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THE MAKING OF AN UNLIKELY CHILEAN FASCIST: REFLECTIONS
ON THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT
AND POLITICAL WORK OF CARLOS KELLER RUEFF

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the intellectual evolution and political activities of Carlos Keller Rueff between the early 1920s and the late 1930s. It discusses his development from a German nationalist to a Chilean fascist during the course of this eventful period. In the 1920s Keller, who started his career in the Deutsch-Chilener Bund, the umbrella organisation of the German-Chilean community, expressed German National positions. Only at the end of the decade he began to distance himself from his narrow, sectarian German sub-culture and took a broader, national view, a development that coincided with his move from Concepción to Santiago and the failure of his plan to revive the immigration of Germans to Chile. With the book *La eterna crisis chilena*, published in 1931, he finally emerged as a Chilean nationalist and gained the reputation of an intellectual. One year later, in April 1932, he was, together with Jorge González von Marées, one of the founding members of the Chilean Movimiento Nacional Socialista (MNS). Keller became the movement's ideologue and its second most prominent leader. This career abruptly ended with the failed nacist coup of 5 September 1938 and the subsequent transformation of the MNS into the Vanguardia Popular Socialista.

On the occasion of Carlos Keller Rueff's admission to the *Academia Chilena de la Historia* in December 1959, Raúl Silva Castro, who held the encomium, duly introduced the new member of the institution to the audience, reviewing the different stages of his professional and academic career and underlining his contributions to many different fields of research. During the course of his lecture, Silva Castro mentioned that in the 1920s Keller had held chairs at the University of Concepción and at the University of Chile in Santiago consecutively, and had subsequently joined the Bureau of Statistics of which he became the director-

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general in 1932. Moreover, he referred to Keller's journalistic activities in, inter alia, *Acción Chilena*, *La Nación*, *La Hora*, and *Atenea*, and noted his numerous scholarly publications on Chilean history, politics, economy, geography, and anthropology, singling out some of his best known books, namely *La eterna crisis chilena*¹, *Un país al garete*², *La locura de Juan Bernales*³, *El Departamento de Arica*⁴, and *Revolución en la Agricultura*⁵. Finally, Silva Castro even alluded to Keller's activities in the Chilean Movimiento Nacional Socialista (MNS), the dominant fascist faction of the 1930s of which Keller had been a co-founder in April 1932.

While Silva Castro at least briefly spoke about the laureate's fascist past, albeit in a complimentary and to some extent misleading way, claiming that 'the dreamer' had only joined it in order to ensure that true patriots and not professional politicians decided the course of the country⁶, he completely omitted another significant aspect in the life of a man to whom he was united together in 'old and unalterable bonds of affection and intellectual understanding'⁷; he simply passed over the fact that during the second half of the 1920s Keller had been active in the Deutsch-Chilenischer Bund (DCB), the umbrella organisation of the German-Chilean community⁸, which, at the time, had its headquarters in Concepción, Keller's home town. Between his return from Germany in 1921, where, after attending a 'Prussian grammar school' in Berlin-Lichterfelde and studying in Berlin, Bonn, and Würzburg, he had gained a doctorate⁹, and the move to the Chilean capital six years later, Keller had not only been professor of sociology and economics at the local university; for some time, he had also been director of the DCB¹⁰. In accordance with the institution's professed objectives to 'preserve and strengthen' the German-Chilean community and to disseminate German culture in Chile¹¹, Keller, who only a few years later would emerge as a

¹ *La eterna crisis chilena* Santiago, 1931.

² *Un país al garete: Contribución a la seismología social de Chile* Santiago, 1932.

³ *La locura de Juan Bernales: nuestra tragedia política 1932-1938*, Santiago, 1949.

⁴ *El Departamento de Arica* Santiago Ministerio de Economía y Comercio, Secretaría General de Censo Económico, 1946.

⁵ *Revolución en la agricultura* Santiago, 1956. For an extensive bibliography of Keller's work see Vicente Romero, 'Carlos Keller (Chilien, 1898-1974. Polygraphe, politicien, technocrate)', *Histoire et Sociétés de l'Amérique latine*, Paris, vol. 2, no. 2 1994, 154-161.

⁶ Raúl Silva Castro, "Discurso de recepción al académico don Carlos Keller, leído en junta pública de 3 de diciembre", *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de la Historia*, no. 61 1959, 92-93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁸ For foundation of the DCB see Claus von Plate, "Der Deutsch-Chilenische Bund", *Mitteilungen* (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), vol. 5, no. 9-12 1955, 311-313; and Jean-Pierre Blancpain, *Les Allemands au Chili (1816-1945)* Cologne/Vienna Böhlau, 1974, 845-853.

⁹ 'Die Entwicklung des Bergwesens in Chile' Inaugural-Dissertation, Bayerische Maximilian-Julius-Universität Würzburg, 1921. For the biographical data see the Curriculum Vitae, which is attached to the dissertation [192].

¹⁰ George F. W. Young, "Jorge González von Marées: Chief of Chilean Nacism", *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft Lateinamerikas*, vol. 11 1974, 315, n. 21.

¹¹ Christoph Martin, "Was ist und was will der Deutsch-Chilenische Bund?", *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 6, no. 6 1926, 215-216. For a discussion of the DCB's activities during the 1920s, cf. Stefan Rinke, "Las relaciones germano-chilenos, 1918-1933", *Historia*, vol. 31 1998, 240-250, 265-275.

leading Nacista militant and an apostle of Chilean national reawakening, forcefully defended the idea of a distinct German identity.

In view of the unequivocally German National positions Keller held in the 1920s as well as his prominent role in the DCB, his subsequent involvement in the MNS indicates a noteworthy intellectual shift, despite arguments to the contrary¹². A contemporary German observer working on German communities abroad, who also knew about Keller's previous work in the Deutsch-Chilenischer Bund, for instance, was puzzled over his activity in a movement that preached the revival of the Chilean nation and, by the mid-1930s, heavily criticised the colonists for the preservation of their German culture and traditions¹³. Yet, apart from one article, which at least briefly deals with Keller's German past¹⁴, so far his development from a German nationalist to a Chilean fascist during the course of the late 1920s and early 1930s has received no scholarly attention. Occasionally, his activities in the DCB are mentioned in passing¹⁵, but in general Keller is only known as the last representative of the *Literatura de la crisis*¹⁶, as well as the 'the guiding intellectual spirit'¹⁷, or at least as the 'co-ideologue', of the Movimiento Nacional Socialista¹⁸. Silva Castro selective presentation of Keller's life was, thus, no exception.

This article will attempt to fill this lacuna, paying special attention to Keller's intellectual development between the early 1920s and the late 1930s, the period during which he was also politically active. Based on an analysis of the writings he published during his time at the German-Chilean Association, his major intellectual works of the early 1930s, which earned him the reputation of a renowned intellectual, and the articles he contributed to *Acción Chilena*, and to a lesser extent to *Trabajo*, the main Nacista publications, the continuities as well as discontinuities between the different stages of his thinking will emerge. The analysis will show that German thinkers essentially formed Keller's ideas. During the period under study he consistently expressed his intellectual indebtedness to them¹⁹. Yet, while he

¹² Michael Potashnik, "Nacismo: National Socialism in Chile, 1932-1938" Ph. D. diss., Univ. of California, Los Angeles, 1974, 112.

¹³ Bundesarchiv Koblenz, R 57, DAI 181/5, Dr. Drascher (Deutsches Ausland-Institut) to Otto Brien, Stuttgart, 10 May 1937.

¹⁴ Romero, "Carlos Keller", 111-116.

¹⁵ Jürgen Müller, *Nationalsozialismus in Lateinamerika: Die Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP in Argentinien, Brasilien, Chile und Mexiko, 1931-1945* Stuttgart, 1997, 244.

¹⁶ Mario Góngora, *Ensayo histórico sobre la noción de estado en Chile en los siglos XIX y XX* Santiago, 1981, 35.

¹⁷ Fredrick B. Pike, *Chile and the United States, 1880-1962: The Emergence of Chile's Social Crisis and the Challenge to United States Diplomacy* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963, 392, n. 170. For similar assessments, cf. Olaf Gaudig and Peter Veit, "'... und morgen die ganze Welt!'" Der Nationalsozialismus in Chile 1932-1943', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, vol. 42, no. 6 1994, 508; and Mario Sznajder, 'A Case of Non-European Fascism: Chilean National Socialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 28, no. 2 1993, 272, 274.

