of control leads to the attempt to control the results of the disaster within a disaster community. Chile's manifestation of disaster community is *la cultura sísmica*; Chile's seismicity is beyond human control, and its seismic events almost always lead to fatalities, or a body count.

Community is a more fluid concept. While the term "community" is often reserved for smaller groupings of individuals, such as neighborhoods, towns, and special interest groups, for the purposes of this analysis, Erikson's definition of

community will be used: a community is a group of people "attached to one another by a common past, a common present, and a common future" (1976: 129-130). In this case, the community being referred to is the mega-community of the entire Chilean population (in general). Benedict Anderson writes of such "imagined communities" in the book of the same title:

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion … In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. (2003)[15]

Anderson goes so far as to define "nation" as an "imagined political community," and Chile is a perfect example of such a nation. For the purposes of this project, it is entirely appropriate to refer to Chile as a community itself and treat it as such. The style in which the Chilean community is imagined is what precipitates *cultura sísmica.* The community processes its past, using historical facts in a workable fashion in the present, in order to produce what will become its future. In addition to a shared past, present, and future, a community, even a mega-community, is tied together by a shared sense of identity. The shared identity in Chile pertains to *la cultura sísmica*; identity corresponds directly to what Anderson refers to as the "the style" in which communities are imagined. The Chilean mega-community shares a culture, or way of life. Chileans' way of life anticipates, prepares for, and responds to seismic events. *La cultura sísmica* is not a new phenomenon; Chile's history reflects and perpetuates *la cultura sísmica*.

[15] I read *Imagined Communities* on an e-reader, therefore I do not have access to page numbers for citations.

History and Disaster

Chilean history could easily be deemed "seismic" in a figurative, as well as literal, sense. On September 11, 1973, Augusto Pinochet and a group of right wing paramilitary forces took control of the Chilean government in a bloody *coup d'etats* staged against socialist leader Salvador Allende. The Pinochet era was a terrible time in Chilean history, and because it did not end until 1989, the reverberations of the damage done by the dictatorship continue to be felt in all sectors of Chilean society (Smith, 2005).

The Pinochet regime committed countless acts of crimes against humanity, including numerous disappearances of "subversives." Chile was placed under a *toque de queda*[16], and the government exercised firm control over its citizens. This part of Chilean history is without a doubt an example of figurative seismicity.[17] With the installation of the Pinochet government, the everyday lives of Chileans were changed drastically and rapidly, and this forced them to adapt to these circumstances that shifted their situation, much like an earthquake shifts the earth.

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[16] "curfew"; interestingly enough, Chileans had a unique way of adapting to the hindrance on their lives. *Toque* parties were the rage of the period, beginning at the hour of the curfew and lasting all night until the curfew lifted. Many middle-aged Chileans spoke to me about these parties, some with even a nostalgic manner. (The same nostalgia can be found in "coasties'" discussion of "hurricane parties" mentioned in Chapter 1). This is a great example of the adaptation to adversity in Chilean life that will be discussed later. It is also crucial to note that following the 2010 earthquake, parts of Chile were once again placed under a *toque de queda*, which was all too reminiscent of the Pinochet era.

[17] My advisor, Dr. Kate Centellas, suggested the idea of "figurative seismicity" to me early on in the process of developing this project, and I found it to be entirely relevant to the Chilean situation. In this case, I use seismicity to refer to "worst cases" or disasters. Disasters involve shifts, just as seismic events involve a shifting of the earth.

In the book *The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes and Why*, Amanda Ripley writes, "Narrative is the beginning of recovery" (2009:x). Having some prior knowledge of the Pinochet dictatorship before beginning my year in Chile, I was astonished to find that people were not only unafraid to acknowledge the dark period of their past but often wanted to tell me about it.

The narratives I heard about the Pinochet regime were completely open. People were willing and ready to talk about what outsiders might consider a sticky subject. I found that by being so open about it, Chileans were not embarrassed, but oftentimes proud that their country was able to prevail through such a difficult time. Chileans know how to recover, and this is a huge part of their disaster community, or *cultura sísmica*. The Pinochet era represents not only a common past, but also a reaction to a disaster. During this time period, drastic governmental abuse of power caused Chileans to find ways to survive; while many Chileans disappeared or died during this time, Chile prevailed as a country. The simple fact that Chile still exists as a country is testament to its triumph. The Pinochet regime ended in 1989, and my time in Chile was affected by the regime only in rhetoric – there was no *toque de queda* or problem of *desaparecidos*[18] left over.

In Sarah D. Phillip's article "Chernobyl's Sixth Sense: The Symbolism of an Ever-Present Awareness," she discusses how the Chernobyl nuclear disaster helped the population of the Ukraine develop what she calls a "sixth sense." This sixth sense fits into the idea of disaster community. Chile's *cultura sísmica* represents a sixth sense, so to speak, of knowing how to respond properly to seismic events, whether

[18] "disappeared persons"; term used to refer to those who disappeared during the Pinochet regime due to governmental violence and kidnapping.

literal or figurative; this sixth sense is also representative of the shared identity involved in *la cultura sísmica*. The Pinochet era, and Chileans' subsequent remembrance of it, is a perfect example of how a disaster provokes a phenomena that "indexes simultaneously belonging (to a population sharing a post-Chernobyl damaged biology) and dissent (against a corrupt, inhumane system), a dialectic that has become the foundation for the 'ongoing performance of cultural life.'" (Phillips, 2004) The emotional climate of the survivors of the Pinochet regime reflects the same sentiments shared by Chernobyl survivors. Chileans who lived through the Pinochet era feel a sense of belonging among themselves that is presented in an almost nostalgic light to outsiders, even though the denouncement of Pinochet and all he stood for is not only understood, but also frequently repeated throughout Chilean discourse. This dichotomy of belonging and dissenting is "performed" yearly in the celebration of Chile's independence day.

Chile was a figuratively-seismic country long before Augusto Pinochet, as a glance even further back into Chileans' shared past makes evident. Chile celebrates its independence day on September 18, *El Dieciocho*, the date on which Chile declared its independence from Spain. Bloody struggles between royalists and nationalists proliferated throughout the following decade until the Chilean government consolidated in 1826. Any country with such a recent, bloody struggle of independence may claim a tumultuous past. Chileans share the struggle of their country's independence, and this sharing is obvious in the enormous celebrations that take place the entire week of *El Dieciocho*. The *Dieciocho* celebrations embody Chile's *cultura sísmica*. I was able to witness and participate in these celebrations,

commemorated with large *ramadas*[19]*, chicha*[20]*,* and *asados*[21]*.* Everyone had their *pañuelos*[22] out and flying to dance the *cueca*, the national dance of Chile. I even got a week off of classes to enjoy these celebrations. What I witnessed was without a doubt a community sharing a common past.

La cultura sísmica flourishes in times of disaster. Chileans are able to link the current disaster (the February 2010 earthquake) to previous disasters in the country's history, furthering the sense of simultaneous belonging (being *chileno*) and dissenting (opposing corruption[23] and devastation).

Identity

To claim that an entire country shares a sense of identity is farfetched. However, after living in Chile for a year, and because this argument is dealing with general terms, I have no qualms asserting that a Chilean identity exists.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson writes of the importance of language in forming a community and its subsequent identity. He warns of the mistake of treating language as an emblem and rather suggests that "the important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*" (2003). Anderson also argues that language "is fundamentally inclusive." The fact that anyone can learn any language stretches the

[19] The best translation for this word would be "party", but it refers to a large gathering, often under a big tent, in a fair/festival-like atmosphere.
[20] white wine with fruit in it
[21] barbecues
[22] handkerchiefs
[23] Corruption is a very common theme in Chilean discourse, which is not surprising considering the legacy of the dictatorship.

already malleable borders of community. Language facilitates the nation-community's possession of "indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship" (Anderson, 2003). In fact, once I learned how to maneuver within the wonders of Chilean Spanish, my host family and Chilean friends accepted me into their lives more than before; learning their language provided an opportunity for me to establish kinship ties.

One of the first things I was told when I arrived in Chile, upon expressing that I had come mainly to learn Spanish, was "*Pero no hablamoh castellano, hablamoh chileno-po!"*[24] I was told this time and again. I cannot say, even after a year, that the persons who told me this were lying. When I first arrived, I sincerely believed that the taxi drivers who drove my family and I from the airport were not only speaking "non-standard" Spanish but that they were speaking a completely different language.

The linguistic differences in Chilean Spanish and standard Spanish are staggering. The phonology of Chilean Spanish is fundamentally distinct. For example, Chileans almost always eliminate the letter "-s" in the final position of a word (*hablamos* becomes *"hablamoh"*). The morphology of Chilean Spanish in the second person singular form is also unique. Chileans do not use the word *vos* for informal "you," as in Argentina, and they conjugate verbs for the second person singular familiar form as if they were using the Spanish plural *vosotros* and eliminate the "-s" (*hablas* becomes *hablai*). These characteristics in themselves

[24] "We do not speak Spanish, we speak Chilean!" ("Po" is an expression Chileans often tag onto the end of phrases; it has no specific translation, other than possibly "so.")

would not be so special, were it not for the astounding difference in the lexicon of Chilean Spanish.

When I was traveling to Chile, I met two young Chileans who spoke very good English. They told me that *el habla chilena* is so distinct that the first thing I should do upon arrival is purchase a book: *How To Survive in the Chilean Jungle* by John Brennan. Anxious to assimilate into Chilean culture, I bought the book as soon as possible. What they wanted me to understand was that there are a good 192 pages worth of (recorded, to date) Chilean vocabulary I would not understand despite my background of university Spanish. Words such as *garabato*, which means bad word, contrast with the standard Spanish *palabrota*. The typical Chilean *garabato* is *huevón*, which has the polite translation of "thing," and it can be used as a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, and just about any grammatical category.

In my linguistics classes, my teacher, Dr. John Gutiérrez, has repeatedly reinforced idea that dialects are mutually comprehensive, whereas languages are not. According to this strict definition, *Chileno* is not technically a separate language. I have spoken to several native Spanish speakers about Chilean Spanish, and I have always received the same response: "Their Spanish is terrible; I can't even understand them." Granted, a native Spanish speaker would understand the majority of the Chileans I came into contact with, but there were still those individuals I met whose language was so *chileno* that I do not doubt they are difficult to understand even for Argentines, Mexicans, and other native speakers. The important point in this argument, however, is that where other Spanish-speakers would say that Chileans' *Spanish* is terrible, Chileans themselves would prefer to

assert that they speak a language all their own. Because languages are inclusive, *Chileno* serves to foster solidarity and a common identity throughout Chile. One would be hard-pressed to find a Chilean whose everyday speech patterns reflected zero *chileno* tendencies and could therefore not identify with his or her fellow countrymen.

Another important part of forming identity, particularly with relation to disasters, is propriety of the incident. Phillips writes of the attempt on the part of the Ukrainian people to "claim Chernobyl for Ukraine" (2004:176). She mentions the juxtaposition of "traditional Ukrainian imagery" with representation of Chernobyl culminating in the intent of propriety. This propriety is important to disaster community because the community must feel that the disaster is a part of the history of their community. Chileans did not hesitate to claim the February 2010 earthquake as their own: The most recognizable and used slogan of the recovery efforts was "*Chile ayuda a Chile,*" which means "Chile helps Chile," a sentiment reflected in all facets of Chilean life. After the earthquake, it was important for Chileans to stress to themselves and to the rest of the world that the earthquake happened in Chile and the recovery would be precipitated in Chile. This slogan and its implications will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The idea of the recovery from the earthquake precipitating from within the country could go back as far as colonial times. Anderson's discusses the trend of creole goals tending to be oriented toward rising in status *within* the creole community and not oriented toward rising "above" or beyond the community (to the metropolises of the colonizing powers) (2003). This creole sentiment is echoed

in the aspirations of Chileans today. They want to become greater within Chile and for Chile, and this is reflected in the recovery process through *Chile ayuda a Chile* and the attitudes of the Chilean people, which will also be discussed further in Chapter 3. Anderson further defines a national community as imagined "because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (2003). This "deep, horizontal comradeship" is what allowed Chile to help Chile; the bonds that tie the nation together supersede the boundaries that cause a community to be imagined as opposed to "genuine." Like Anderson notes, in a nation, it is impossible for every citizen to know every other citizen, but sharing the fact of citizenship itself forges a bond that is no less powerful for being imagined.

