

Looking at the Past and the Future without Fear

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICARDO LAGOS

Matthew Gutmann

*How has Latin America had a significant impact around the world, economically, politically, culturally?*¹

Ricardo Lagos: The most important contributions of Latin America to the world have not necessarily been in the social sciences but instead in literature, in painting, in music, perhaps even in the kitchen. From Mexican tacos distributed throughout the United States to the most sophisticated, contemporary Peruvian cuisine, right? What I mean is that, as Carlos Fuentes liked to say and Mario Vargas Llosa² says, too, the intellectual and cultural worlds have played a larger role in making Latin America what it is than its politicians have.

However, I would say that, despite this, Latin America has undergone a learning process. And we have learned, first, that many of the theories taught abroad have to pass through the sieve of our own reality. Beginning with John Maynard Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936)—Keynes called his theory “general,” although it was only general for countries like those in which Keynes lived and not for the rest of the world. Second, in many cases when these theories pass through the sieve of our own reality they become, instead of a general theory, one that is particular to the developed world. It has been hard for us to understand this because, in many instances, we want to mechanically apply ideas from the social sciences. If one tries to mechanically apply Max Weber, we find that Weber was thinking about a German reality that is very different from our own.

Then what can the rest of the world learn from the process that Latin America has gone through in understanding and applying external theories?

From the economic perspective, two interesting phenomena occurred. First, the phenomenon of the transition from dictatorships to democracies, although even in democracy we have learned that if there aren't sensible macroeconomic policies in place, then the economy will give us a hard time. I have always said that the most important thing about Alfonsín [Raúl Alfonsín, president of Argentina, 1983–89]—who was undoubtedly one of the most respected democrats because he was able to reestablish democracy in Argentina³—is that his government suffered from poor economic management, which obliged him to end his presidency six months early. The result was that we began to take macroeconomics much more seriously. And if you think about it carefully, although the Washington Consensus⁴ was in fashion at the time, we also learned that the Washington Consensus only mentioned us in relation to the “trickle down” effect and the need for public policies. It was one thing to implement solid macroeconomic policies, but it was also important to understand that the Washington Consensus was not useful in helping us improve the social situation of our people.

That said, it is also important to note that because we had the Tequila Crisis,⁵ the currency depreciation crisis in Brazil, the currency depreciation crisis in Argentina after Carlos Menem [president, 1989–99]—each of these crises caused a regional crisis—and we had so many crises that we learned the importance of having an effective financial system. Perhaps this explains why our financial systems were able to resist the 2008 financial crisis. I don't know if this means that we were able to teach the world something, it's just to say that we had learned from previous crises how to execute the necessary tasks in the new one.

And today we can say that we didn't cause this crisis. We can declare ourselves innocent of this, the biggest of all the crises. Also, as a result of previous crises—and this is an advertisement—we learned how to implement countercyclical policies. We learned that if we Latin Americans have to depend on soya prices, petrol prices, copper prices, and other commodities whose prices fluctuate greatly, there was also another possibility. The possibility to have the so-called structural surplus budget. By this I mean that the fiscal budget should use structural determinants of income, like taxes, as a fraction of potential GDP [gross domestic product] established by an independent technical committee. These policies mean that when com-

commodity prices are low, we spend as though the cost were the long-term cost, which is much higher. However, when the price is very high we spend less because the long-term price is lower.

In Chile, we applied these policies in 2000, 2001, and 2002, when the price of copper was only 60 cents per pound but we used the price of 89 cents. When this same pound of copper reached a price of \$3.00, we could spend as though it cost \$1.19, both established by the Committee. And why am I telling you this? Because when the 2008 crisis came along, the Chilean government had savings of about 40, 50 percent of our yearly GDP, and we could therefore implement countercyclical policies and spend more. We spent 4 percent of GDP supporting the neediest sectors, simply withdrawing from our savings; we didn't have to ask for financial support from anywhere else.