¹⁸ Young, "González", 315, n. 21.

¹⁹ Potashnik ("Nacismo", IX, 60) states, on the other hand, that Keller, apart from Spengler, was mainly influenced by the Chilean writers Nicolás Palacios, Francisco Encina, and Alberto Edwards. Since Keller attended a German school in Concepción before moving to Germany at the age of fourteen in 1912 and spent the rest of his formative years there, German thinkers were certainly more important for the formation of his ideas than Chilean ones.

remained faithful to his authoritarian and élitist convictions and an ardent admirer of Germany, including, at least until the mid-1930s, the National Socialist regime, his defence of a distinct German identity faded away as his involvement in Chilean politics increased. Keller transferred his explicit admiration of the German-Chilean colonists to fascism in general and Nazism in particular, seeing them as the only solution to the profound crisis the country was going through at the time and as another means to germanise his native country. By the mid-1930s, his militancy in the MNS, and the fight for what he perceived as a better future for Chile, had certainly become more important for him than the preservation of a distinct German identity.

THE ADVOCATE OF THE GERMAN-CHILEAN COMMUNITY

Carlos Keller Rueff was born in Concepción on 3 January 1898. Both his parents were of German descent, typical of the low degree of assimilation of the German community at the time, and his family belonged, characteristic of the situation of the colonists in the city, to the haute-bourgeoisie that dominated its economic activities²⁰. Keller grew up on his parents' 'beautiful small estate on the outskirts of the town', spending his infancy, as he subsequently remembered, amongst 'excellent fruit trees and a kitchen garden' and next to 'the chimneys of [my] father's factory'. At the time, he also developed, as he later asserted, his love for, and interest in, agriculture²¹. Even more important for his later world-view, Keller was brought up in a community that was fiercely proud of its traditions and origins and aware of its modernising role in the local economy. Numerous social and cultural institutions in Concepción –after Valparaíso and Santiago the third most important German trading centre in Chile– guaranteed the preservation and continuation of the closed community and its distinct German identity²². Not least the youth was consistently reminded of its obligation and the spirit of Germandom was inculcated in them. In October 1910, the headmaster of the German school in Concepción, which Keller attended before moving to Europe in 1912, admonished his pupils, for instance, 'to do their parents' origins credit' and urged them 'always to accept, respect and love Germany as their linguistic and spiritual home'²³.

Keller internalised his headmaster's words without reservations. His stay in Germany, lasting for almost a decade –from the immediate pre-war period until the establishment of the Weimar Republic–, only reinforced these emotional and intellectual links. After his return to Chile he became, as his involvement in the

²⁰ On the German community in Concepción and its economic and social position, see Katharina Tietze de Soto, *Deutsche Einwanderung in die chilenische Provinz Concepción 1870-1930* Frankfurt on the Main, 1999, 68-90.

²¹ Keller, *Revolución*, 11. In 1874, his father had established a successful brewery, Keller Hnos., which sold its products not only in the region but also in Perú.

²² Tietze de Soto, *Einwanderung*, 91-109.

²³ *Deutsche Zeitung für Chile*, 20 October 1910, 3, as quoted in Tietze de Soto, *Deutsche Einwanderung*, 95-96.

Deutsch-Chilenischer Bund underlined, deeply committed to the cause of the German-Chileans, who numbered around 20, 000 to 25, 000 at the time²⁴. Like the majority of these colonists, he resented the young Weimar Republic²⁵, rejecting both the democratic regime and the new flag it had adopted as alien to the true nature of the 'German man'²⁶. For Keller, who had lived in Berlin during the breakdown of the German Reich, witnessing the revolutionary upheavals that rocked the 'great materialistic and spiritually dead city' at the time²⁷, 'supermen' (*Uebermenschen*) and leaders, with their 'lucidity of mind', 'power', and 'energy'²⁸, and not democracy and co-determination, guaranteed human progress. The victory of general field marshal Paul von Hindenburg, the chief of the general staff of the German army during the Great War, over the candidates of the left and the centre in the second round of the presidential election in the spring of 1925 thus promised, if only for his conservative and reactionary supporters in Germany and amongst the German communities abroad, the revival of a glorious past. In the name of the DCB Keller consequently 'welcomed his election with very special and justified pleasure', because Hindenburg was not just another 'party leader', who represented particularistic interests or exchangeable ideas, but above all 'the epitome of the German people' and a 'great personality'²⁹. In accordance with this statement, through the *Bundeskalender* of the DCB, a widely read publication that Keller edited, he helped to disseminate the views of the Reich's anti-democratic critics –Oswald Spengler, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Wilhelm Stapel, and Hans F. K. Günther– amongst the colonists³⁰.

Keller's belief in élites was not restricted to political leaders, though. He also expressed these convictions when writing about the German-Chilean colonists, tirelessly praising their cultural and entrepreneurial superiority as well as their economic achievements. Valdivia, a centre of the German immigrant community and besides Llanquihue the first target area of the colonists, was portrayed as a shining example of the German settlers' positive influence on the development of the Chilean nation. Their tenacity and ability to assert themselves had turned the initially inhospitable region, which they had found on their arrival in the mid-nineteenth century, into the agricultural powerhouse of Chile³¹, and because of them the city had become a pulsating and vibrant economic centre, characterised by 'life', 'progress', and 'work'³². The development of Valdivia should serve,

²⁴ Blancpain, *Allemands*, 848-849; and Christel Krause Converse, 'The Rise and Fall of Nazi influence among the German-Chileans' Ph. D. diss., Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1990, 2.

²⁵ Olaf Gaudig and Peter Veit, *Der Widerschein des Nazismus: Das Bild des Nationalsozialismus in der deutschsprachigen Presse Argentiniens, Brasiliens und Chiles 1932-1945* Berlin, 1997, 32.

²⁶ "Hindenburg", *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 5, no. 5 1925, 132.

²⁷ "Bergwesens", *Curriculum Vitae* [192].

²⁸ "Nietzsche", *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 5, no. 8 1925, 226. Keller also develops this idea in 'Der Führer', *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 5, no. 7 1925, 193-197.

²⁹ "Hindenburg", 129-130.

³⁰ Rinke, *relaciones*, 296.

³¹ "Die deutsche Einwanderung in Chile", *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 5, no. 9 (1925), 264, 262.

³² "Valdivias Wirtschaftsgeist", *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 5, no. 9 1925, 301.

Keller asserted, as a role model for Chile's 'political future', because [s]e desarrolló la ciudad sin la ayuda de ningún gobierno ni de capitales extranjeros. Todo lo que es se lo debe al esfuerzo de sus hijos. Y hoy Valdivia forma la ciudad más laboriosa del país. Es la única ciudad chilena que forma en su totalidad parte integrante del sistema económico chileno, porque en Valdivia no hay capital extranjero, y no hay empresa alguna que le pague tributos al extranjero³³.

Concepción stood, according to Keller, in sharp contrast to Valdivia. In comparison to the inhabitants of the latter, the natives of the former, while moving 'more elegantly', generally shied away from work. They only wanted to lead a 'pleasant life', without, however, working too hard, and therefore they were 'almost never industrialists'. Rather, they preferred to be lawyers, brokers, and maybe traders and big landowners, 'who use their estates as a summer retreat (*Sommeraufenthalt*)'³⁴.

Keller's explanations of these marked discrepancies between German-Chileans, on the one hand, and Spanish-Chileans, on the other, revealed his belief in Germanic superiority as well as his penchant for rural communities and closed German settlements, which were characteristic of the province of Valdivia. They also showed, moreover, the strong influence of Werner Sombart and above all Oswald Spengler on his thinking³⁵. Over the years, he would consistently refer to the works of these scholars, as well as other German authors and writers, particularly the economists Friedrich List and Johann Heinrich von Thunen³⁶. Explicitly naming Sombart's *Geschichte des modernen Kapitalismus*³⁷, which identified the Enlightenment ideas of reason and control of nature as the means by which men had laid the foundations of capitalism, he argued that the predominance of different social and economic concepts was responsible for the divergent

³³ "La Estructura Económica de Chile (contribución al problema monetario)", *Atenea*, vol. 2, no. 6 1925, 43.

³⁴ "Valdivias Wirtschaftsgeist", 301. In his description of the Spanish-Chilean population Keller expressed a position voiced by Francisco A. Encina in *Nuestra inferioridad económica* Santiago, 1986, 6th edition [1911], 90-94. Encina stated on page 91, however, that "No recuerdo haber leído uno solo de los cronistas en el cual no haya encontrado alguna alusión a las inclinaciones de los colonos a la ostentación", suggesting that Keller only took up widely shared resentments.