Symbols

Symbols are embedded in all aspects of *la cultura sísmica*. Phillips writes, "symbolic representations are powerful because they link the material with the immaterial and the concrete with the abstract" (2004:162). She further stresses the importance of symbols in "how people represent themselves to themselves and to each other" (2004:160). Using symbolism is a way to encompass complex emotions and happenings within an over-simplified representation.

La cultura sísmica manifests itself through the ways Chileans are able to identify themselves as part of the disaster community. One very important Chilean symbol is the Chilean flag. This may seem very obvious at first, but my observations during my time abroad lead me to insist that Chileans treat their flag as a symbol in

a manner very distinct from the way most Americans view their flag. Our flag is ubiquitous, yes. But aside from military personnel and their families, how much respect and esteem do we really have for our flag?

Figure 1. Tattered flag

The power in the Chilean flag as a symbol astounded me throughout my year abroad, but I was particularly moved by the way the Chilean people used it after the earthquake. The striking image in Figure 1 was simple to find. I typed "*chile bandera terremoto*"[25] into Google images, and the majority of the first page of results were different variations of the same image. In the months following the earthquake, the image filled the Facebook profiles of my Chilean friends. Almost every Chilean friend I had on Facebook used this image as his or her profile picture (the picture that

[25] "chile flag earthquake"

shows at the click of a person's name) at one time or another for months following February 27, 2010. The vision of a Chilean man holding up a tattered flag in front of the devastation became a powerful symbol, not for the earthquake itself, but for *la cultura sísmica* of Chile.[26]

The particular file I used came from a blogging website (Blogspot) about anecdotes from the World Cup in 2010, which brings me to my next example of Chilean regard for the national flag. Both times that Chile won matches at the World Cup, first against Honduras and then against Switzerland, the celebration was incredible. People waved the Chilean flag from every open window and door. Cars drove up and down the street with people hanging out of sunroofs yelling "*Chi-chi-chi! Le-le-le! Viva Chile!*" Every face wore a smile. For the Switzerland game, my host brother had an *asado*, and we ate *choripan* and drank *Cristal*[27] as we watched and cheered. Afterward, we went to a pub down the street, and the majority of the people there (including myself) carried flags draped across their shoulders, proud to connect to one another in celebration of their country, using the most obvious and most powerful symbol available.[28]

The reason these symbols are so crucial to a disaster community is that the experience of going through such a disaster is so difficult to communicate in words. The senses are overwhelmed with smells, sights, and sounds. A disaster forces the

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[26] I will return to this image in Chapter 3.
[27] Popular Chilean beer
[28] Perhaps not surprisingly, the atmosphere in Chile following victories in the World Cup reminded me very strongly of the atmosphere around the New Orleans area when the Saints starting winning during the season after Hurricane Katrina. Sports teams are another powerful symbol seen in both the post-Katrina disaster community and the post-earthquake disaster community.

human mind through so many emotions as to be unable to articulate the feeling of being a survivor. Symbols offer a materialization of the *shared* inexpressible mental state of the members of a disaster community, and they represent for this community a beacon of hope and a point around which to come together.

Defining *Cultura sísmica*

As mentioned in the introduction, I became acquainted with the term *cultura sísmica* in a casual conversation with a family friend (of my host family) in Chile. This woman explained to me that the reason that Chile is able to withstand earthquakes so well is because the country possesses *cultura sísmica*. I began to understand through this conversation that the term referred to the human side, the traditionally "cultural" side of an earthquake. Using my classic definition of culture learned in high school, I interpreted *cultura sísmica* as seismic "way of life." This simple definition is employed in the understanding of *cultura sísmica*; it is the human component of this "way of life" that matters. Chileans possess a rich culture in general, and perhaps it is their interpretation of the word *cultura*, the manner in which they express themselves as a community literally and symbolically, that affords this intangible, yet powerful concept.

Interestingly enough, upon proposing my project to several different advisors, I was surprised and disappointed to find that in English the term "seismic culture" generally refers to architectural and building practices that follow codes to make them less susceptible to seismic events. The English version of the concept, therefore, refers more to physical and structural adaptations to seismicity. However,

I still believed that there was a valid, more abstract conception of *cultura sísmica* in place in Chile.

Upon further research, I found that the definition of *cultura sísmica* that I was trying to form was often acknowledged in American academia, if not expanded upon. Halvorson and Hamilton define a seismic culture as "one in which adaptations to seismic hazard become ingrained in society through knowledge sharing, indigenous building practices, vernacular architecture, and so forth" (2007:322). Knowledge sharing obviously falls under the "cultural" conception of *cultura sísmica*. Homan offers an even more gratifying definition of the term arguing, "Whilst seismic culture is physically manifest through building stock, it can also be more latently preserved in the attitudes and understandings of community members towards the hazards that they face." (ND) Homan asserts my point exactly; *cultura sísmica* appears at the human level, developed and furthered through the knowledge of, approach to, and improvement upon earthquake recovery. While building practices, tangible seismic culture, are in place in Chile, this project is concerned with the larger concept of intangible *cultura sísmica*. Therefore, the building practices in themselves are not as important to *cultura sísmica* as the peace of mind they provide or dissatisfaction they provoke in Chileans.

Lens: Negative and Positive asymmetry

In Karen Cerulo's *Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst*, she asserts, "Worse cases elude definition" (2006). Her personal experimentation provides the most clear illustration of the phenomenon. She polled

her students at Rutgers, asking them to answer first, what is the best thing that could happen to them and then, what is the worst thing that could happen to them.

> My students' answers were amazingly precise. … one student reported, "I would become an NBA franchise player within the next three years." … (when asked what's the worst that could happen to them) the students' precision all but disappeared. Rather than pinpointing the worst, students offered very general, abstract answers such as "maybe, death?" "getting sick," or simply "failure." While these young men and women could itemize the best of events with a high degree of specificity, their articulations of the worst were both vague and terse. (2006:2-3)

Cerulo argues that this "nebulous quality of the worst" is embedded in us from a very young age. The conception of quality, at least certainly in the United States, is asymmetrical, meaning that where gradation of quality usually includes very descriptive, precise ideas of the best, once past the "bad" mark on the scale, the idea of "worst" is lumped together (2006). A good example of this is the grading system in my high school, which was not unlike others across the country. A grade of 70-85 was a C, 86-94 a B, and 95-100 an A. Notice that the scales reduce by one third in size as the grade rises. However, a grade of 69 or lower, which encompasses 70 possible numerical grades, was failing. In other words, to fail was to fail, whether one failed with a 69 (the "best worst") or with a zero (the "worst worst").

The "positive asymmetry" with which certain societies view possibilities is what makes a community unprepared for worst-case scenarios, according to Cerulo. Her idea of different communities viewing the world and its happenings through different lenses, or portholes, is instructive and works as a symbolic simplification. If one thinks of the community as a single individual, the community's "lens" as that individual's viewpoint, and the disaster that strikes that community as an image the

individual sees through his or her viewpoint, it is quite clear that the lens makes all the difference in how a community perceives and reacts to disaster.

The examples Cerulo uses to illustrate the useful nature of having a lens that is negatively asymmetric are the success in containing SARS and preventing a Y2K disaster. Without going into great detail here, I would like to stress that the aspects of negative asymmetry that allowed these successes, according to Cerulo, were cooperation, awareness, and distribution of information. Furthermore, community characteristics that invoke negative asymmetry include service orientation and porous boundaries.

Chile is a very service-oriented society, and boundaries in Chile do not take shape in the way boundaries in the United States do. In the United States, individuals living during the Cold War error remember the "Red Scare" and the drills in preparation for communist nuclear threat. However, Chileans are not taught of the dire threat of communism[29] from a young age, and the idea of redistribution of resources is not seen as a gateway to communism. The Chileans I met during the earthquake aftermath understood as a given that to recover from the disaster, they would have to share and serve each other, regardless of any perceived boundaries. Much like the manner in which world technologists approached Y2K and world health governing bodies approached SARS, Chileans here instituted specific practices to avoid and manage disaster. In addition to architectural *cultura sísmica*, which will be discussed presently, Chileans learn from a very young age of the probability of severe earthquakes and what to do to survive in the worst case. Not

[29] In fact, the infamous Pinochet regime was politically right-wing and subsequently anti-Communist.

only are there standards in place in the Chilean school system that afford the spread of such knowledge, but also the older generations of Chileans share their seismic knowledge with the younger generations on a regular basis.

There exists an alternative reason, other than a negatively asymmetric lens, as to why Chile is able to recover so swiftly and smoothly as a community. Cerulo argues that there are three cultural practices that contribute to initiating and sustaining positive asymmetry. She defines cultural practices as "not openly articulated plans. Rather, they are 'the routines of institutions and actors'" (2006:72). The cultural practices that help define *la cultura sísmica* that I witnessed in Chile are definitely born more of habit than conscious efforts to actually sustain *la cultura sísmica*. Cerulo refers to the three specific cultural practices used at the arising of a worst case: "eclipsing," "clouding," and "recasting." The important aspect of these practices is that they all acknowledge the worst. Eclipsing "expunge(s) target entities from conscious consideration," while clouding "minimize(s) and distort(s) the worst." (2006) The practice that resonates the most in Chile's disaster community is recasting, in which the worst is seen as an opportunity to bring out the best in people. Cerulo also calls this shadowing. (2006)

In the case of Chile, I was interested to see the difference in news coverage compared to what I had seen concerning Hurricane Katrina. It appeared to me that for every sad story about the destruction, Chilean news organizations offered exponentially more inspirational stories. The composition of news coverage showed that Chileans were prepared to celebrate the heroes that the earthquake inevitably produced. Cerulo writes that recasting empowers, and I am inclined to agree. The

emotions evoked by stories of heroism serve to motivate the community to be heroic in the day-to-day crises of disaster recovery. After my host family and I saw the gathering of donations at my university, we immediately went home and gathered what we could from our belongings. Seeing others taking charge in a time of need breeds effort and bravery.

One popular anecdote related to me by several of my Chilean family members was of an older woman who went to a supermarket in the days following the earthquake because someone told her that they were giving away food and water. When she arrived, she discovered that the store was not, in fact, giving away anything, but that there were people looting, taking both items of necessity and nonessential items. Supposedly, a reporter asked her why she was just standing there and not grabbing things for herself, to which she responded that she would take something if it were being given to her, but she would not steal. My Chilean family was very proud of this woman, and I can understand why. Similarly, for months following the earthquake a common topic of conversation was the disgust Chileans felt at the *fliates*[30] in their community who stole televisions and other nonessential items after the store windows had been broken, making entry easy. I was told repeatedly that the people who did that were not truly *chileno*. In *la cultura sísmica*, it is important to recast the worst case by celebrating everyday heroes and denouncing petty criminals. A community needs something to feel proud of, and Chile has no shortage of hero stories and successes in which to relish.

[30] Chilean word for "low-life" or "criminal"

There is a legitimate foundation for the argument that Chileans use a symmetrical lens when interpreting Chile's seismicity. The negative part of the lens is used in the anticipation of and preparation for earthquakes; in addition to instituting seismic building codes, which resonates with the English definition of seismic culture, many of my respondents informed me that in the Chilean school system earthquake education is a vital component of the curriculum. Chileans can imagine the worst-case outcome of a seismic event due to the inevitable recent history of catastrophic earthquakes. Many members of older generations have lived through devastating earthquakes in Chile's past, such as the 1985 earthquake, and their knowledge is passed down through formal (education) and informal (generational transmission) channels. On the opposite end of the spectrum, after a disaster Chileans tend to focus on the positive aspects of recovery, as mentioned above, and those Chileans who are able to, those less-affected by the disaster, strive to maintain a positive attitude.[31]

In *Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination*, Lee Clarke explicitly states that ordinary people and social networks are more likely to save lives and help recovery efforts in disaster situations than formal organizations (2006). This resonates with the proactive response from the "ordinary" Chilean to the problems arising from the February earthquake. Everyday citizens' being proactive, more so than the government, is vital to disaster community.[32]

A common theme in the disaster narratives I collected through surveys and through personal interaction is the idea that now that the earthquake has happened,

[31] Positive attitudes will be discussed further in Chapter 3.
[32] The proactive nature of the Chilean people will be explored in depth in Chapter 3.