³⁵ Keller subsequently claimed that during his stay in Germany he "made friends with Spengler" and that after his return to Chile he "maintained correspondence with Spengler and supplied his mentor with information on the Indian civilizations of South America" Potashnik, *Nacismo*, 112-113. No evidence exists to verify this assertion. Keller's name does not appear in the collection of Spengler's correspondence, edited by Anton M. Koktanek as *Briefe: 1913-1936* Munich C. H. Beck, 1963. Nor does Spengler refer to Keller in his essay *Das Alter der amerikanischen Kulturen*, originally published in 1933. Cf. Oswald Spengler, *Reden und Aufsätze* Munich, 1937, 138-147.

³⁶ Keller repeatedly mentioned List 1789-1846 and his idea of protective tariffs for the development of the national economy and Thunen (1783-1850) and his concept of concentric agricultural circles around cities. For List see, for instance, "Estructura Económica", 43, and *Eterna crisis*, 166-168, and for Thunen, cf. "La doctrina sobre la agricultura de Heinrich von Thunen", *Atenea*, vol. 12, no. 59 1929, 395-409. Before Keller, Malaquías Concha had already popularised List's argument in Chile. See Joseph L. Love, "Economic Ideas and ideologies in Latin America since 1930", in Leslie Bethell, ed., *Ideas and Ideologies in Twentieth Century Latin America*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 210.

³⁷ "Valdivias Wirtschaftsgeist", 302.

evolutions of the ethnic groups. While the German immigrants, filled with the 'old Viking's urge to infinity and immensity' and the 'enormous drive for expansion'³⁸, brought from their homeland the spirit of modern capitalism, the Chilean population had been, and to a large extent still was, imbued with early capitalist ideas. In this worldview man was 'the measure of all things'. He followed his feelings and only worked 'to live on the return' of his capital, Keller maintained. The entire life was devoted to religion, arts, and social activities, while work was seen as a necessary evil and not as a possibility to achieve higher aims. The economy was, moreover, determined by the past and not geared to the future. The traditions of the forefathers were accepted uncritically; innovation and progress were completely alien to this lifestyle³⁹.

Although Keller accepted that modern capitalism had gained a foothold in Chile, he ascertained that only European traders, industrialists, and farmers in general and German ones in particular had initiated this development. They had filled a 'vacuum' created by the decline of the Spanish empire, a process that had started in the seventeenth century, when the 'entire nation was standardised' and the 'friction and the problems', which were necessary for progress, 'stopped'. The 'soul of the Spaniard', as Keller averred, 'was no longer stimulated and tormented'⁴⁰. Taking his inspiration from Spengler, who had asserted that the 'Spanish century' ended in the mid-17th century⁴¹, he consequently maintained that Chile, like all the other colonies in the Americas that had been dependent on the Spanish motherland, had only undergone an 'inauthentic (*unechte*) development' during the course of the last centuries. While outwardly it seemed that an 'original development' had taken place, it had only been an 'artificial' one, because it was neither 'instinctively (*triebhaft*) embedded in the national traditions' nor a genuine 'creation'⁴². Without paying too much attention to either details or historical accuracy, Keller thus asserted that Germans alone had established Chile's national industry, founded a modern army, and created the country's school system⁴³.

As the concept of decline indicated, Spengler's reflections were central to Keller's interpretation of Chilean history. In a lecture on the relevance of Spengler's ideas for Hispanic America, delivered at an event organised by the Instituto Cultural Chileno-Germano at the University of Chile in May 1927, he further developed his arguments outlined in the *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*. Although in front of the Spanish-speaking audience he was more restrained in his

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 301. For similar statements, cf. "El capitalismo primitivo", *Atenea*, vol. 2, no. 3 1925, 199-212.

⁴⁰ "Spanisch- und Deutsch-Chilenisch", *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 6, no. 6 1926, 221, 223.

⁴¹ Cf. Oswald Spengler, "Preussentum und Sozialismus", in Spengler, *Politische Schriften* Munich, 1933, 1-105. "Preussentum und Sozialismus" was originally published in 1919.

⁴² 'Spanisch- und Deutsch-Chilenisch', 221, 223.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 225. For the influence of German instructors, and especially Theodor Körner, on the Chile army, see Frederick M. Nunn, *The Military in Chilean History: Essays on Civil-Military Relations, 1810-1973* Albuquerque, 1976. For their role in the transformation of the education system, cf. William Sywak, 'Values in Nineteenth Century Chilean Education: The Germanic Reform of Chilean Public Education 1885-1910 Ph. D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1977.

comments about the outstanding role of the German immigrants, and did not distinguish between German-Chileans, on the one hand, and Spanish-Chileans, on the other, nevertheless Keller stressed the decisive influence of non-Spanish Europeans on the formation of the modern Chilean nation. He consequently deplored the imitative nature of its culture, arguing that [f]ueron los comerciantes e industriales anglosajones y los colonos alemanes los que vinieron a desarrollar nuestra economía. Fueron los sabios franceses y alemanes los que vinieron a formar nuestro ambiente espiritual. El iberoamericano solo conocía un ideal: París. Y con esa exaltación de la ‘cuidad luz’, trataba de ocultar su propia esterilidad, la ausencia de valores originales en su vida espiritual. Nuestra economía y nuestra vida espiritual han venido, así, a depender del extranjero, son una sombra, un reflejo de Europa. Nuestra vida está basada en un anhelo de imitar, no de crear. Siempre nos consideramos como inferiores y tratamos de ocultar esa inferioridad, presentándonos como perfectos y acabados europeos, es decir, imitando sus hábitos, su dicción, su estilo de vida, pero sin tratar de crear un fondo real sobre el cual descansa nuestra cultura⁴⁴.

Apart from a vaguely formulated hope that the nation might find its own, distinctive way by critically ‘adapting European methods’ to the Chilean reality and by ‘inculcating’ a creative spirit in the youth⁴⁵, on this occasion Keller did not clearly outline how the country could break free from this vicious circle of imitation and decline. In an article, published shortly afterwards in the *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, he revealed once more, however, that he had in fact the Germanisation of Chilean society in mind⁴⁶. Like other Latin American intellectuals inspired by Spengler, Keller did not advocate, hence, breaking ‘loose from intellectual mimicry and [exploring] what cultural assertion at the periphery might now involve’⁴⁷. Rather, reflecting his German National position, he saw the solution of Chile’s problems in the embrace of Germanic values and the strengthening of the German population.

He pursued this objective on two levels. Firstly, he wanted to solidify the German-Chilean community, putting, like Spengler, special emphasis on the youth⁴⁸. As in September 1925 and in June 1926, when he had appealed to the German-Chileans to defend their cultural traditions⁴⁹, Keller stressed, in

⁴⁴ *Spengler y la situación política cultural de la América Ibérica* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1927), 44-45.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁶ Romero, “Carlos Keller”, 116-117. Another illustrating example of Keller’s attitude can be found in his lecture about the situation of the Chilean university system delivered at the University of Concepción in August 1926. Keller explicitly described the German system as a role model for Chile. See *La Universidad Moderna (Conferencia dictada ante la Federación de Estudiantes el 16 de agosto de 1926)* Concepción, 1926, 20-36.

⁴⁷ Referring to the reception of Spengler, Richard M. Morse states that the “Proof of ‘decadence’ was precisely what Latin Americans needed”. See “The multiverse of Latin American identity, c. 1920 – c. 1970”, in Bethell, ed., *Ideas and Ideologies*, 93.

⁴⁸ For Spengler, see *Politische Pflichten der deutschen Jugend* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1924).

⁴⁹ “Das Deutschtum in Chile”, *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 5, no. 9 1925, 261-262; and “Spanisch- und Deutsch-Chilenisch”, 226-227.

accordance with other leading German-Chilean leaders who equally feared the disruptive influence of the rising Chilean nationalism on the community⁵⁰, that it was their duty to preserve their distinct identity and the 'spirit of their fathers, their loyalty, their enthusiasm, their stamina, their tenacious struggle'. They should, of course, find new answers to new problems, consistently strive for the improvement of their achievements, and continue to learn Spanish; but, above all, they should never forget their origins, as this was the only way to serve their country of birth and contribute, as in the past, to its progress⁵¹.

Following an earlier statement, in which he proclaimed that Chile would be the leading nation in Spanish America if it only had 'fifty cities like Valdivia'⁵², secondly, Keller also wanted to revive the immigration of Germans to Chile, a process that had faltered since the turn of the century⁵³. In contrast to the official Chilean settlement policy, which wanted to avoid the effect of homogeneous ethnic colonies characterised by low degrees of assimilation, i.e., the 'German South'⁵⁴, Keller preferred this type of settlement. Referring to the example of Llanquihue, he argued that this approach had produced the most successful results⁵⁵. Possibly encouraged by the establishment of a German colony in Peñaflores in 1929⁵⁶, his attention specifically focused on the Central Valley and, as he saw it, the unproductive *latifundios* in this region⁵⁷. 'At the instigation of the Deutsch-Chilenische[r] Bund', in June 1930 Keller consequently wrote a booklet in which he praised Chile as the land of the future that would welcome German colonists with open arms⁵⁸. Because of their 'efficiency', 'diligence', and 'perseverance' Germans were not only admired by the Chilean people, but also predestined to turn readily and cheaply available land into profitable farms within a few years⁵⁹. Moreover, German clubs, organisations, and societies flourished, offering recently arrived immigrants the possibility of making friends with like-minded German-Chileans⁶⁰. As for the situation at the national level, the prospective German colonists would come to a country, Keller's account implied, that was ahead of Germany as it no longer suffered from the 'parliamentary maladministration' the

⁵⁰ See Tietze de Soto, *Deutsche Einwanderung*, 95; and Rinke, 'relaciones', 266-268.

⁵¹ 'Zum Geleit', *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 7, no. 9-10 1927, 372-373.

⁵² "El problema de la colonización", *La Información*, vol. 11, no. 103 1926, 243.

⁵³ For figures, see Tietze de Soto, *Deutsche Einwanderung*, table 1, 16; and Rinke, "relaciones", 265.

⁵⁴ For a summary of the contemporary debate about immigration policies, see María Rosa Stabili, 'Las políticas migratorias de los gobiernos chilenos desde la segunda mitad del siglo pasado hasta la década de 1920', *Estudios migratorios latinoamericanos*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1986), 194-197.

⁵⁵ For the advantage of homogenous settlements over mixed ones and the praise of the German colonists around Llanquihue, see his "Los alemanes en Llanquihue", *El Mercurio*, 22 October 1927, 1+7. Also cf. "deutsche Einwanderung", 264-266, where Keller laments, with some justification, the failure of ethnically heterogeneous settlements in Chiloé.

⁵⁶ Rinke, "relaciones", 266.

⁵⁷ See 'Geopolitik', *Deutsche Monatshefte für Chile*, vol. 9, no. 3-4 1929, 60-65.

⁵⁸ *Chile: Ein Führer durch das Land und seine Bewohner* Santiago, 1930, 6th edition, 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31, 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11, 61.

Weimar Republic experienced at the time. The regime of General Carlos Ibáñez, which was based on a 'strong national spirit', had first and foremost the 'common weal' on its mind, and consequently acted decisively 'against every senseless doctrinal and merely inflammatory enterprise'⁶¹.

Because of the excessively German nature of his proposals as well as the economic and political upheavals that would soon rock Chile, his ambitious plan did not receive the response he had hoped for⁶². The political anarchy that followed Ibáñez's fall from power in July 1931, together with the profound economic crisis that afflicted the country in the early 1930s, undermined Chile's attractiveness for prospective immigrants. Moreover, in 1931 the national government banned new immigration because of the rising rate of unemployment⁶³. His involvement in the DCB also came to an end; the booklet was his last contribution to the cause of the German-Chilean association and the local Germandom. Implicitly admitting that his previous strategy to germanise his native country had failed, Keller began to distance himself from his narrow, sectarian German sub-culture and took a broader, national view. Building on the positive reception of his lecture about Spengler, to which Alberto Edwards referred to in *La fronda aristocrática*⁶⁴, and benefiting from the complete ignorance of his contemporaries about his German National past, in the next two years he established his own reputation as a Chilean nationalist thinker and the last representative of the *Literatura de la crisis*. In view of his previous works, this shift marked the crucial turning point in Keller's intellectual and political career.

CHILE'S ETERNAL CRISIS

The backgrounds, political orientations, objectives, and professions of the representatives of the *Literatura de la crisis* varied considerably, yet they invariably 'proclaimed the existence of an intense national crisis' and were united by 'the grief, the emotive perception of the social disease that afflicted the fatherland, [and] the feeling of powerlessness in the face of a negative historical period'. While for some, most notably Alberto Edwards, it was a question of decadence, for others it was either a social crisis, or one of the education system, or an economic one, or a racial one; Nicolás Palacios, author of *Raza chilena* (1904) and Francisco Encina, author of *Nuestra inferioridad económica* (1911) were the best-known representatives of the latter current⁶⁵. With *La eterna crisis chilena*, the book that made him known to a wider audience, Keller joined the group of those writers and thinkers who interpreted 'Chile's history as one of inexorable decline from the great days of the Portalian republic, when strong

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁶² Romero, "Carlos Keller", 125.

⁶³ Rinke, "relaciones", 265.

⁶⁴ *La fronda aristocrática en Chile* Santiago, 1992, 13th edition [1928], 95-96.

⁶⁵ Cristián Gazmuri Riveros, *Testimonios de una crisis, Chile: 1900-1925* Santiago, 1979, 9-11.

government had allegedly brought order, hierarchy and progress to the nation'⁶⁶. As he stated in the book, published immediately after the downfall of Ibáñez's dictatorship in July 1931, the Parliamentary Republic, which had taken the place of the oligarchic regime with the revolution of 1891, had been a distinctively negative experience for the country; it had been the era de los grandes escándalos y negociados públicos. La intervención del Estado se limitaba a un mínimo. No era posible gobernar y administrar al país, pues lo impedía el Parlamento. La Nación era el botín de guerra de los más fuertes, audaces y ricos. Las personalidades honradas y decentes se retiraban de la vida pública⁶⁷.

In accordance with this approach, which was undoubtedly more in tune with the conventional conservative interpretation of Chilean history than the assessments put forward in the German-Chilean publications, he stated that the period between the intervention of the armed forces in 1924 and Ibáñez's overthrow seven years later was 'the first great attempt' at ending 'the reigning chaos'⁶⁸. The intervention of the armed forces, which had not only removed President Arturo Alessandri from power but had also smoothed the way for the adoption of a new constitution that shifted the balance back to the executive, had been the starting point for the return to Chile's glorious days. Echoing Alberto Edwards⁶⁹, the situation became even more promising once Carlos Ibáñez, who had played an important role in these events, subsequently emerged as the new strongman of Chilean politics. Keller praised the fallen dictator, because he had effectively sidelined the political parties that he held responsible for the alleged decline of nation; with their exclusion from power 'shady deals, the distribution of the electoral plunder, the rule (*reino*) of the shallow and empty cliché, [and] the excitement of the masses for personal aims' had ceased to undermine the Chilean nation⁷⁰. Under his rule the country had been transformed into 'a modern state, completely different from anything that existed before the revolution' of 1924. The state no longer belonged to 'any social class but treated them on an equal basis'. In addition, his regime had created organismos de control de empresas particulares [...], con el fin de proteger al consumidor y al pequeño y grande capitalista que invertían su dinero en esas empresas; se crearon nuevas industrias mediante el pago de primas y la protección aduanera; se fomentó ampliamente la agricultura; se le dio un gran desarrollo al crédito, creando nuevas instituciones fiscales y semifiscales⁷¹. Despite these positive reforms, Ibáñez's regime had not gone far enough, Keller argued. As against Italian Fascism, it had,

⁶⁶ Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* London/New York: Verso, 1999, 232. For a detailed discussion of the main proponents of the theory of Chile's decline, cf. Cristián Gazmuri Riveros, "La idea de decadencia nacional y el pensamiento político conservador chileno en el siglo XX", *Estudios Sociales*, vol. 28-29, no. 2-3 1981, 33-54.

⁶⁷ *Eterna crisis*, 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁹ *Fronda aristocrática*, 243-279.