Chile has an opportunity to improve. A part of *la cultura sísmica* is the acceptance of disaster and the recognition of a starting point for improvement, and this is what many Chileans saw. Clarke (2006) and Cerulo (2006) both mention the importance of learning from worst cases. They contend that this is the way that communities are able to survive later worst cases. From what I have witnessed with this earthquake, Chileans have been "learning well" (Clarke, 2006:143) from seismic activity for a long time. For this reason, *la cultura sísmica* is so developed that it is not necessarily difficult for the country to organize, mobilize, and recover from seismic events. Furthermore, Chileans were inclined to approach the earthquake as a worst case "triggering vital and necessary growth" (Cerulo, 2006:114). My respondents' answers to my survey reflect this sentiment.[33]

Flexibility

Cerulo (2006) and Clarke (2006) both claim that flexibility is an important part of survival in disaster situations. While it may be difficult to assert that Chile is a flexible country on a structural and governmental level, that Chilean everyday life is flexible is apparent to even the less-shrewd outsiders upon participating in daily activities with Chileans. I was fortunate enough to experience this peculiar degree of flexibility firsthand while living with a wonderful host family.

[33] Improvement will also be discussed further in Chapter 3 with the presentation of survey results.

The best example of the flexibility and adaptability of everyday Chilean life is embodied in the weekend ritual of *almuerzo*[34]. On Saturdays, I would wake up hungry and immediately ask my host mother when we would have lunch. Her answer? *"Al tiro."*[35] I would then excitedly dress for the day, anticipating a good, hearty meal. Upon leaving my room, I would discover that my host mother was gone. When I asked my host brother where she went, he replied that she went to the market.

I thought we were having lunch *al tiro*? I soon discovered that *al tiro* could mean anything from ten minutes to four hours, but what is usually means is it will happen when it happens. After returning from the market, my host mother and/or host brother would begin chopping vegetables and preparing the meal. This process moves slowly, with intermittent breaks for cigarettes or glasses of wine. If an ingredient was forgotten in the initial trip to the market, it was not a problem. Someone, sometimes myself, would simply go down to the corner store or the closest *feria*[36] to get it.

When preparing *almuerzo*, there was no rush to a deadline, and the hour was always flexible. Lunch was often improvised, and my host family adapted easily to different situations. When we finally did sit down to lunch, it was a joyous occasion to be savored.

I found that Chileans in general were less worried about strict deadlines and boundaries than doing something in the correct manner. Chileans' flexibility within

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[34] "lunch"
[35] "immediately"
[36] "market"

everyday life manifests in their concept of time. I believe that this contributes greatly to *la cultura sísmica*. The people know that there will be seismic events, and when one such as the February 2010 earthquake strikes, they are willing and able to adapt within their flexible lifestyles to respond in an appropriate manner.

Reciprocity

In *The Gift,* Marcel Mauss writes, "A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction." (1990: vii) Solidarity is the basic, one-word definition of *cultura sísmica*; it is the word that I heard over and over in my formal and informal investigations into the phenomenon. Reciprocity is the fuel for solidarity. Mauss writes of the importance of gifts not in and of themselves, but their symbolic significance. Furthermore, "It is not individuals but collectivities that impose obligations of exchange and contract upon each other." (1990: 5) This interpretation of reciprocity is suitable to the discussion of *cultura sísmica*. The collectivity, or community, of Chile instigates the systems of exchange and contract that invariably dictate the process of giving and receiving, both normally and after a seismic event.

Mauss writes that everything – namely, gifts and gift rituals – "is there for passing on, and for balancing accounts." (1990, 14) The constant flow of giving and receiving makes the Chilean society suited to both donate to those in need and graciously receive help when needed. A good example of this flow of giving and receiving regardless of circumstances is *El Dieciocho*, mentioned above. Mauss cites Brown's observations of Andaman Islanders, describing them as "extremely well with regard to hospitality between local groups and visitors to festivals and fairs

that serve as occasions for voluntary and obligatory exchanges." (1990: 19) The festival atmosphere of the holiday allowed my Chilean family to welcome me with gifts of food, drink, and knowledge of their customs and their culture. In return, they expected my sharing of my culture and customs throughout my time with them. The ebb and flow of reciprocity is constant, and a seismic event only allows the custom to be more prominent and obvious.

Cultural Reproduction

In addition to the shared past of the Chilean community, Chilean people also share a common present and future. I was impressed by how involved even younger generations are in the politics of the country. Public opinion in Chile is often very united; in September 2011, a survey conducted by the *Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporánea* (CERC)[37] found that some 89 percent of the population, regardless of class, gender or political affiliation, supported nationwide student protests for a free and better education (BBC, 2011). That Chilean youth are even able to rally behind a point such as education is evidence of the Chilean sense of a shared situation, and a hope for a better, shared future.

Additionally, 73 percent of respondents considered education the most important problem in the country, followed by 40 percent, delinquency, and 38 percent, public health (BBC, 2011). These are the same problems that often came up in discussion over meals and drinks during my time there. Chileans share a sense of what is wrong with their present situation and a desire to better it for the future.

[37] "Center of Studies for the Contemporary Reality"

The awareness of the shared future of Chile is what perpetuates *la cultura sísmica*. Older generations are responsible for passing on information and lessons to younger generations with time, practicing in a cultural reproduction of disaster community. Older generations are also responsible for instituting the practical side of disaster community in a way that will help future generations.

Conclusion

Although the opinion of whether or not Chile truly has a *cultura sísmica* is polemic, as evidenced in the surveys I conducted to be discussed presently, Chile has a *cultura sísmica* because seismic events are expected. The probability, not possibility, of large-scale earthquakes is what Chileans discuss. *La cultura sísmica* exists because it is a normal part of Chilean discourse. The aspects of this disaster community are "preserved in the attitudes and understandings of community members towards the hazards they face" (Homan). The characteristics of this phenomenon include, but are not limited to, solidarity, a proactive approach, flexibility, and a positive attitude.

"Sólo Dios sabe por qué y para qué nos sirvió esta tragedia, pero todos sabemos que en los tiempos de adversidad es cuando se refleja el alma de los pueblos … Así es Chile, fuerte y noble, y lo ha demostrado muchas veces a través de nuestra historia." [38]

-President Sebastián Piñera

[38] "Only God knows why and how this tragedy served us, but we all know that in times of adversity is when the soul of the community is reflected … Chile is like that, strong and noble, and it has been demonstrated many times throughout our history."

Chapter Three

Introduction

Now that the theoretical concepts have been introduced, it is appropriate to apply them to ethnographic research. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I designed the survey in the Appendix in a way I hoped would draw out these Chileans' opinions and emotions about the earthquake. This analysis is entirely concerned with the human, abstract aspects of the earthquake. Therefore, the questions in the survey were probing, personal, and open-ended. My subjects were all between the ages of 19 and 30, and the majority of them (24 of 32) were students. Table 1 shows the location of my respondents by age and sex, and Figure 2 shows a map of the epicenter of the February 27 earthquake in relation to the regions of Chile.

Table 1. Age and Sex by Location

Region	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	XIV	Total
18-25	1	2	16		3	1	1	24
F		2	5		2	1	1	11
M	1		11		1			13
Over 25	1		6	1				8
F	1		2	1				4
M			4					4
Total	**2**	**2**	**22**	**1**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**32**

As shown in Table 1, there is not much geographical diversity of my subjects as most of them were students, and the Valparaíso Region is the host of numerous universities and trade schools. As stated in Chapter 1, coastal towns in general and particularly towns that host universities serve as nexus of society, and I believe my sample is therefore a good representation of Chile as a whole.

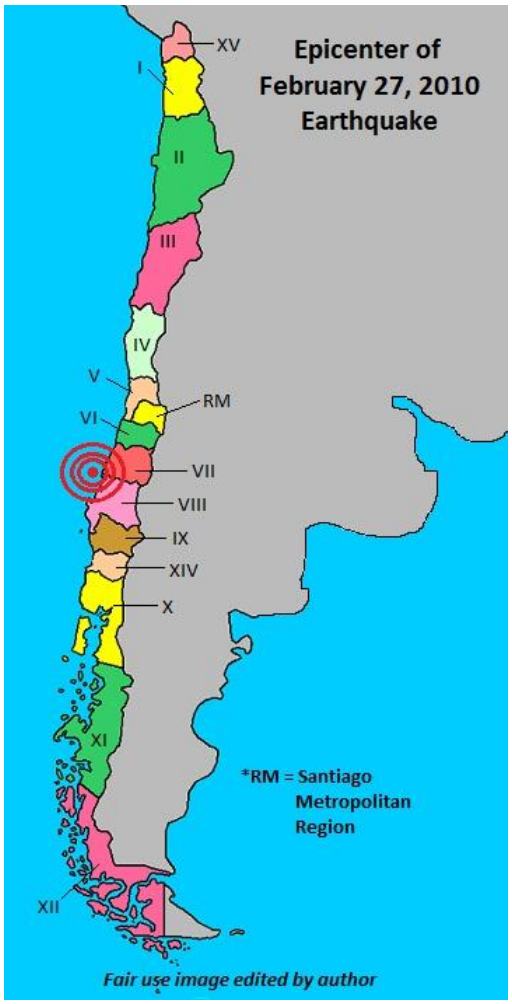

Figure 2. Map

As Table 2 demonstrates, the majority of my respondents (28) were familiar with the term "*cultura sísmica*." Of the 24 who answered the question "Where did you hear the term *la cultura sísmica*?"[39] more than half mentioned school and about half mentioned the media. Although the survey was more concerned with the subjects' familiarity with and treatment of the term, many supplied their own personal perception of the definition of *cultura sísmica*, based upon the information bombarding them at school, through the media, from family members and being processed internally.

Table 2. *La Cultura Sísmica*

La Cultura Sísmica			
Familiar with the term la cultura sísmica		*Became familiar with seismic culture through:*	
Yes	28	School	10
No	3	The Media	8
Total	31	Family	1
Chile has a seismic culture		School & The Media	2
Yes	14	Family & The Media	3
No	12	*Older generations are better with seismic cultures*	11
Yes & No	5	*Previous earthquake experience*	
Total	31	Yes	6
		No	26

[39] There was actually not a specific question about where the subject had heard the term, but rather the "Where?" was tacked on to the end of question 9 (see A-1, A-2). Additionally, the question did not specify whether they were familiar with the term before or after the earthquake, but based upon the responses I can conclude that my respondents took the question to mean before the earthquake.

I did not explicitly ask the respondents to define *la cultura sísmica,* but almost all of them provided an explanation of what the term means (to them) in some area of the survey. Apart from a few technical definitions of *cultura sísmica* that relate more closely to the English definition of seismic culture (structural and building practices designed to withstand earthquakes), the overwhelming majority of subjects referred to the human aspect of *cultura sísmica* – the spread of knowledge about how to deal with an earthquake – in at least one area of the survey.

Although the definitions of *cultura sísmica* were not particularly varied among respondents, the question of whether or not Chile has a *cultura sísmica* was almost exactly divided in half: 14 respondents answered in the affirmative, 12 answered in the negative, and five gave ambiguous answers, which I categorized as *"Si y No."*[40] The majority of the subjects did experience damage to either work or school property, while only one subject identified the damage as more than minor. Only six subjects had experienced an earthquake before, and many of the subjects pointed out that to fully understand *cultura sísmica*, and to be fully prepared for a disaster of that magnitude, it was necessary to live through the experience first hand. Approximately 50% believed that the older generation, however, can and does help the younger generation understand *cultura sísmica*.

[40] Only one subject did not answer question 11: "Do you believe Chile has a cultura sísmica? Why or why not?" Of the only three respondents who responded that they were not familiar with the term (question 10), none of them refrained from attempting to answer the explicit yes or no question. These three all had an opinion of whether or not Chile has a cultura sísmica, regardless of the fact that they denied familiarity with the concept.

Table 3. *Cultura Sísmica* by View of Disaster Response

Cultura Sísmica	Both	Negative	Neither	No answer	Positive	Total
No	2	8		1	1	12
No answer		1				1
Yes	4	5	1		4	14
Yes and No	1	3			1	5
Total	**7**	**17**	**1**	**1**	**6**	**32**

Table 3 shows the answer to Question 9, "Do you think Chile has a seismic culture?" with reference to the respondents' opinions of the disaster relief. Regardless of the answer to Question 9, the majority of each answer category had a negative opinion of disaster relief. Although opinion of the disaster response immediately following the earthquake was decidedly negative (24 of 32 had a negative element to their opinions), *every single survey* emphasized at some point in the 16 questions that Chile is resilient, Chileans live by solidarity, and/or certain groups and organizations stood out as positive beacons during the aftermath. For example, one respondent stated, "I believe the solidarity of the people was something truly impressive, like the donations of food, clothing, etc." Another stated, "The entire country began to help the victims so that they could survive with at least the basics such as food, clothing, sheets, comforters." These answers were not uncommon even to the most negative of respondents.

I also observed firsthand the Chilean response to the earthquake through interaction with my host family, friends, and volunteering. I was able to witness and photograph many important gestures (symbolic or demonstrative) of Chile's *cultura sísmica*. What follows is an analysis of the surveys and my personal observations. Evidence that Chile has a *cultura sísmica* is clear; the definition is somewhat more

complicated. Based upon my research, *la cultura sísmica* is a learned awareness of seismicity, with a great capacity for knowledge of the nature of seismic events and appropriate behavior during and after such events. *Cultura sísmica* is characterized by a positive, proactive attitude and a simultaneous distrust in government response and a faith in the power of individuals working together toward the common goal of recovery. Chile's culture of flexibility and improvisation in everyday life makes Chile an ideal site for *cultura sísmica* to flourish.

"…es inherente a todo un país sísmico."[41]

At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, many of the respondents felt the need to state the obvious: Chile has a *cultura sísmica* because Chile is a seismic country. I received several such answers to the explicit *sí o no* question. Many of the affirmative answers were simply, "yes, we have earthquakes, so we have a *cultura sísmica*." Additionally, the vast majority of the subjects felt the need to point out somewhere in the survey that Chile has *temblores*[42] daily, and it is not uncommon that the country should experience a major earthquake.

The important factor in this answer is not that Chileans feel the need to state the obvious, but actually what lies behind this answer, the second, unsaid, part of this statement. The young Chileans were not only telling me "of course, we have a *cultura sísmica*", but also, "of course, we have a *cultura sísmica*, because we have to." By treating the seismicity of the country and the presence of a *cultura sísmica* as a

[41] "…it's all inherent in a seismic country."
[42] "tremors"

cause-effect relationship, Chileans emphasize not only their necessity, but also their ability to adapt to adverse situations.

Responding that Chile has *cultura sísmica* because it is a seismic country is a way of naturalizing the phenomenon. *Cultura sísmica*, however, is a social construct in response to a natural occurrence – earthquakes. By characterizing *cultura sísmica* as a part of Chilean nature, these respondents suggest that *cultura sísmica* forms a natural part of their identities because they are born in a seismic area. The consequence of this naturalization is the converse idea that without *cultura sísmica*, Chileans would not truly be "Chilean."

Understanding life in a seismic zone is a crucial component of Chilean identity; from a young age, Chileans learn about the probability of seismic events in their area, and most experience such an event early on in life, although these events typically consist of small tremors as opposed to mega-earthquakes. Regardless of the scale of the seismic event, the knowledge that the earth can move under one's feet is instilled in each Chilean's mind from early childhood.

Cultura sísmica

Whether or not Chile has *la cultura sísmica* is a very subjective issue. It entirely depends upon how *cultura sísmica* is defined, and who exactly is giving their opinion. Within my sample populations, it is striking to note that when asked the yes/no question, "*Usted cree que Chile tiene una cultura sísmica?*"[43] the results were divided almost evenly down the middle. Fourteen subjects answered *sí,* and twelve

[43] "Do you believe that Chile has a cultura sísmica?"

answered *no.* One subject did not answer because he did not understand the term *cultura sísmica* (a rare case), and five gave answers that put them into the *sí y no* category.

To understand these responses and place them in the larger context of the hypothesis of the analysis, that Chile indeed does have *cultura sísmica*, it is important to understand why respondents answered in the affirmative or the negative. It is also important to note how these individuals understand *cultura sísmica*, and which other survey responses signal that although when asked explicitly about *cultura sísmica* about half of the group responded that Chile does not have *cultura sísmica*, many of their responses to other questions make Chile a good representation of the idea of seismic culture.

"Creo que además de lo que las generaciones van enseñando a sus hijos sobre esto, también se va aprediendo con el tiempo."[44]

"Actualmente no estamos preparados estructuralmente para recibir a un mega terremoto."[45]

The important factor in constructing a workable definition of *cultura sísmica* is Chileans' personal and community interpretations of the concept, and for this we turn to the surveys. While several subjects (for the most part, male and older than other respondents) acknowledged or even defined *cultura sísmica* using the

[44] "I believe that in addition to generations constantly teaching their children about this, it is also being learned with time."
[45] "Currently we are not prepared structurally to receive a mega earthquake."

architectural/structural definition[46], the majority indicated that *cultura sísmica* was related to human preparation for and reaction to seismic events.

More than one third of respondents indicated that they themselves became familiar with the term *cultura sísmica* in school. Additionally, many who answered that yes, Chile has a *cultura sísmica*, responded that this was because children are taught at a very young age at school how to respond to seismic emergencies through simulation and drill programs. "In some schools … they have started an evacuation plan … that consists in acting out a simulation of some type of tragedy," said one subject. Another wrote, "… in the schools, techniques for (responding to) disasters are taught; I see it in my seven-year-old cousin, who knows what to do in case of a strong tremor or earthquake or tsunami." She continued, "… that is creating a *cultura sísmica*."

Those who answered in the negative to the *si o no* question and implied that *cultura sísmica* lay in the hands of school administrators actually pointed to a lack of school programs to prepare young Chileans for seismic events. "There should be more education to this respect in the schools," responded one Chilean. Several responded that although there may be enough seismic preparation taught in schools, the students do not take these simulations and information distribution seriously enough to have an affect.

Even those who answered no (Chile does not have *cultura sísmica*) often indicated the human side of this debate. While those who said yes often cited

[46] "…There are few public spaces that are designed for this type of situation."; "… Architects and builders are forming new structural norms so that (buildings are able to resist) tremors and earthquakes."

Chileans' knowledge regarding disaster preparation and management, those who answered negatively frequently cited Chileans' *lack* of knowledge of disaster preparation and management. Like the problem with the schoolchildren, many respondents felt that the majority of Chileans, adult or not, who had not experienced a strong earthquake firsthand before, did not take the formation of a *cultura sísmica* and a disaster community seriously prior to the February 27 earthquake. "The problem is that the people or students did not take this type of operations (simulations, etc) very seriously until the earthquake occurred" was one response indicative of this sentiment.

The important conclusion to be drawn from these and additional comments of the respondents is that the majority felt that *cultura sísmica* entailed a human dimension, compatible with the aforementioned components of the English definition of seismic culture: "attitudes," "understanding," and "knowledge sharing." Even those who knew the technical, English definition of *cultura sísmica*, including a student of architecture, acknowledged this human side: "People don't have a *cultura sísmica*."

Solidarity

"El pueblo chileno es un pueblo que se mantiene unido frente a la adversidad sin importar clase social o color politico."[47]

"Chile es un país muy solidario y todos se ayudan, la gente que estuvo menos afectada ayudaba a las que estaban muy mal."[48]

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[47] "The Chilean community is a community that maintains unity when facing adversity, it doesn't matter social class or political color."
[48] "Chile is a very supportive country, and everyone helps each other, the people that were less affected helped those who were badly affected."

Beginning the first week after the earthquake, I heard and read the term "solidarity" almost every day for the remainder of my time in Chile. Merriam-Webster defines solidarity as "unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards" (2011). I definitely witnessed and was informed of the unity of the Chilean community on a large scale following the February 27 earthquake. *Pueblo* is a word that has many translations; according to Word Reference, it can mean "village," "small town," "people," or "the working class." *Pueblo* often serves as a marker of identity in Latin American societies. The subject quoted above refers to *el pueblo chileno*.[49] This is a term I was already familiar with, having had it described to me by numerous people I encountered during my year abroad. It is important not only because it conveys the sense that Chile as a country is a unified community, but also that this unity is part of Chilean solidarity.

Within my sample group, the term *solidaridad* was mentioned explicitly in three responses, as well as indirectly in three more. Although this may seem like a small number, it refers to some 20% of the group – not an insignificant figure. Additionally, a trend throughout the survey responses was the mention of how or even where the government or other organizations may have failed to respond sufficiently to the needs of the earthquake victims, ordinary Chileans came together to help one another.[50] These ideas were very specific: "… the entire country

[49] The concept of *pueblo* is very common in Latin American discourse, especially in social and political movements.
[50] While Chileans tend to assert that solidarity is a phenomenon of the people and the *pueblo*, it does not necessarily reflect anti-government sentiments. Government

promised to (help) those persons who needed that they give them some shoes, a little bit of clothing, or something to eat," wrote one Chilean.

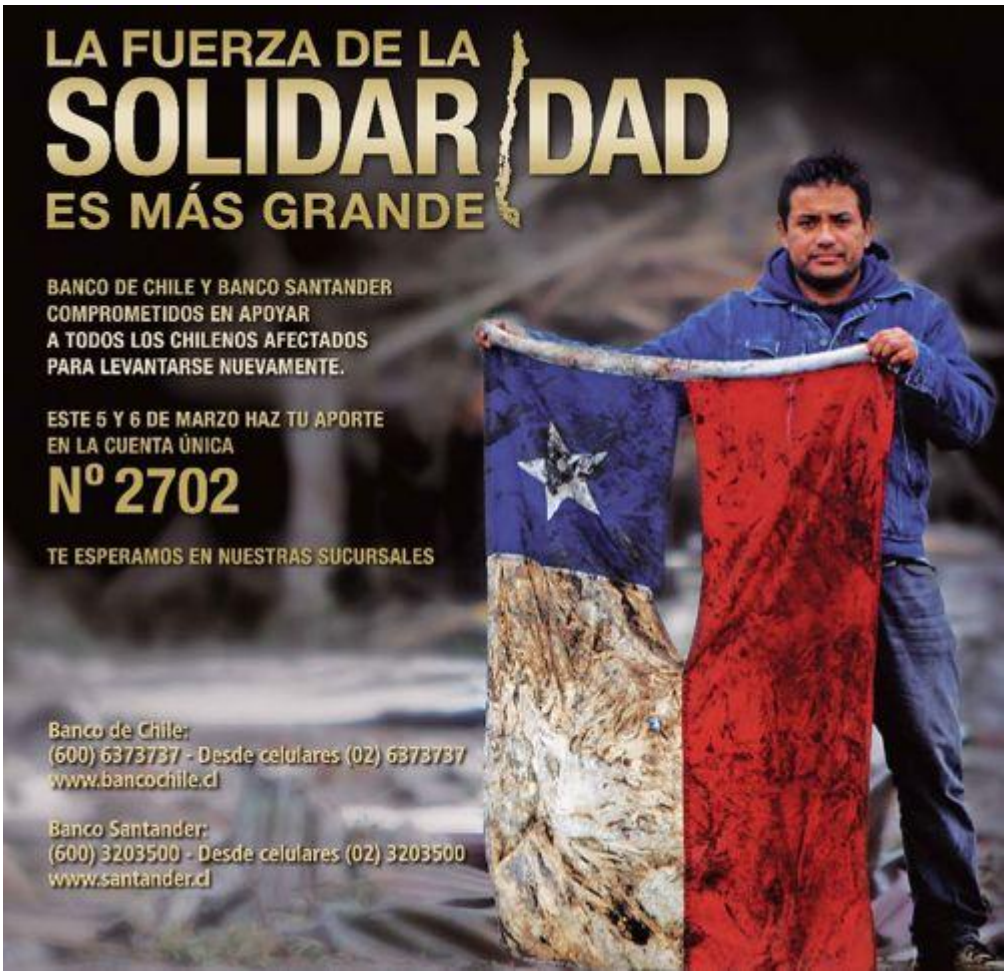

Figure 3. *Solidaridad es más grande*
Source: blogspot.com (2011)

Figure 3 shows an advertisement for the banks that sponsored the countrywide telethon to be discussed momentarily. It says "Solidarity is bigger," which likely refers to solidarity being bigger than the earthquake. This was a

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figures such as Piñera and Bachelet worked hard in the aftermath to present a united front and to promote solidarity amongst all citizens, as discussed in the section that follows about the *Teletón*.

sentiment reflected in people's attitudes regarding earthquake recovery. That the term *solidaridad* was such a big part of the advertisement is intriguing. Perhaps not surprisingly, the accompanying image of the man holding the tattered Chilean flag in front of a pile of rubble was a very popular image following the earthquake, showing up on ads and on Facebook. To me, the picture represents again the idea of the Chilean *pueblo* and says something along the lines of: "Even though we have been bruised and beaten, we are still Chilean, and we will still work as one to come through this disaster."

The February 27 earthquake destroyed the house of my host sister's boyfriend's family, leaving his mother and little sister without a place to live. They lived in a small town on the outskirts of Santiago called Buin. Just days after the earthquake, they had already found a new house, and my host mother approached me asking if I wanted to come to help them move. The two families had been very close throughout my experience there, and I was not surprised we were going to help. This is a good example of solidarity on the human level, specifically the solidarity that stems from kinship and friendship ties, which interconnect throughout different spheres of Chilean life.