⁷⁰ *Eterna crisis*, 32.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

first of all, failed 'politically to organise the public opinion'⁷²; it had, moreover, also missed the opportunity to change the nation's spiritual outlook. Repeating previous statements, the former director of the DCB still lamented the persistence of primitive capitalist concepts, underlined the significance of Spain's decline for the development of Chile, and emphasised the lack of critical thinking⁷³. Besides, Keller once again stressed the decisive contributions of European colonists – particularly British, French, and German ones– to the economic progress and intellectual modernisation of the country since independence and, in accordance with this interpretation, reaffirmed that the nation 'needs an immigrant who furnishes us with spiritual capital, because our eternal crisis is, basically, a spiritual problem and not a material [one]', *tiene su causa más profunda y verdadera en nuestro cerebro. Es algo independiente, absolutamente independiente de toda cuestión doctrinaria. Podemos organizar nuestro Estado sobre base comunista, socialista, liberal o conservadora: si no logramos modificar nuestra organización cerebral, la crisis no desaparecerá*⁷⁴.

At the same time, Keller rejected the notion that Chile's problems were in any way related to the ethnic composition of its population, as Francisco Encina, for instance, had argued⁷⁵. He explicitly dismissed this idea, stating that *la constitución racial de los pueblos es una cuestión de escaso interés, en comparación con otros problemas más importantes. Lo que les da su uniformidad a los pueblos modernos es la cultura que domina en ellos, entendiendo por cultura no algo fijo y estable, sino algo que se encuentra en constante movimiento y transformación*⁷⁶.

In order to overcome this 'eternal crisis', Keller called for, above all, a spiritual transformation of the Chilean population, as it had demonstrated its inability to adapt to modern capitalism, lacking 'the precision, the convictions and the eagerness to innovate and improve'⁷⁷. The conclusion that Chile needed people who were upright, hard working, and filled with the will to progress honestly⁷⁸, indicated that he still had primarily German immigrants and the embrace of German values in mind.

Keller also envisioned reforms of the economic system that were more far-reaching than those implemented by Ibáñez. While his regime, benefiting from strengthened international demand for nitrate and expanded production of copper as well as the influx of foreign capital in the form of private investments and loans, had implemented a substantial public works programme, dramatically expanded and reformed the educational system, enacted protective tariffs, established the Institute for Industrial Credit, and obtained legislation on agricultural colonisation

⁷² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 18, 45-56, 87-90, 103-108, 184-185.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 273, 319.

⁷⁵ See *Nuestra inferioridad económica*, 32-33.

⁷⁶ *Eterna crisis*, 312.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 319.

and a limited land reform, it had not reduced Chile's vulnerability to international markets. In addition, the debts of the national government had markedly increased as a result of the investments in the infrastructure⁷⁹. Under the impression of the world economic crisis, which particularly hurt Chile's main export articles –nitrate and copper–, Keller proposed measures that aimed at the restructuring of the 'essentially inorganic' national economy, decreasing the dependency on products 'that reacted strongly to every disturbance that arose in the world market'⁸⁰. Apart from the proposal to increase the population by means of immigration, seen as the necessary precondition for the development of a national industry and the re-establishment of the balance of payments, he essentially stated that the country ought to increase its exports and decrease its reliance on imports and foreign capital. In order to achieve the first goal, he suggested focusing on agricultural products, reasserting that the Central Valley had all the 'necessary natural conditions' to be transformed into the nation's 'vegetable garden and orchard'⁸¹. For the realisation of the latter, Keller pleaded for import restrictions and the formation of national capital, especially through forced savings schemes⁸².

In *La eterna crisis chilena* Keller had reaffirmed his penchant for an authoritarian and interventionist state as well as his marked dislike of both democracy and free-market capitalism. Within only one year, during the course of which Chile had staggered from one political crisis to the next and the economy had shown no signs of recovery, Keller's attitude became markedly more radical. The political upheavals that shook Chile in the months following Ibáñez's fall from power reinforced his authoritarian and elitist convictions. In his second book, *Un país al garete*, he maintained that the solution of the current crisis depended on 'a strong personality', 'a truly fiendish' leader, 'who manages to unite a group of selected individuals' whose support would enable him to 'carry out an efficient job'⁸³. The modern state could not function, Keller asserted, as long as political parties and special interest groups, which had blossomed after disappearance of the restrictions imposed by the Ibáñez regime, torpedoed the collective will and pursued their own particularistic objectives: *El Estado moderno no puede aceptar la existencia de tales consejos. Sus funciones las debe encomendar a personalidades responsables y no a cuerpos ejecutivos irresponsables. En el Estado moderno no cabe otra forma de organización que la jerarquía burocrática, rígidamente constituida, con amplias facultades de mando para los ejecutores y plena responsabilidad por su actuación*⁸⁴.

Keller, hence, did not simply endorse conservative ideas, but proposed his own version of modernity, selectively borrowing from European fascism. A

⁷⁹ Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*. New York, 1988, 2nd edition, 220-224.

⁸⁰ *Eterna crisis*, 41.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 165-185.

⁸³ *Un país al garete*, 29.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

concomitant proposal was the further, albeit unspecified, restriction of the franchise –already limited to around ten per cent of the population, because of the exclusion of women and illiterates– and the adoption of a system that gave those who produced the nation’s wealth a genuine say in political decision-making⁸⁵.

The former director of the DCB did not only speak up for an authoritarian transformation of the polity, however. He also advocated the direct involvement of the state in the economy. Reflecting his fundamental assumption that liberal capitalism was at an end, he stated that the state should ‘organise and direct the individualistic economy’ –‘from the production and circulation to the distribution and consumption’–, slowly ‘getting individuals used to thinking collectively’. It was necessary, Keller underlined, ‘to reunite the common interests around a rational organisation’⁸⁶. Since these proposals dangerously smacked of nationalisation, he was at pains to stress the difference between his ideas and ‘Russian communism’, pointing out that [p]ara el desarrollo de la economía nacional, se necesitará en el más amplio sentido la iniciativa privada, sin perjuicio de que el Estado se convierta en empresario subsidiario en el caso de aquellas iniciativas necesarias que no sean atendidas por los particulares. Como regla general, el Estado deberá regular, fiscalizar, controlar y también dirigir la economía, sin necesidad de que tome por su cuenta la realización del plan⁸⁷.

Although it is not entirely clear when *Un país al garete* was exactly published, it is highly likely that it came out before he started his political career in the Movimiento Nacional Socialista; as against his subsequent booklet, *Como salir de la crisis*, which was based on a lecture he had given at the Academia de Guerra in mid-August 1932, he did not yet refer to any movement that could have led the country out of its profound crisis and into a better and brighter future. The situation would soon change, however. For the best part of the 1930s, Keller would play a prominent role in the MNS, the movement that united ‘those who have succeeded in preserving [...] their moral integrity during these years of slaughter’. It was this group that fulfilled his demand for a ‘new political front’ que constituya un baluarte inexpugnable, sólido en su estructura, disciplinado en sus procedimientos, que someta a sus miembros a un riguroso control moral y que divulge y estudie el sentido de nuestra época, a fin de que el Gobierno no se encuentre en un espacio vacío, sino que su voluntad se transforme en acción social⁸⁸.

The emerging Nacista movement would thus provide a new elite, replacing the traditional oligarchy that had ruled the country since independence.

With the involvement in the group that would dominate the space on the extreme right of Chile’s political system during the remainder of the decade, Keller entered a new phase in his life. He no longer would be a social critic, who simply lamented the country’s decline, but turned into the ideologue of an organisation that promised the reawakening of the Chilean nation on the basis of its fascist

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁸ *Cómo salir de la crisis* Santiago, 1932, 31.

message⁸⁹. Seen against the background of his increasingly angry denunciations of the political and economic situation and his repeated calls for radical reforms of state and society, this process followed a certain logic. At a time when Chile experienced the rapid succession of unstable governments while the international prestige of German Nazism was rising because of Adolf Hitler's unprecedented success in the presidential election of 1932, for Keller and the other Germanophile young men who set up the Movimiento Nacional Socialista in April 1932— not least the German-Chilean Jorge González von Marées⁹⁰—fascism appeared as the wave of the future. As Keller had pointed out in, *inter alia*, *La eterna crisis chilena*, Chile had to substitute the 'mechanical imitation' of foreign ideas with 'an immediate participation in the Western spirit of the era'⁹¹. And this demand he attempted to achieve with his activity in the MNS. The Nacista movement seemed to offer him the opportunity to carry out his authoritarian, interventionist, and elitist convictions and to pursue, with different means, the Germanisation of Chilean society he had failed to achieve so far.