We were not the only ones who arrived to help. My *cuñado's*[51] cousins also came, and everyone did their part to make the moving process smooth and swift. I was impressed with how quickly we accomplished the job, and the unity of the family was obvious during that weekend. Everyone worked, and we all ate together and slept in various spots around the small, new home over the weekend. It was an

[51] Literally "brother-in-law"; I use it here even though my host sister and her boyfriend were not married.

incredible experience that made it impossible to doubt the solidarity of the situation, especially watching and helping the family prepare our meal. Mealtime is a traditionally important part of any family group's relationships, and Chileans take full advantage of the opportunity to come together. Solidarity and reciprocity go hand in hand, and Chileans' mealtime traditions embody the concepts.

"Chile ayuda a Chile"

"…porque vamos a salir adelante, Chile ayuda a Chile, ¡Fuerza chilenos!"[52]

-President Michele Bachelet

When a strong earthquake struck Chile in the Valparaíso Region in March of 1985 (Booth, 1985), Mario Kreutzberger hosted a Jerry Lewis-style telethon to raise money for the *damnificados.* The slogan *"Chile ayuda a Chile,"* or "Chile helps Chile," was chosen to represent the solidarity of the telethon. Highly successful, annual telethons became a staple of Chilean television programming. Following the February 27 earthquake, another *Chile ayuda a Chile* telethon was held to help *damnificados* on March 5-6, 2010, with the same slogan and the same host (Fundación, 2010). According to one of the many Facebook pages for the telethon, the event was *24 horas de solidaridad*, or twenty-four hours of solidarity (2010). Figure 4 shows the telethon's emblem.

[52] "…because we are going to come out ahead. Chile helps Chile. Strength, Chileans!"

Figure 4. *Teletón*
Source: americasolidaria.org (2011).

The telethon was a twenty-four hour televised show involving performances from musical artists and dancers, appearances and communications via satellite phone with famous figures and governmental figures, updates on the situation in the badly-affected VI, VII, and VIII regions, and ceremonial acceptances of donations. Although Chilean citizens and Chilean public figures and donations dominated the event, several other countries came through to donate money and items, including Argentina, Russia, the United States, and Spain, among others (Minuto, 2010).

Some of the artists who either performed, appeared, or called in to give their support included: Noche de Brujas, DJ Mendez, Natalino, Illapu, Ana María Polo, Ricardo Arjona, Lucybell, Francisca Valenzuela, Buddy Richard, Peter Rock, Juanes, Paulina Rubio, Tito el Bambino, David Bisbal, Shakira, Américo, Nicole, Mario Guerrero, Leo Rey, Catalina Palacios, Diego Torres, Myriam Hernández, and others (Minuto, 2010). This is a very impressive list of Latin American artists; Shakira alone is an internationally-renowned artist, and many of the artists, such as Paulina Rubio, Américo, and Tito el Bambino, are household names in Chile.

Several governmental figures made appearances or announcements, including President Michele Bachelet, President-elect Sebastián Piñera, Sub-Secretary of Interior Patricio Rosende, Minister of House Andrés Valasco, Minister of Health, Minister of Defense Francisco Vidal, Minister of Public Works, and ex-president Ricardo Lagos. At the end of the telethon, President Michele Bachelet and President-elect Sebastián Piñera embraced on stage, just days before the transfer of office. The embracing of the two political figures, Bachelet from the left-based *Concertación* and Piñera from the right-based *Alianza*, resonates with the quote at the beginning of this section, that Chileans come together in a way that political "color," or affiliation, does not matter. The official final figure for the amount raised by the telethon was $30,212,775,555 Chilean pesos, or roughly $60 million dollars.[53]

I watched the telethon from my *cuñado's* mother's new house outside of Santiago. It was a compelling and moving show, and it without a doubt showed strong, Chilean solidarity. For the purposes of this analysis, it is crucial to consider

[53] The conversion rate for the Chilean peso for the year I was in Chile fluctuated between 560 CP/$1 and 520 CP/$1.

the slogan (Chile helps Chile) more than the actual elements of the show. My own reaction at first was negative surprise. Chile helps Chile? So they do not want help from other countries? My other friends from the United States felt the same way. We found the slogan to be somewhat pretentious.

We could not have been more wrong. By adopting the mantra of helping themselves, Chileans committed themselves to helping one another. It is not that they did not want help from other countries. The slogan was trying to convey the message that Chile has so many rich resources, especially manpower, within its own borders, and it was important that this was utilized to the maximum. Yet again, the idea of the Chilean *pueblo* arises. This acknowledgement of the entire country as unified embodies the idea of disaster community. The slogan *"Chile ayuda a Chile"* exemplifies the Chilean (successful) attempt to claim the earthquake as their own, an important part of *cultura sísmica*. This Chilean assertion of identity only strengthens the power of *cultura sísmica*.

Proactive Approach and Reciprocity

Un Techo para Chile

The proceeds from the telethon went to an organization called *Un Techo para Chile*, "a roof for Chile." *Techo* is a Chilean non-profit organization that helps build temporary and permanent housing for those in need. Following the earthquake, the *damnificados* became the main focus of the organization. Here again is another example of the Chilean *pueblo* in the idea that there is one roof for all of Chile, and it is a Chilean responsibility to construct it. The fact that Chile constantly

has an organization in place whose main goal is to provide a roof whether theoretical, or in this case, literal, for *chilenos* is very telling of Chile's *cultura sísmica*. The roof symbolizes safety for Chile; a roof protects those inside a dwelling from the elements – in this case, from an earthquake. *Techo* is representative of the Chilean proactive attitude – when a disaster strikes, Chileans know that it is not a time to sit idly by, but a time to react and rebuild. Mauss cites Leenhardt's observation of gift giving and receiving as "the movement of the hook that serves to bind together the various sections of the straw roofing so as to make one single *roof.*" (1990:21) The roof analogy is a powerful tool both of the organization and of *cultura sísmica.*

"Si hoy podemos poner de pie a todos Chile, mañana podemos secar las lágrimas para reconstruir todo, y dar el techo y el abrigo a quienes lo perdieron." [54]

–"Don Francisco" (Mario Kreutzberger), *Teletón* host

The Chilean response to the earthquake I witnessed was proactive. On March 4, 2010, my host mother decided it was time for me to get out of the house and see how well Valparaíso actually fared. We went to the college at which I was studying, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (PUCV). I was surprised, pleased, and impressed to find an organized collection center for clothes for the *damnificados*. In the courtyard of the main building, my Chilean classmates formed a line that stretched out to the street, passing bags of clothes organized by size and gender to

[54] "If today we can get everyone on their feet, tomorrow we can dry the tears in order to rebuild everything, and give a roof and a coat to all who lost theirs."

various eighteen wheelers and other vehicles destined for the more heavily affected Southern regions.

Figure 5. Van
Photo taken by author, March 4, 2010.

The atmosphere of the project was extremely uplifting. Loud music blared over speakers, and the students sang along and danced as they worked. Chile helps Chile, indeed. Behind the trucks, I encountered the vehicle in Figure 5. This is a photo of the van mentioned in Chapter 1; the direct translation of the banner would be, "The Earth moved, now you move: Non-perishable foods, toilet paper, diapers, water." This banner embodies Chile's *cultura sísmica*: "Yes, there was an earthquake, and it shook us hard. Yes, it was scary. It is over now, and it is time to act." It

acknowledges the earthquake and the fear it produced while immediately demanding that Chileans be proactive.

The Chileans I spoke with in the weeks following the earthquake constantly reminded me that although the situation was scary in Valparaíso, there were people who needed help, and it was their responsibility to provide it. Chileans are not ones to hide in a corner and lick their wounds. In the case of the earthquake, Chileans took a very proactive approach to recovery efforts, gathering necessities and assembling teams to distribute resources and help rebuild, donating money to the telethon, and showing general support for one another.

Another good example of the proactive stance of Chileans is my experience with *Un Techo para Chile*. On the weekend of May 14-16, 2010, I traveled with roughly fifty other international students and Chileans with *Techo* to a small town several hours south of Valparaíso. Several other international students had already made the trip and recruited more international students to go. The group I went with contained more Chileans than international students, but we all loaded the bus together and headed south. The goal was to build as many *mediaguas* (small, wooden temporary shelters) as possible in one weekend. Figure 6 shows a photo of the finished *mediagua* I helped to construct that weekend. We stayed at a local primary school, sleeping in classrooms on the floor in sleeping bags. The experience left an impression on me due to the reception we received throughout our service.

Figure 6. Finished *mediagua*
Photo taken by fellow volunteer, May 16, 2010.

On Saturday morning, we broke into groups of six with the task of building one *mediagua* per group. Each group was to have at least two male members, and my group had the bare minimum two - two French college students. We were at another disadvantage because our group leader was the only one who had experience with *mediaguas*, and she was pretty small; the labor was manual, and we had a lot of heavy materials. We were never going to accomplish this goal alone. We arrived at a family's lot that Saturday morning. Their small farm contained several structures, and the main structure was completely destroyed. We set up to build next to where the main house stood before the earthquake.

Luckily, we did not have to work alone. The family we were working for was beyond welcoming, and the father and eldest son did at least as much, if not more,

work than we did. They were skilled builders, and the task became easier as the hours passed. These men were not accepting charity by standing by and doing nothing. They took an active part in using the materials donated to them by *Techo*. Figure 7 shows the eldest son of the family we worked with showing us how to dig holes for the posts that make up the foundation of the *mediagua*.

Figure 7. Eldest son helping us
Photo taken by fellow volunteer, May 15, 2010.

It can therefore be concluded that *la cultura sísmica* of Chile is proactive. Chileans are not going to wait for someone to come help them, they are going to help each other and themselves. Additionally, when help does come, Chileans are going to use the help in a proactive manner, actively participating in application. Unlike in Katrina, the Chileans I met did not expect the government to provide for them

because that is not a part of *la cultura sísmica*. The proactive approach involves beginning to work immediately, regardless of adversity or lack of assistance.

"The overwhelming impression gained was that the morale in the general population was high, even in the worst affected areas. There was no sign of apathy at this stage ... The Chilean are clearly a warm and friendly people, but the fact that they were prepared to communicate with foreigners wandering through devastated back streets taking photographs ... speaks a lot for the Chilean resilience o earthquakes, as well as their more human virtures."

-Edmund Booth, 1985

The quote above was taken from a 1985 publication about the March earthquake that struck the Valparaíso Region, but it could easily have been about the February 2010 earthquake. The excerpt describes precisely the reception I received by Chileans when curious about the earthquake and its damage. It speaks to a general positive overtone in Chilean relations in the aftermath of seismic events.

With *Un Techo para Chile*, I was put into contact with a family who had lost large parts of their home only months after the devastation. It would be easy to assume that the attitude and "vibes" of the family would be negative – I know my family was not particularly receptive to the organizations that tried to help us after Hurricane Katrina. Although my family was not necessarily negative toward relief groups, we tried to stay out of the way and had little contact with them.

This particular Chilean family was the opposite. *Techo* sent small bags of food for the volunteers' lunch: *fideos con salsa de tomate*.[55] I suppose the mother of the Chilean family decided that this was not adequate for us, and she cooked us baked

[55] "noodles with tomato sauce"

chicken with mashed potatoes and rice and vegetables both days; it was delicious. With all of their losses, you would think she would not go out of her way to accommodate us, but she did. This seems to be common in Chilean society – giving even when there is not much to give.

Figure 8. The family
Photo taken by a neighbor of the family with a fellow volunteer's camera, May 16, 2010.

The family not only helped us with the *mediagua*, but also visited with us and shared stories, and even beer. At the end of the last day, we had *once*[56]with them inside the one remaining building left standing after the earthquake. It was an incredible experience; they let us in to share with their family. They even allowed us to take a photo of the finished *mediagua* with them and us standing in front of it,

[56] Chilean nighttime meal, similar to English "tea," usually consisting of bread with avocado and/or cheese and meat, and tea.

shown in Figure 8. Their positive attitude was infectious. Their fellowship with us was part of the exchange and contract inherent in a community characterized by reciprocity. The family did not have, or at least, did not show, difficulty in accepting our gift of materials and labor because they were expected, or by Mauss' analysis, obligated, to reciprocate our gift with their gift of food, fellowship, and welcome. The power of reciprocity manifests itself in a myriad of ways.

In Chapter 1, I mentioned my astonishment at the ease with which I was able to collect my surveys. The easiest way to make this simple fact translate into the embodiment of *cultura sísmica* is to draw a parallel between the Chileans' willingness to help a *gringa* and the attitude of their North American counterparts toward participation in surveys to help a stranger from another country. After collecting their responses to my surveys, I informally spoke with several *estadounidense* family members and friends about the matter – initially purely out of curiosity. The responses I got from fellow Americans furthered my opinion of Chilean helpfulness and friendliness. I told these informal interviewees the basic situation: I Facebook-messaged some eighty Chileans explaining who I was and what I needed (e-mail addresses to send them surveys). I told them how many responded and were immediately willing to help. I then asked, "Would you have helped me? Were I a Chilean researching, say, Hurricane Katrina, and needed Mississippians to fill out surveys with open-ended questions, would you give me your e-mail address? Furthermore, would you respond to the e-mailed survey?"[57] I asked five or six people, and they all said no, immediately.

[57] Paraphrase

I then directed the inquiry inward. Would I have helped me? I knew at once that the answer was no. I receive Facebook messages and e-mails about events, collections, and surveys constantly. Unless the message has come from a very close friend, who has definitely already contacted me through more personal avenues, I do not respond. In fact, I am often insulted by the barrage of messages I receive asking for such a large chunk of my time. When I observed how willing Chileans were to help me and compared it to my own attitude toward donating time without compensation, I was ashamed of myself. Here lies a major difference in Chilean versus American attitudes. Whereas Americans are appalled at the prospect of giving up free time for no personal gain, Chileans are oftentimes delighted to help others, and especially each other. I witnessed this helpful attitude time and again while I lived in Viña. I constantly came into contact with people who wanted to help me learn my way around, improve my Spanish, and just generally have a good time. If they could be so kind to a stranger, it is completely fathomable how natural it was for them to help each other after the earthquake. *La cultura sísmica* of Chile is very collective.

"Somos el Chile que se levanta y sigue adelante."[58]

-President Michele Bachelet

"Lo importante es mejorar y aprender…"[59]

As mentioned in Chapter 2, learning from disaster and "worst cases" and being prepared are important parts of recovery, and as such are crucial to *cultura*

[58] "We are the Chile that gets up and moves forward."
[59] "The important thing is to improve and to learn."

sísmica. This is where cultural reproduction comes into play. Many of my respondents mentioned that they learned how to deal with seismic events in school through drills and formal training, but the home is also an important to the spread of *cultura sísmica*. My own survey does not lend itself to discussion of family life, but there are basic observations I was able to make about Chilean culture during my time there, many assisted by a class about Chilean culture I took at PUCV. Chileans often live with their parents, and even grandparents, well into their twenties. Chilean life is centered around meals, not because of the food, but because it is a time to come together.

The previously mentioned *once* tradition (tea time) is exemplary of this coming together. Although many families are not able to have lunch together due to school and work, they almost always come together for *once*. *Once* was when I learned the most about Chilean life, my host family, and *la cultura sísmica*. Parents and grandparents reproduce their culture through these informal gatherings, and that is crucial to *cultura sísmica*. The reason the older generation is able to teach the younger generation about *cultura sísmica* is that the majority of older Chileans have experienced (if not a catastrophic earthquake) at least several significant seismic events in their life. Chileans often focus on what they learned from these events rather than the trauma of the event itself.

One night during the time after *once*, my host mother told me about when she was a *niña* and there was a rather large tremor that shook her house in Huasco Bajo. She said the older members of her family told her to brace herself in the doorway and to go outside after the tremor was over. These are rather obvious essentials to

anyone who lives in a seismic area. For me, however, this was new information. Coming from the coastal region of Mississippi, I had never even experienced a tremor, much less a magnitude 8.8 earthquake. If my host family had not been home, I would have had no idea what to do during the earthquake. However, Chileans experience seismic events with fair regularity, and they learn at a very young age proper protocol in an earthquake. As each generation experiences its corresponding seismic events, they teach the following generations about *cultura sísmica* and what they have learned from their experiences.

The two quotes at the beginning of this section are paramount to this aspect of *cultura sísmica*. "We are the Chile that gets up and moves forward," said Chile's President Michele Bachelet shortly following the February 27 earthquake. "The important thing is to get better and to learn," stated one of my subjects when asked if she had anything to add to her responses at the end of the survey. Acknowledgement of, knowledge gaining from, and moving past the seismic catastrophe are crucial to having a *cultura sísmica*. "Learning well" from disasters is ideal (Clarke, 2006). The knowledge learned from each disaster is then passed on by cultural reproduction through formal training in schools, as well as elders' stories of previous disasters.

"Han sido muy lentas de parte del gobierno. No fueron organizadas de un principio y lamentablemente no hubo mano dura contra los saqueadores desde el primer día … La teletón también demostró una vez más la solidaridad de los chilenos y de los extranjeros para ir en ayuda a las personas dañadas."[60]

[60] "(The recovery efforts) have been very slow from the government. They were not organized from the start, and sadly there was not a strong hand against the looters

"A este término todos tienen que aportar, no solo los ciudadanos en el saber que hacer … sino que también a nivel instutucional .. arquitectos que construyan viviendas anti-sísmicas."[61]

Despite the positive attitude that Chileans possess when dealing with day-to-day situations and normal interactions between civilians, when asked "How do you feel about the emergency response?"[62], the response of my subjects was astoundingly negative. The question was very general. It did not ask how do you feel about the government's emergency response or your local church's emergency response or your family's emergency response. I designed the question to be broad and ambiguous to see how my subjects would interpret it. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of my respondents took this to mean the Chilean government's response to the February 27 earthquake. This is the reason the response was astoundingly negative. I mentioned Augusto Pinochet in Chapter 2, and I attribute this negative response and the distrust behind it to this period in Chilean history. Only within the last twenty years has Chile had a government that was democratically-elected, and the Pinochet period was an era of fear, uncertainty, and human rights violations perpetrated by the reigning powers.

As mentioned before, all of my subjects had something positive to say about the Chilean response to the disaster at some point in the survey. Additionally, many of them criticized the government response but followed the criticism with praise

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from the first day … The telethon also showed one more time the solidarity of Chileans and foreigners to help injured persons."

[61] "At this point we all have to support each other, not only in the citizens knowing what to do … but also at an institutional level … architects that construct anti-seismic living spaces."

[62] See A-1, A-2 for the full question. It includes several inquiries and prompts and was an extremely open-ended question.

for some other, usually more human, aspect of the response. Another quote that was very exemplary of the Chilean tendency to focus on the human side of the disaster is as follows: "I feel that it is well organized. Yes, they are fast and efficient. The *bomberos*[63], principally, and then the *carabineros*[64], the *militares*[65], among many more." Instead of focusing on the government as a unit, this subject was keen to point out and praise the efforts of *individuals*, a crucial part of disaster community. *La cultura sísmica* works because individuals work together for the greater good. Many of the respondents, while viewing the government response in a negative light, had something positive to say about the human side of the response.

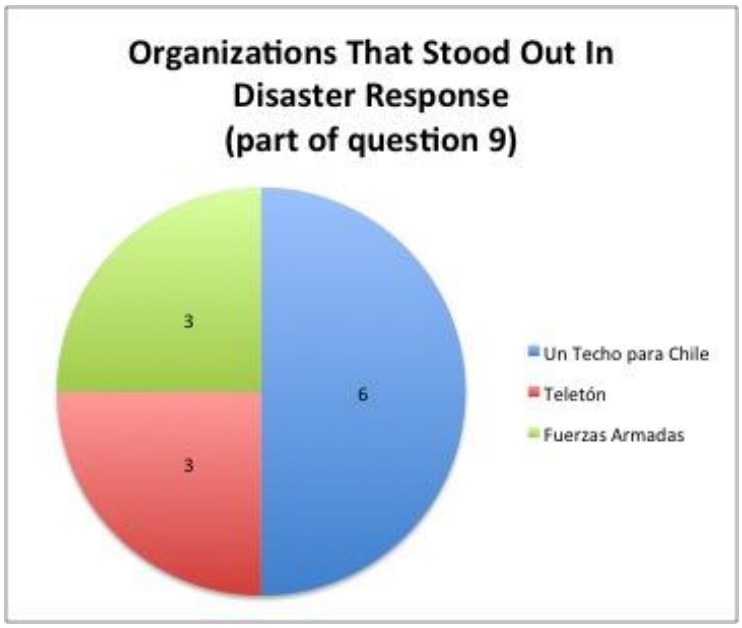

Figure 9. Organizations That Stood Out In Disaster Response

[63] "firemen"
[64] Chilean police
[65] Roughly translates to "military men." The Spanish word for army is *ejército*. I find this wording very telling because instead of referring to the army as a whole, this subject is referring specifically to the men.

One part of the question was "Is there an organization in particular that makes great efforts to help the Chilean people?" Although many neglected this part of the question (they had more to say about other sections of the inquiry), roughly a third of the respondents pointed out a particular organization, as shown in Figure 9.[66]

Although I had very few subjects who experienced major structural damage to their homes, I had one subject in particular whose mother's house was completely destroyed. Her opinion of the emergency response was astoundingly negative:

> Clearly the country was not organized for an earthquake of this magnitude. I don't believe that there exists an organization that does or has done something good for the *damnificados*. Including the "*medias aguas*" [sic], they did not give them to those who truly need them. Like everything in this country "*se fueron por dentro*" with the *plata*.

However, this is understandable and common in the aftermath of disaster. I can relate to her disillusionment with the government; after Katrina, the word "FEMA" (Federal Emergency Management Agency) became tantamount to profanity. Even though my family was fortunate enough to have the resources (or access to the resources) we needed to prosper after our house was destroyed, we were disgusted with the way in which FEMA handled disaster relief.

The U.S. government disaster relief through FEMA had an inefficient bureaucracy, and we were unable to get any of the money that was supposed to go to those who lost their homes. I can relate personally to her comment about

[66] The lack of praise for particular organizations is telling in itself of *cultura sísmic*a. Chileans focus on individuals, "everyman" efforts to help one another, as corresponds to much of the theoretical conception of *cultura sísmica*.

resources not going to those who needed it. I had an elementary school friend who not only did not receive damage to his home, but also was part of an extremely wealthy family in my community. He, not his family, but he, a sixteen-year-old, received $2,000 dollars from FEMA; he bought a boat. I imagine in Chile the cases were not so extreme – the government provided temporary housing, not cash. However, from her comments I deduce that she saw a family, who probably already had somewhere warm to sleep, receive temporary housing – which was pretty common – and her mother, who lost her home completely, did not. It is very understandable that people in these types of situations would view the disaster response in a negative light, and due to the subjects' interpretation of the question as asking about governmental organizations in particular, it is not surprising that the response was considerably negative. *La cultura sísmica* is an imperfect phenomenon, and although the effects of its possession are usually positive, in disaster aftermath there will always be a negative side.

Figure 10 shows the specific complaints voiced in response to question nine (27 of 32 named specific complaints). All of the specific complaints were related to the government: insufficient tsunami alert, organization, looting (several subjects mentioned that the government did not have a "firm hand" to control it), and ONEMI, the governmental disaster relief organization. More important to my analysis of cultura sísmica, the fact that most respondents viewed the organizational response in a negative light but had something positive to add about the response of individuals is characteristic of proper approaches to worst case scenarios based on

the ideas laid out in Chapter 2 of "regular people" being most important in recovery (Ripley, 2008).

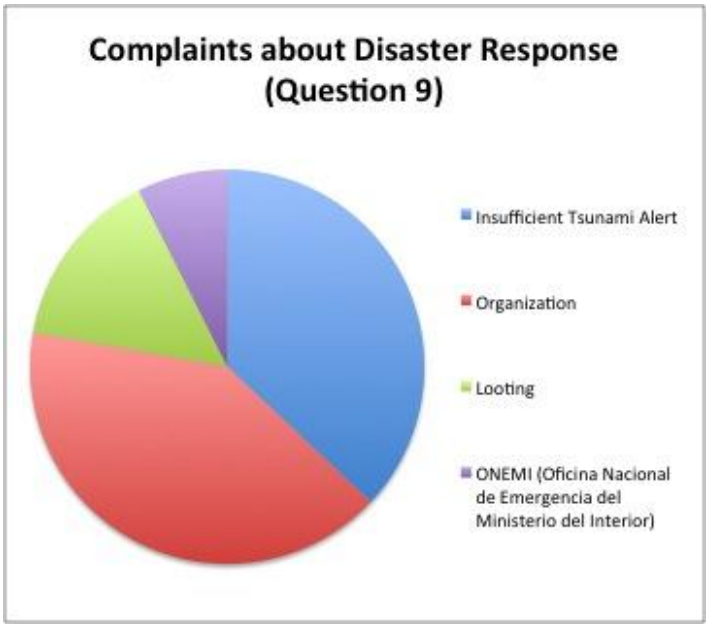

Figure 10. Complaints about Disaster Response

As shown in Table 4, none of my respondents who experienced major damage to either a family dwelling or a place of employment/education viewed the disaster response in a positive manner. This resonates with the idea that those more-closely affected by the disaster are hard-pressed to use positive asymmetry when viewing the earthquake's aftermath.