THE APOSTLE OF NATIONAL REAWAKENING

Besides González, the undisputed *Jefe* of the Chilean fascists who shared Keller's assumption that Chile's crisis 'was directly linked to the world-wide crisis of capitalism' and 'that liberalism was the chief cause of moral decadence in Chile'⁹², the former director of the DCB was the most important member of the movement. As the 'second chief of Nacismo'⁹³, he also exerted considerable influence on its ideological direction. He not only edited the Nacista organ, *Trabajo*, from its foundation in April 1933 until early 1937⁹⁴, but also published almost single-handedly *Acción Chilena* between January 1934 and January 1938. In this magazine, which at first was not officially linked to the Nacista movement but as of June 1935 appeared as the 'official organ of the Department for the Preparation of the Leadership'⁹⁵, he unceasingly explained the programme of the MNS, attempting to show the superiority and in fact inevitability of fascism. As against the articles and editorials published in *Trabajo*, which above all addressed daily issues important for the political struggle of the movement, his publications

⁸⁹ On the MNS, see Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* Stanford, 1999, 143-192; and Sznajder, "Chilean National Socialism", 269-296.

⁹⁰ On González's background, see Rodrigo Allende González and María Piedad Allende Edwards, *El Jefe: La Vida de Jorge González von Marées* Santiago, 1990, 23-43. Young "González", 312 states that the leader of the MNS was "brought up in a household which savored not a little of the burgherdom of Imperial Germany: proper, proud, ambitious, stern, and moralist - characteristics he likewise exhibited in his own personality".

⁹¹ *Eterna crisis*, 56.

⁹² Potashnik, "Nacismo", 137.

⁹³ *Zig-Zag*, 11 September 1936, 75.

⁹⁴ *Acción Chilena*, vol. 6, no. 1 1937, IV. His successor was Diego Lira Vergara.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 3 1935, 133.

in *Acción Chilena* were more general in nature, and they thus provide good insights into both his world-view and the ideology of the organisation.

Following his earlier statements about the decline of the nation since the defeat of the oligarchic regime in the civil war of 1891, Keller characterised Chile's political and economic situation in bleak and apocalyptic terms. Without even mentioning Ibáñez's dictatorship, which he had previously praised for its modernising initiatives, he asserted that the last forty years of 'formalist democracy' had been an unmitigated disaster for the country, leading Chile al borde de un precipicio. La nación se encuentra totalmente anarquizada y dividida. El parlamento se descompone en una infinidad de grupos y subgrupos, que defienden intereses particulares o que tratan de participar en el reparto del botín que representan el presupuesto y los contratos fiscales. [...] El Presidente de la República no es respetado en su cargo. Existe animosidad en contra de las fuerzas armadas. La alta política ha cedido su lugar a la polémica folletinesca⁹⁶.

Given the profundity of the crisis, he argued in favour of radical solutions; the last resort in this situation was the adoption of European fascism to Chilean reality, as it presented the only viable option. Fascism, Keller claimed, was superior to liberal democracy as well as communism. While the age of democracy was simply over, and it would not return, communism –the 'great antagonist (*contradictor*)' of fascism– would only aggravate the current situation, as it sought to 'materialise the world' and 'to humble all individuals to the level of the most wretched one so that its will' was obeyed⁹⁷. Fascism, on the other hand, tiene fe en la fuerza del espíritu y cree que solo él da algún sentido a la vida. Desea, además, que la fuerza del espíritu restablezca en la colectividad el sentido de la responsabilidad de los dirigentes y dignifique la vida de las masas. Pretende realizar la selección de los más aptos, a fin de que ellos dirijan a la colectividad, no en su beneficio particular, sino cumpliendo una misión divina que la comunidad les ha confiado⁹⁸.

As the emotive references to 'the leaders' and 'the masses' indicated, Keller envisioned a regime that was ruled by an undisputed leader who, in turn, presided over an omnipotent state. Although he attempted to conceal the true nature of his intentions by asserting that this state would not restrict private initiatives, nor would it give orders –'like the Russian state'– that had to be executed slavishly, he nevertheless made clear that the 'individual freedom [would] only [be] recognised inasmuch as it [was] in harmony with the national interest.' The state, i.e., its executive arm that he wanted to strengthen, would act as the ultimate and undisputed arbitrator, reserving the right to make 'the final decision' in all matters⁹⁹. Moreover, these decisions would not be reached through discussion and voting in parliament (which would be replaced by an institution based on corporatist representation)¹⁰⁰; they solely depended 'on the intuitions of the

⁹⁶ "Acción Chilena", *Acción Chilena*, vol. 1, no. 1 1934, 4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁹⁹ "La destrucción de la economía liberalista IV", *Acción Chilena*, vol. 1, no. 5 1934, 145.

¹⁰⁰ For corporatist regime, cf. *Acción Chilena*, número especial, vol. 5., no. 2 1936, 90-94.

outstanding men of our time, who determine new ideals and organise the people so that they, after having been filled with enthusiasm for them, are in the position to carry them out'¹⁰¹.

Keller left not doubt that Jorge González was one of those 'great men' of the era; because of his 'genius', he was, in fact, 'the only hope of this completely destroyed (*en ruinas*) country'. With his superior intellect, the ideologue of the Nacista movement tirelessly proclaimed, the leader of the Chilean fascists penetró directamente al fondo, analiza el valor moral y la capacidad de acción y coloca a cada cual en su lugar, sin atenerse a su posición social. Y estas decisiones se inspiran en un amplio y generoso humanismo, que corrige errores con criterio superior y comprensivo, pero sin prescindir, en caso necesario, de vigorosa energía¹⁰².

The evocation of the myth of Diego Portales was a concomitant of this endeavour to portray his leader as a worldly saviour of the Chilean nation¹⁰³, but on more than one occasion Keller even went so far as to compare González to Jesus, asserting that the *Jefe* was the 'symbol of the fatherland', he was 'the Christ of politics put on his cross, which he has to carry with bravery and sacrifice'¹⁰⁴. This comparison was all the more remarkable because at the same time the Nacistas claimed that their ideology was based on Catholic values and that they would defend Catholicism against the onslaught of the materialistic world¹⁰⁵.

In accordance with his remarks about the nature of fascism, and reflecting earlier statements, Keller put great emphasis on the spiritual and moral transformation of the Chilean population and the need to instil into them a mentality that recognised 'the existence of a higher unity (*unidad superior*)', the nation. Signalling another radical shift from his earlier position, immigration did not play any significant role in this process¹⁰⁶. The main means to achieve this goal was the Servicio de Trabajo, an institution that, modelled on the German example, would bring together young Chileans from all social classes who would jointly participate in social, cultural, and work programmes. This experience of togetherness would not only forge a sense of 'national unity', Keller maintained. Even more important from the point of view of the leading Chilean fascist, it would result in lo que genuinamente debe llamarse un pueblo, es decir, un conjunto orgánico, estructurado, inspirado en ideales comunes, jerarquizado de acuerdo con el principio de la eficiencia social, dispuesto a reconocer y encumbrar los verdaderos valores, en vez de odiarlos y perseguirlos, como ocurre en la actualidad¹⁰⁷.

Despite his claim that Nacismo was a progressive force that did not look to the past to solve Chile's current problems¹⁰⁸, important concepts underlying this new

¹⁰¹ "Kaleidoscopio económico", *Acción Chilena*, vol. 1, no. 13 1934, 396.

¹⁰² "El Jefe", *Acción Chilena*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1935), 77-79.

¹⁰³ Cf. "Portales", *Acción Chilena*, vol. 2, no. 5 1934, 129-160.

¹⁰⁴ *Acción Chilena*, número especial, 86.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. "Razas, pueblos y culturas", *Acción Chilena*, vol. 6, no. 1 1937, 9.

¹⁰⁷ "El Servicio de Trabajo", *Acción Chilena*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1935), 30-31.

¹⁰⁸ "Economía liberalista IV", 147.

mentality were, nonetheless, distinctively conservative, as he stressed the segregation between the sexes and advocated the perpetuation of social differences. The Servicio de Trabajo, for example, only aimed at the male youth. While they would be united in ‘labour camps’, young women would not be separated from their families but only work during the day, especially in schools, hospitals, and the public health sector; their social service would, moreover, aim at the formation of ‘mothers’ who were conscious ‘of their duties and prepared to fulfil them’¹⁰⁹. His exposition about the education of children shows, on the other hand, that Keller opposed the idea of social progress. Children should only learn what they needed to get on in their natural surroundings: Nos debe interesar que la niña del campo aprenda a acomodar bien su casa, mantenerla aseada y en buen estado, dotarla de ciertas comodidades y preparar una comida higiénica y nutritiva; [...] Y si el hijo del inquilino es educado en el sentido de desarrollar el espíritu de observación, de mantener disciplina (sobre todo, consigo mismo), de economizar, para formar un capital y poder surgir, de saber realizar con precisión las faenas del campo, y si, además, dispone de los conocimientos generales que necesita para entenderse con los demás, ello será de mayor importancia para su vida que dominar perfectamente la gramática o haber malgastado su tiempo en aprender una lengua extranjera¹¹⁰.

In order to avoid the impression that the rejection of an ‘intellectual education’ for children of farmers was based on the prejudices of a member of the educated classes, Keller brought an economic argument to bear, claiming that it would probably lead to the migration of young people to the cities¹¹¹. Chile’s future, he still maintained however, depended on the development of the agricultural sector, the future ‘spinal column of the whole national economic organism’¹¹². Instead of weakening it by raising false hopes, it had to be strengthened through policies that aimed at the support of owners of medium and small properties, for instance the setting up of co-operatives and the construction of an adequate infrastructure¹¹³. Only this sector had the potential, he pointed out, to produce ‘great surpluses of exportable products’ that, in turn, would reduce the country’s dependency on nitrate and copper exports and create the preconditions for establishing a sustainable national industry based on agricultural products¹¹⁴. The ‘economic independence’ he envisioned, thus, did not amount to a ‘stubborn autarchy’; it merely wanted to ‘avoid that the disturbances of the world-market would affect [the Chilean] market’¹¹⁵. Ignoring the obvious contradiction between this aim and the proposal to expand the integration of the Chilean economy into the global economy, Keller stated that the Nacistas ‘did not take the view’ that Chile deba

¹⁰⁹ “Servicio”, 39.

¹¹⁰ “Educación primaria II”, *Acción Chilena*, vol. 1, no. 7 1934, 204-205.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹¹² “Plan General de Acción Agraria Nacista”, *Acción Chilena*, vol. 5, no. 1. 1936, 40.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 34-38.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹⁵ “Orientación de la política económica del Nacismo”, *Acción Chilena*, vol. 7, no. 1 1938, 13.

transformarse en un país intergralmente industrializado que llegue a abastecerse en todo sentido. Muchos industrias y especialmente, la pesada, no podrán desarrollarse debidamente en nuestro territorio, porque disponemos de una población demasiado pequeña¹¹⁶.

While the inconsistency of Keller's thinking in this matter in all probability had no immediate impact on the political fortunes of the MNS, the fact that Nacismo wanted to bring about a national regeneration on the basis of a new, as he saw it, universal phenomenon –fascism– that it adapted to the national circumstances certainly did negatively influence its development. As the decade progressed and fears about the Third Reich's imperialist aspirations grew in Chile, the undeniable ideological and formal resemblance to German Nazism, not least the name¹¹⁷, proved to be a considerable liability for the Chilean fascists. Its opponents on the left, and to a lesser extent the conservative administration of Arturo Alessandri, who had assumed the presidency for a second time in late 1932, repeatedly denounced the group as a forefront organisation of international fascism. Leading Nacistas angrily rejected these accusations, and there is indeed no indication that the movement received substantial payments from the Nazis¹¹⁸. Yet, as Keller's statement exemplarily indicates, they consistently struggled to reconcile their respects for the Führer and the Duce, on the one hand, and the insistence on the ideological originality of their movement, on the other: En verdad, si el Nacismo imitara la obra de Hitler y Mussolini, no haría más que copiar los mejores modelos que actualmente ofrece la vieja Europa. Pero tal imitación ni siquiera existe. Ni el fascismo italiano ni el nacional-socialismo alemán tienen la concepción del Nacismo sobre la unidad cultural cristiano-occidental, como base de la vida espiritual; ninguna de esas dos doctrinas europeas [...] ha llegado a despersonalizar el principio de la Jefatura, como lo hace el Nacismo; sus ideas sobre la estructura política son netamente chilenas[.]¹¹⁹.

At the same time, Keller's behaviour as well as the group's initially strong support amongst the German-Chilean community of southern Chile undermined his, and other Nacistas', efforts to legitimise the position of the MNS¹²⁰. *Acción Chilena* showed a strong interest in European fascism, featuring a number of contributions about the institutions and alleged achievements of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy as well as articles by prominent German Nazis¹²¹. Just as in

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁷ For similarities, see Allende González and Allende Edwards, *Jefe*, 55-56.

¹¹⁸ For propaganda material cf. Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Aufklärungsausschuss Hamburg-Bremen, no. 7, Correspondence with Auslandsorganisation, vol. 1, 1936, Ibero-Amerika-Verlag to Landesgruppe Chile, Hamburg, 10 June 1936.

¹¹⁹ *Acción Chilena*, número especial, 120.

¹²⁰ I discuss this relationship, and how it changed over time, in "The Chilean Movimiento Nacional Socialista, the German-Chilean Community, and the Third Reich, 1932-1939" (unpublished manuscript, 2001).

¹²¹ See Richard Korherr, 'Mussolini', vol. 1, no. 1 (1934), 19-23; Hans Hinkel, 'Hitler', vol. 1, no. 1 1934, 24-26; G. Rinzetti, "La organización corporativa de Italia", vol. 1, no. 3 1934, 76-82; G. Kohn, 'Nueva organización del trabajo en Alemania', vol. 1, no. 9 1934, 270-273; Alfred Gerberding, 'S.A. y S.A.', vol. 1, no. 11 1934, 343-344; Walter Buch, 'El Fuehrer', vol. 1, no. 6 1934, 181-183;

the *Bundeskalendar* of the DCB, so in the programmatic journal of the MNS Keller also consistently published essays of, or about, the Weimar Republic's anti-democratic critics¹²². In addition, Keller, who unashamedly defended the persecution of Jews in Germany, averting that the new regime only wanted to reduce their influence in accordance with the country's 'ethnic composition'¹²³, even spoke at a meeting of the local Nazi party in Santiago in December 1934. At the gathering, which high-ranking German diplomats attended¹²⁴, the MNS's ideologue described Nazism as the force that had resurrected the German 'national traditions (*Volkstum*)' and turned them into the 'source of all strength'¹²⁵. In accordance with these declarations, a few weeks later he hailed Hitler's 'admirable economic achievements' in *Trabajo*¹²⁶.

In view of the limited political success of an overtly elitist and anti-popular programme and the consistent accusations that the group only imitated foreign models, by the mid-1930s the MNS modified its positions. The group began to stress its national roots, reinforced its interest in the economic and social situation of the population –after assuming their seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the (Chilean) autumn of 1937 the three Nacistas submitted legislative projects that demanded an immediate stop to the repayment of foreign debts, the imposition of a tax on copper exports, and a state programme to improve the housing situation of the working classes¹²⁷–, and assumed increasingly critical attitudes towards both Nazi Germany as well as the German colonists. Just as he had praised the superiority of fascism and underlined the exemplariness of Nazism, so Keller, remaining faithful to his belief in the *Jefe*, defended this change of direction. The former director of the DCB, who later remembered that during his propaganda tours for the MNS he had been 'warmly received by large numbers of the German colony in Osorno and elsewhere'¹²⁸, did not even defend them against González's subsequent accusation that they refused to learn Spanish and paid homage to the swastika¹²⁹. In May 1938, he moreover

Otto Dietrich, "Filosofía del nacional-socialismo", vol. 3, no. 2 1935, 69-76. Buch was head of the NSDAP's party court and Dietrich Hitler's press adviser. From 1938 onwards he was permanent secretary in Joseph Goebbels' ministry of propaganda.

¹²² A. E. Guenther, "Spengler no acertó", vol. 1, no. 3 1934, 87-91; Oswald Spengler, "Rusia nuevamente asiática", vol. 1, no. 5 1934, 148-150; Moeller van den Bruck, "Marxismo", vol. 1, no. 11 1934, 335-339; Hans Schwarz, "Moeller van den Bruck", vol. 1, no. 12 1934, 367-373; Moeller van den Bruck, "La belleza italiana", vol. 1, no. 12 1934, 373-374; Leonhard Oberascher, "Othmar Spann como precursor", vol. 3, no. 1 1934, 22-26.

¹²³ *Hoy*, 4 August 1933, 26. See also his article "Razas", 2, 4+5. Although on this occasion he characterised the racial doctrines of German National Socialism as a "pseudo-philosophy", Keller defended the anti-Semitic legislation of the Third Reich.

¹²⁴ *Deutsche Zeitung für Chile*, 3 December 1934, 2.