Table 4. View of Earthquake Response by Damage.

	Both	Negative	Neither	No answer	Positive	Total
Minor damage	5	8		1	5	19
No damage	1	5			1	7
Significant damage	1	4	1			6
Total	**7**	**17**	**1**	**1**	**6**	**32**

Table 5 shows the respondents' opinion of whether or not Chile has a *cultura sísmica* relative to the amount of damage each one experienced. Interestingly enough, the trend of negativity among those who experienced damage is not seen when assessing Chile's *cultura sísmica*. Only three of the six respondents who experienced damage to a frequented location answered that Chile does not have *cultura sísmica*; two answered that Chile does indeed have *cultura sísmica*, and one abstained from the question. Additionally, of the respondents who experienced minor damage, more answered that Chile does have *cultura sísmica*. This suggests that *cultura sísmica* is neither arbitrary nor individualistic, but rather objective and collective. Yet again, the power of *cultura sísmica* lies in the collective.

Table 5. *Cultura Sísmica* by Damage.

	No	No answer	Yes	Yes and No	Total
Minor damage	6		9	4	19
No damage	3		3	1	7
Significant damage	3	1	2		6
Total	**12**	**1**	**14**	**5**	**32**

"Seguí muy preocupada porque habían replicas casí todos los días."[67]

In hindsight, I could have worded Question 8 better. I asked, "How did your worries change during the time of the earthquake (during, immediately after, one

[67] "I continued to be very worried because there were aftershocks almost every day."

week after, etc.)?" when it would have been more appropriate to ask, "What were you worried about during the earthquake?" I wanted to find out what Chileans were concerned about after the earthquake and see if I could establish a pattern of change in the aftermath of the event. The responses I received, however, still serve my analytical purpose of defining *cultura sísmica*. Twenty-five respondents named a specific concern they had in the days following February 27, and these concerns are telling of *cultura sísmica*. Figure 11 shows the distribution of my respondents' relevant responses to Question 8.

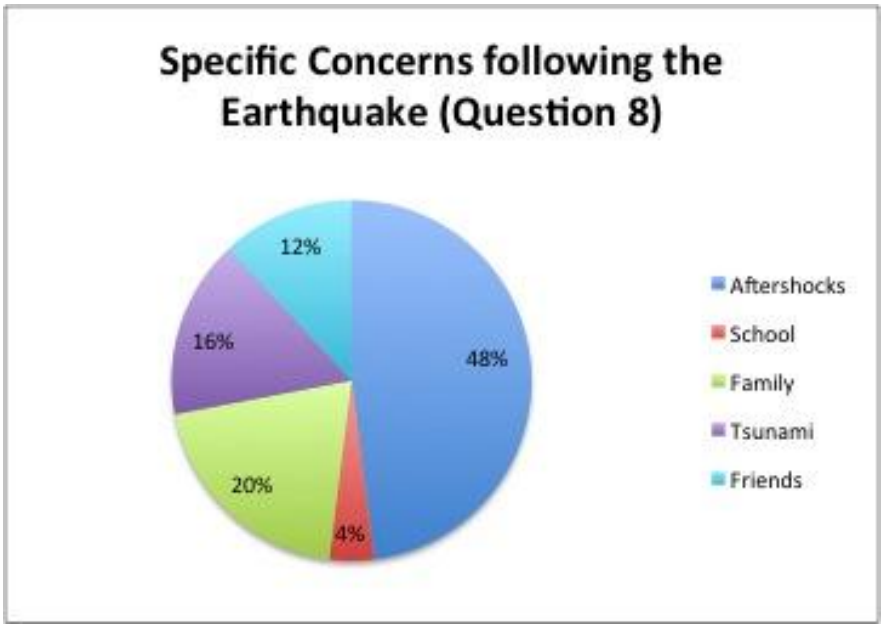

Figure 11. Specific Concerns following the Earthquake

The 48 percent of those who voiced a specific concern were concerned about the aftershocks following the earthquake and 16 percent were concerned about a tsunami show the Chilean capacity of seismic knowledge – aftershocks and tsunamis are the most dangerous, and the most immediate, consequences of a seismic event. Thirty-two percent were concerned about people – family and friends. Not one

subject responded that he or she was concerned about money, governmental infrastructure (tangible and intangible), or loss of material possessions. This conveys that not only are Chileans knowledgeable about their own country's seismicity, but they also have a good awareness for what is important following a disaster.

Conclusion

Chile does possess a tangible *cultura sísmica* – infrastructure and building practices designed to withstand seismic events – like the English definition of seismic culture. However, tangible *cultura sísmica* can only withstand up to a certain level of seismicity on the Richter scale, and earthquakes with extreme magnitude levels – remember the February 27 earthquake had a recorded magnitude of 8.8, placing it in the top ten highest magnitude earthquakes in history – are strong enough to destroy this material side. The good thing about *la cultura sísmica,* as referred to in this project, is that no matter how strong an earthquake is, it cannot be destroyed because it is housed within the society and passed on from generation to generation, proliferated by the government, schools, and media. The people characterized by the average Chilean's laid back, positive attitudes assisted with the calm and proactive approach necessary in disaster recovery. Their willingness to help one another is the reason Chile has been able to recover so quickly. Although my respondents were split on whether or not Chile has a *cultura sísmica* is not necessarily relevant; it exists because people talk about it. Furthermore, those who responded that Chile does not have a *cultura sísmica* were quick to express the need

for one, which in itself represents possession of *cultura sísmica*. The sense of community felt in the aftermath of the earthquake was strengthened and praised time and again. Solidarity, as many Chileans will tell you, is the most important part of disaster community, and Chileans know how to come together in a crisis. They have proven it time and again throughout history.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The manifestation of disaster community in Chile is *la cultura sísmica*. When I was first told about *la cultura sísmica* in the hours following the earthquake on February 27, 2010, my mind started racing. The parallels I drew between this disaster and Hurricane Katrina were unavoidable. My initial curiosity at the dynamics of *cultura sísmica* was not academic. I wanted to know what it was about Chileans that made them so able to handle a disaster of such magnitude because I personally was not prepared to handle the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Although I was able to draw many parallels, what I initially noticed about the earthquake recovery tended to be negative similarities I remembered from 2005, such as looting. I continued to search for the negative in the situation, but I found myself hard-pressed to find much of it. This is what makes Chile's *cultura sísmica* so unique and so powerful.

As much as I draw parallels between Hurricane Katrina and the February 2010 earthquake, I must admit that my capacity to do so is limited. During the aftermath of Katrina, I was in the midst of the devastation – the figurative "ground zero." In contrast, the epicenter of the Chilean earthquake was located some 200 miles from my home in Viña del Mar. Even though I saw some of the destruction the

earthquake caused, I was nowhere near ground zero. I feel as though my vantage point in Chile gave me insight, and although it is difficult for me to find the good in what happened after Hurricane Katrina, I feel as though had I viewed the disaster from a vantage point like mine in Chile, I would have seen very similar, positive disaster community manifestations.

Helping a friend of my Chilean family move because her house was destroyed was a very emotional experience for me. The looks on Patricia and her daughter Marcela's[68] faces were so eerily reminiscent of my cloudy memories from the fall of 2005. While with them, I kept thinking, "That must be what my face looked like." Memories I had suppressed for years came flooding back during the weekend we spent with this family. These memories were not enough, however, to render me unable to help the communal effort of relocation. Patricia is one of the most resilient women I have ever met, and her strength was contagious. She was, in fact, the first person to explicate and demonstrate *la cultura sísmica* to me.

Material possessions are not supposed to be of tremendous importance, and I know that. We go through life buying and accumulating things that we both need and do not need, often without reflecting on the relative "necessity" of the possessions we have. Once one loses his or her material possessions, the desolation of loss is unexpected. I believe that the devastation of losing one's possessions is not borne of the desire for the possessions themselves (memorabilia excluded), but for the emotions one attaches to certain possessions.

[68] Pseudonyms

Losing one's dwelling, the material manifestation of the idea of home, is a tragedy, particularly for the homemaker. I could not tell you how my mother felt seeing the great room she and my father planned and designed destroyed. Likewise, I cannot tell you how Patricia felt salvaging what was left inside her house that was to be demolished. I have never had a permanent dwelling myself to fill, but I know what it is like to put pictures, candles, and furniture just so in my room. Imagining this on the scale of a whole house, I cannot fathom the sense of losing the embodiment of months and years of effort and progress to make it just so.

The United States is an extremely materialistic society. The importance given to material possessions such as clothes, shoes, jewelry, and technology is staggering. I hesitate to make sweeping generalizations, but I will uphold that the Chileans I met from July 2009-July 2010 were not nearly as materialistic as their North American counterparts. It was refreshing to live in a place where I was not expected to have a different pair of jeans for every outfit. My Chilean friends and family were not as worried about whether or not someone had the nicest jewelry, newest clothes, or fanciest shoes. In fact, I did not go into one Chilean home that had a television in the main living area. The emphasis on personal connections and interactions was much stronger than the importance of material items. This is one of the many reasons *la cultura sísmica* is so strong – Chileans seem to already understand that the important things in their life, relationships with each other, are what should be worried about. Patricia even told me explicitly that she was not terribly depressed at the loss of her house because her family was safe, and that is what mattered.

I recently made the trip from Gulfport to Oxford with my twin brother, and we had some interesting conversations I could not avoid connecting to *la cultura sísmica*. My brother, Dusty, is a pretty conservative, patriotic, all-American young man. One conversation started as an ode to American ambition on Dusty's part, which segued into the topic of appreciation. We argued over whether or not Americans, that is to say, people from the United States,[69] really appreciate everything they have. He insisted that they did, and I refused to concede that Americans do not take things for granted. The reason I write of this argument is that it made me think, as many things do, of this project. I argued that it was impossible to really appreciate having clothes, food, and a warm place to sleep without knowing what it is like to not have those things. We both agreed that we were able to appreciate our belongings because of our experience in Hurricane Katrina, and I believe that is a crucial component of disaster community. Knowing that everything one has can be taken away in an instant not only heightens appreciation, but also furthers the de-emphasis of the importance of material possessions.

Following this argument I began to wonder, however, whether or not individuals have to actually experience the devastation of loss to possess this trait. The typical teenager is rather self-possessed and unappreciative in general, so it is hard for me to draw any conclusions from my personal experience with Katrina, which happened on the brink of my seventeenth birthday. Ultimately, the ability to

[69] I always try to avoid the term "American" when referring to people from the United States now because in Chile I was told repeatedly, and oftentimes belligerently, that anyone from North or South America is technically *americano*, and it is very egocentric of us to claim the name when it applies to so many places beyond the United States. Spanish offers the useful term *estadounidense*, but no such term exists in English, as yet.

not take anything for granted comes with time, and with time comes experience. What makes a disaster community particularly suited to enjoying this ability is that survivors of a disaster can remember previous disasters. Hurricanes are a fact of life on the Gulf Coast, and although there was a point in which I felt Katrina was the only disaster of its time, I have been taught about Hurricane Camille in school and by my family members who lived through it. In Chile, too, the vast majority of the members of the older generation have survived and/or witnessed a mega-earthquake and all that comes with it. *La cultura sísmica* is fostered by this shared, living memory.

The implications of Chile's *cultura sísmica* are great. Phillips writes of the tendency for disaster to serve as a catalyst for political movements or social change (2004). Shortly after I left Chile in 2010, a movement that had been brewing for years in Chile came to fruition. Education has long been a polemic issue in Chile, and university students decided that they were fed up with the inequality in Chilean education. For more than a year, university students across the country have been striking and staging demonstrations in protest. One Chilean friend I spoke to recently told me that she lost an entire semester to the strike.

Mobilization of college-age students in itself is impressive. That they are trying to precipitate change in a system that they will not be able to enjoy themselves speaks legions of *la cultura sísmica*. The technical success of the movement remains to be seen, but it has gained enormous momentum and recognition worldwide (BBC, 2012). Whether or not the earthquake played a part in the realization of the movement is impossible to prove, but it is certainly probable.