¹²⁵ *Westküsten-Beobachter*, 13 December 1934, 69.

¹²⁶ 31 January 1935, 4.

¹²⁷ See Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones Ordinarias 1937*, 24 May 1937, 56-59; 8 June 1937, 401; and 14 July 1937, 1145-1147.

¹²⁸ As quoted in Potashnik, "Nacismo", 247.

¹²⁹ Archivo Nacional (Archivo Siglo XX), *Archivo del Ministerio del Interior*, Providencias Confidenciales, 6-126, 1938, Emilio Jeltsch Sánchez (Subcomisario Jefe Provincial) to Prefectura de la III. Zona de Investigaciones, Concepción, and Intendencia de la Provincia de Valdivia, Valdivia, 26 March 1938.

justified González's break with the MNS's fascist identity, emphasising, in open contradiction to his publications as the ideologue of the movement, 'its anti-dogmatism': En efecto, el Nacismo es tal vez el único movimiento político del mundo que no tiene programa. Jamás ha aceptado aferrarse a principios dogmáticos. Su esencia es vida, es una actitud espiritual y una acción consiguiente, frente a las situaciones y los problemas que tiene que afrontar. [...] En lugar de dogmas el Nacismo tiene una sólida armazón espiritual, y su auge sin interrupción es una consecuencia de ella. Pero esa armazón no se asienta en los artículos de un programa, sino en la encarnación diaria de ese espíritu en cada una de las manifestaciones de la vida del Nacismo¹³⁰.

Despite his protestations, the decision hardly was, however, an expression of the movement's 'solid spiritual body'. Rather, this U-turn underlined the complete failure of the Chilean fascists to find a niche in the country's relatively well-developed, albeit limited, political system, which, moreover, had become increasingly polarised between the conservative sectors backing President Alessandri and the opposition forces united in the Popular Front. Since reaching its apex in the parliamentary election of May 1937, when it had received around 3, 5 per cent of the national vote and elected three deputies, the MNS stagnated. With this decision the group finally hoped, then, to break out of its political isolation, reacting, as Keller conceded, to the 'present-day constellation of forces'¹³¹.

Initially, the strategy seemed to pay off. At last the MNS was an acceptable partner for the Unión Socialista, a small breakaway group set up by pro-Ibáñista members of the Socialist party in November 1937¹³², and the former dictator himself, who had spurned the advances of Nacismo since its unilateral declaration of support of his presidential aspirations in October 1937¹³³. At the beginning of June 1938 these groups, led by the MNS, formed the Alianza Popular Libertadora as a platform for Ibáñez's candidacy. On closer examination the decision turned out to be less successful, however, as the Chilean fascists lost credibility and criticism mounted within the movement that ultimately led to the formation of the Partido Nacional Fascista¹³⁴. In addition, Keller's relationship with González suffered, notwithstanding his declared support of the *Jefe*. The ideologue of the MNS distanced himself from González. The latter did not even inform 'the second Chief of Nacismo' about the preparation for the Nacista coup¹³⁵, which took place

¹³⁰ "Una opinión algo precipitada", *Trabajo*, 31 May 1938, 3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³² On the Unión Socialista, see Andrew Barnard, 'The Chilean Communist Party, 1922-1947' Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1977, 194-195; Paul Drake, *Socialism and Populism in Chile, 1932-1952* Urbana/Chicago/London Univ. of Illinois Press, 1978, 185; and Tomás Moulian and Isabel Torres Dujisin, *Discusiones entre honorables: las candidaturas presidenciales de la derecha, 1938-1946* Santiago: FLACSO, 1989, 109-112.

¹³³ For nomination and support, see *Trabajo*, 13 October 1937, 1; 14 October 1937, 1; 21 October 1937, 1; and 30 January 1938, 3.

¹³⁴ On the reaction to this decision and the formation of the Partido Nacional Fascista, see Marcus Klein, 'The New Voices of Chilean Fascism and the Popular Front, 1938 - 1942', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 2001, 349-359.

¹³⁵ Enrique Zorrilla, *La profecía política de Vicente Huidobro*. Parral, 1996, 115.

on 5 September 1938, one day after the official declaration of Ibáñez's presidential candidacy.

In the aftermath of the disastrous insurrection Keller, together with other leading Nacistas, still rejected González's offer to resign as the leader of the MNS¹³⁶. Yet, an unbridgeable rift had opened. The transformation of the Nacista movement into the Vanguardia Popular Socialist in early January 1939 was the event that finally triggered off the complete break between the two founding fathers of Nacismo. Keller was unwilling to follow his *Jefe* into an organisation that embraced democratic values and endorsed the administration of Pedro Aguirre Cerda, the candidate of the Popular Front who had, with the explicit endorsement of González, succeeded in the presidential election. For him, just as for the other signatories of a declaration that was published in the santiaguino press in early 1939, the ideological changes amounted to nothing less than a betrayal of the ideals he had fought for during the last years¹³⁷. With the public reputation of the Vanguardia, Keller ended his political career as well as his attempt germanise his native country, an aim that he had, in fact, already given up with the renunciation of the MNS's fascist identity. Henceforth, he again applied himself to historical and sociological studies, returning to his roots.

FINAL REMARKS

A few weeks before his death at the age of seventy-six in February 1974, Keller once more demonstrated that throughout his life, and the failure of his political adventures and the disastrous consequences of fascism notwithstanding, he had remained an unrepentant supporter of authoritarian and anti-democratic ideas. In the second edition of *La locura de Juan Bernales*¹³⁸, the novel in which he treated his experience in the MNS, Keller unequivocally endorsed the military coup of Augusto Pinochet, asserting that el 11 de septiembre de 1973, no quedó otra alternativa que aquella de que las Fuerzas Armadas asumieran el mando y suprimieran los poderes políticos por un tiempo, tanto en el Congreso Nacional, los Municipios y los Partidos Políticos, hasta que el caos en que estábamos viviendo fuera remplazado por algo medianamente más sensato¹³⁹.

Just as too many other apologists of the coup, Keller tellingly showed no compassion for the victims of the ruthless military regime. Given his worldview, it seems fair to assume that he, unlike many others who had initially supported the putsch but subsequently criticised the brutal dictatorship, would have remained an ardent apologist of Pinochet.

¹³⁶ *La Hora*, 17 October 1938, 5.

¹³⁷ *El Diario Ilustrado*, 6 April 1939, 7. The manifesto was also published in *Hoy*, 13 April 1939, 9. For the VPS, see Klein, 'New Voices', 364-371.

¹³⁸ For an analysis of the novel, see Olaf Gaudig and Peter Veit, *Faschismus in Chile. Die Darstellung der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung im Roman* Berlin: WVB, 2001.

¹³⁹ *La locura de Juan Bernales. Tragedia política de Chile en 1932-1938 y su trascendencia en 1973* San Felipe, 1974, 2nd edition [1949], 316, as quoted in Romero, "Carlos Keller", 149-150.

Keller's ideas were undoubtedly formed by his German upbringing and education, in Chile as well as in Germany, where he stayed for almost one decade. His involvement in the Deutsch-Chilenischer Bund underlined his commitment to the cause of the German-Chilean community. As long as he was a leading militant of the DCB, his heroes consequently were the anti-democratic critics of the Weimar Republic as well as other German writers and authors, on the one hand, and the German-Chilean colonists, on the other. Only after he had failed to lure more German immigrants to his native country, Keller began to distance himself from his narrow German National position, a development that coincided with his move to Santiago and his increasing involvement in national politics. Without completely rejecting his earlier analysis, he also came closer to the conventional conservative interpretation of Chilean history, adhering to the argument that the country had experienced an inexorable decline since the breakdown of the Portalian regime in the late 19th century. With remarkable ease, Keller emerged as a Chilean nationalist.

This shift marked the real turning point in his intellectual and political development. In view of his increasingly angry denunciation of the political and economic situation, which he expressed in both *La eterna crisis chilena* and *Un país al garete*, as well as his continuous admiration of Germany, the subsequent embrace of fascism as the only solution to Chile's crisis was, on the other hand, less dramatic. For Keller, the Movimiento Nacional had failed, however, to carry out his goal in life. Not least because of its undeniable similarities to Nazism, Nacismo had always remained –fortunately for the Chilean people and the country– a small group, operating at the fringe of Chile's political system. Although it was not, as its enemies consistently maintained, a forefront organisation of the Third Reich, it was never in the position to assume power, and bring Keller close to his fascist dream.