Music is a powerful expressive avenue in any culture. From the first time I went out to the *discotecas* after the earthquake up until the last time I went out in Chile, the deejays always played one song. The song is called *"Arriba la vida"* by Croni-K. I have extensively searched for the roots to this work to no avail. Therefore, I cannot say whether or not the song was written specifically about the February 2010 earthquake, or even who actually wrote it. What I can say is that I never heard it before then, and it became an anthem for the Chileans surrounding me. Croni-K even performed the song at the telethon mentioned in Chapter 3. It is set to an upbeat *reggaeton* track with a very *chileno* salsa feel.

The effect *"Arriba la vida"* had, and still has, on those who listen to it is electric. The "vibe," or feel of the atmosphere, was incredible when the song came on in the club. From the first notes of the music, everyone danced and sang at the top of their lungs with huge smiles on their faces (including myself). Usually when songs are played over and over, the enthusiasm they produce fades, but the reaction to this song did not change in the slightest for the duration of my stay, all of the five months following the earthquake. Five months is a long time for any song to produce such an effect, and I do not doubt that the celebration (for that was what it was) continued for long after I left. The following are portions of the lyrics to the song:[70]

Hoy la pena pasó, sigue bailando que yo seguiré cantándote
Ya se olvidó y la tormenta pasó
Abre tu corazón, la vida se hizo para sembrar amor
Y no se deprima (Nooo)
Tira para arriba (Yeeeh)

[70] A translation of "Arriba la vida" can be found in the Appendix (A-5).

Carga vitaminas (Oooh)
Disfruta la vida[71]

En momentos de crisis y tristezas
No te eches a morir, levanta la cabeza
Seal cual seal la situación
Recuerda que en la vida todo tiene solución
Escucha bien, escucha bien que la vida es muy linda
Contra lo que sea, hermano, no se rinda
Siga bailando y vacilando
Como dijo Celia las penas se van cantando

Y no se rinda, vamos brinda
Todos arriba que la fiesta siga
Baila como quiera y levanta la bandera
Por la paz de este mundo, pueblos y tierra
Contágiate de energía que hay que vivir la vida

Si en esta vida hay problemas, dale, piensa y sigue
Si la amargure está matando, deja que se olvide
No hay conflicto que no tenga solución
Una manera de olvidar la situación

No se deprima, hace a un lado las penas
Que nadie sabe cuando El Señor nos lleva
Disfruta a tu madre, a tu padre, a tus amigos
Abuelos, hijos, hermanos y primos
Dale conmigo, arriba las manos
Vive lo bueno, al carajo con lo malo
Abre los brazos, abre el corazón
Dale, vida al mundo entregando amor

Hola may que es la que hay
La vida hay que vivirla con style
Alegría, tristezas, triunfos y errores
Vive la vida con alegría
No se deprima, manos arriba
Todos unidos como familia
Latinoamérica unida

Bienvenida a la salida
De los problemas y la rutina
Para que no se deprima
Porque esta música anima

[71] Refrain

Y te cambia la vida
Usted ya siga
Entrega tu corazón pa' que te sane la herida
Si quiere, invita una amiga (cuando diga)
Para que Díos la bendiga

The lyrics to this song express *la cultura sísmica* much more eloquently than I ever could, although much of the actual effect of the song is lost in reading the lyrics rather than actually listening to it. The music encompasses all characteristics of disaster community: comradeship, appreciation, positivity, improvement, and solidarity. The important element of disaster community is community, and of *cultura sísmica*, culture; "Arriba la vida" epitomizes these concepts. *La cultura sísmica* thrives in Chile. According to the Chileans I spoke with after the earthquake, Chile experiences a catastrophic seismic event about every 30-50 years. When – not if – the next earthquake occurs, the disaster community in Chile will be able to perform even better.

Afterword

I do not remember exactly when I decided my senior thesis would be about my experience in this disaster, but once I did, that was final. This project has a very personal side to it, but I have tried to retain an academic tone in the body (Chapters 2 and 3). Truth be told, there have been many times over the course of this endeavor I regretted my choice of topic. It was hard to stop myself from generalizing too much, and I am afraid I failed on several occasions. My intent, however, was not to stereotype the Chilean people as a whole or to place their society on a pedestal. There were definitely aspects of the recovery effort that Chile did not execute

properly, but that too is a part of disaster community. Each time a community experiences a disaster, it presents an opportunity to learn and improve, and as my research suggests, Chileans have a great awareness of that fact.

When I chose *la cultura sísmica* as my thesis topic, I did not realize how ambitious in nature it was. From the onset of research, however, I mentally began kicking myself for having such high aspirations. With two and a half years of college courses behind me, I should have realized I do not possess the necessary knowledge or training to execute an innovative theme in the appropriate *modus operandi* of academia. By the time I came to this realization, I was far too attached to the idea of articulating the phenomenon I had witnessed. I had several opportunities to change topics, including a semester hiatus from the university. This thesis, in fact, played no small part in my necessity for a break. This has not been an easy undertaking, and I have taken longer than my allotted time to finish it. I regret that even still I have not succeeded in fully articulating the intangible concept of *cultura sísmica*. Perhaps one day my pursuits will lead me to readdress disaster community with the appropriate skills to do it justice.

APPENDIX

Appendix

A-1. Survey

Nombre:
Fecha de Nacimiento:
Lugar de Nacimiento:
Lugar de Residencia:
Occupación:

1. ¿Dónde usted estaba en la noche del terremoto, el 27 de febrero de 2010? Por favor, especifique cual región/ciudad, que tipo de edificio (departamento, edificio de un piso, edificio de dos pisos, bar, disco, etc.), y sí estaba en casa o visitando a alguien.

2. ¿Usted estaba solo o con otros?

3. ¿Estaba despierto o dormido cuando empezó temblando?

4. ¿Dónde fue para esperar para que parara el terremoto? (una entrada, afuera, pasillo, baño, etc.)

5. ¿El edificio donde usted estaba recibió algun tipo de daño físico por el terremoto?

6. ¿Su hogar (de usted) recibió algun tipo de daño físico?
6a. ¿Usted tuvo que mudarse de casa, temporariamente y/o permanentement [sic]?
6b. ¿Usted recibió algun tipo de asistencia gubernamental? No gubernamental? (la Iglesia, una organización sin ánimo de lucro, etc - por favor, especifique el fuente)? Ambos?

7. ¿Su lugar de trabajo/estudio recibió algun tipo de daño físico?
7a. ¿Por cuanto tiempo usted estaba sin trabajo/estudios?
7b. ¿Su trabajo/lugar de estudio hizo/hace algo para compensar por las horas faltadas?

8. ¿Cómo cambió su preocupación durante la época del terremoto (durante, inmediatamente después, una semana después, etc.)?

9. ¿Qué opina usted sobre la respuesta a la emergencia? ¿Las esfuerzas de auxilio del gobierno estaban/están organizadas rápidamente y eficientemente? ¿Hay alguna organización en particular que hace esfuerzas increibles para ayudar a la gente chilena?

10. ¿Usted ha conocido el término "la cultura sísmica"? ¿Dónde?

11. ¿Usted cree que Chile tenga una "cultura sísmica"? ¿Por qué sí o no?

12. ¿Cómo usted cree que la generación menor de Chile trata "la cultura sísmica"?

13. ¿Cómo usted cree que la generación mayor de Chile trata "la cultura sísmica"?

14. ¿Usted ha trabajado/trabaja como voluntario en las esfuerzas de auxilio y limpieza? Usted estaría dispuesta a responder a una encuesta extra sobre su experiencia como voluntario?

15. ¿Usted había vivido en algun otro terremoto, grande o pequeño? Sí si, por favor, especifique cuándo y donde, y dé un cuento de la experiencia utilizando las preguntas anteriores como modelo.

16. ¿Usted estaría dispuesto a responder a una entrevista más profunda y/o dando un narrativo personal sobre sus experiencias y opiniones en torno al terremoto?

Hay algo más que usted piensa que yo debería saber? Si hay algo que quiere añadir sobre su experiencia, por favor hagalo abajo.

A-2. Survey Translation

1. Where were you on the night of the earthquake, February 27, 2010? Please, specify which region/ city, what type of building (apartment, one story building, two story building, bar, club, etc.), and if you were at home or visiting someone.

2. Were you alone or with others?

3. Were you awake or asleep when the tremors began?

4. Where did you go to wait for the earthquake to stop? (a doorway, outside, hallway, bathroom, etc.)

5. Did the building where you were receive any type of physical damage due to the earthquake?

6. Did your home receive any type of physical damage?
6a. Did you have to move, temporarily or permanently?
6b. Did you receive any type of governmental assistance? Non-governmental? (the Church, a non-profit organization, etc – please, specify the source)? Both?

7. Did your place of work/study receive any type of physical damage?

7a. How long were you without work/studies?
7b. Did your place of work/study do/does something to compensate for lost time?

8. How did your worries change during the time of the earthquake (during, immediately after, one week later, etc.)?

9. What is your opinion about the emergency response? Were the efforts of the government organized quickly and efficiently? Is there any organization in particular that made incredible efforts to help the Chilean people?

10. Do you recognize the term "seismic culture"? Where did you learn it?

11. Do you believe that Chile has a "seismic culture"? Why or why not?

12. How do you think the younger generation of Chile handles "seismic culture"?

13. How do you think the older generation of Chile handles "seismic culture"?

14. Have you worked/are you working as a volunteer in the recovery efforts? Would you be willing to respond to an extra survey about your experience as a volunteer?[72]

15. Have you lived through any other earthquake, large or small? If yes, please, specify when and where, and give an account of the experience using the above questions as a model.

16. Would you be willing to respond to a more in depth interview and/or give a personal narrative about your experiences and opinions in regard to the earthquake?

Is there anything else that you think I should know? If there is anything you want to add about your experience, please do it below.

A-3. Sample Facebook Message

hola _____! soy Erin Mauffray, y estudié en Chile el año pasado. no sé si me recuerdas, creo que nos conocimos _____. espero que te encuentres super bien!!

te escribo porque necesito ayuda. estoy escribiendo mi tésis sobre el terremoto, y necesito que unos chilenos hagan una encuesta. si me puedes ayudar, por favor envíame tu correo. también si conoces alguna otra persona que estaría dispuesta ayudar a una gringa, por favor dame sus correos también. cualquier ayuda sería MUY agradecida!! muchas muchas gracias!

[72] In the end, I only had one respondent who had worked as a volunteer, which made my second survey obsolete.

A-4. Message Translation

hello _____! I'm Erin Mauffray, and I studied in Chile last year. I'm don't know if you remember me, I believe we met _____. I hope this message finds you well.

I write to you because I need help. I am writing my thesis about the earthquake, and I know some Chileans to fill out a survey. If you can help me, please send me your email address. Also, If you know any other person that would be willing to help a *gringa*, please give me their emails, too. Any help would be very appreciated. Thank you very much!

A-5. *"Arriba la vida"* Translation

Today the pain passed, keep dancing and I'll keep singing to you
It's already forgotten, and the storm passed
Open your heart, life was made to sow love
And don't be depressed (Nooo)
Rise up (Yeeeh)
Fill up with vitamins (Oooh)
Enjoy life

En times of crisis and sadness
Don't give up to die, lift your head
Whatever the situation
Remember that in life everything has a solution
Listen well, listen well, that life is very beautiful
Against whatever, brother, don't give up
Keep dancing and emptying
Like Celia said, pain leaves singing

And don't give up, let's toast
Everyone up, let the party continue
Dance how you want and lift the flag
Because peace in the world, communities, and land
Pass it on with energy, life must be lived

If in this life there are problems, okay, think and continue
If bitterness is killing, let it be forgotten
There is not conflict that doesn't have a solution,
A way of forgetting the situation

Don't be depressed, put your pain aside
Because nobody knows when God takes us

Enjoy your mother, your father, your friends,
Grandparents, children, siblings, and cousins
Okay with me, lift your hands
Life is well, to hell with the bad
Open your arms, open your heart
Okay, life to world giving love

Hello *may*, it is what it is
Life must be lived with style
Happiness, sadness, triumphs, and mistakes
Live your life with happiness
Don't be depressed, hands up
We are all united like a family
United Latin America

Welcome to the end
Of problems and routine
So you don't get depressed
Because this music encourages
And changes your life
Keep moving forward
Give your heart so that your wound can heal
If you want, invite a friend (when I say)
So that God can bless her

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