And these savings were not the result of the Chicago Boys⁶ either?

Right, because it wasn't the Chicago Boys who implemented them. So, we have to talk about the Chicago Boys, who dominated the scene especially during the dictatorship [1973–90] when it was relatively easy to justify their policies. When you explain their policies, when you decide to open your economy as we did in Chile, for example, and you go from 170,000 textile workers to 30,000, well that has an enormous impact from the perspective of employment, and one that happens in less than a year, in the 1980s. So, I would say that our policies were part Washington Consensus and part of the reestablishment of democracy, which is when we realized that many aspects of the Washington Consensus were just common sense. However, there were assumptions that were not common sense and did not work.

For example, even if the trickle-down effect existed, it was in the very long term and was therefore not compatible with our immediate problems. Now, what we did learn was how to create well-targeted social policies, although in those years the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank did not like these words. In 1990, as minister of education, I realized that in the majority of schools along the coast there were only girls or very few boys above the age of fourteen, because the boys went to work with their fathers in the boats. However, in other parts of Chile, such as the Valle Central, I encountered schools where there were only boys because all the girls over fifteen went with their mothers to harvest fruit.

There wasn't anywhere for them to work. So, based on these experiences, I said, "Why don't we create a program for people who are extremely poor? We will offer a grant that will allow parents to support themselves a bit

better so that children won't have to go fishing with their fathers or harvesting with their mothers." This experience—"grant" is a big word for such a small amount of money, but it was enough to incentivize parents to keep their children in school. Later, in 1993, Cardoso [Fernando Henrique Cardoso, president of Brazil, 1995–2003] named Paulo Renato de Souza as his minister of education, and Paulo Renato asked me, "What can I learn from Chile?" And I told him about this experience. That was the origin of Brazil's Bolsa Escola program. Bolsa Escola then spread to other countries.

Another example is when we decided that to address the issue of extreme poverty we would create a program called Chile Solidario, where we would work with the poor to teach them their rights. Through this experience we discovered that it is one thing to say that we are going to create laws to protect the rights of the poor and quite another that the poor understand that there are laws that work in their favor.

Has this been a model outside of Latin America as well?

Chile Solidario? I would say yes, through the World Bank, which decided to disseminate the model. It is funny: the World Bank told me they wanted to celebrate, in quotation marks, the ten-year anniversary of Chile Solidario at a large forum that did take place at the World Bank. Simply because they understood that it had been a really worthwhile program. Now, why had it been worthwhile? When you are president and you issue an invitation to the presidential palace, everyone comes. And there were people from the Right, from the Left, and I said, "Gentlemen, we know who the poor are in Chile, we know where they live, so what do we do to end poverty?" Some said, "Send them a check," others said, "Send them social workers," and it was a big debate. In the end, I decided that sending a check would be insulting to people's dignity; it wasn't just about clientelism, it was about people's dignity, so we chose the social workers. We chose a different way of working.

The result: a social worker would visit each family and tell them, "I'm here to teach you what rights you have as a result of your social situation." As a woman once told me, "I never knew that, as a result of my poverty, I had certain rights. I didn't dare go to the municipality and say, 'Help me, I'm poor.'" So, I think that one could say that from the economic and social perspectives, we have learned a lot.

Of course, there was also the financial crisis and the G7 that Chirac [Jacques Chirac, French president, 1995–2007] timidly wanted to turn into the G14, so he would invite the BRICs, Brazil, India, and China. Well, it became the G20 after the 2008 crisis. I still find it picturesque that it was

President [George W.] Bush who first called the G20 together in Washington, D.C. I don't think that there was anything further from his mind before the crisis than the notion of having a G20 rule the world. But the depths of the crisis necessitated a much wider world.

What about the role of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico representing the other Latin American countries? Do you think this has been special in the G20 or not?

Yes and no, yes and no. I think that in many cases, we have had to contribute to criticisms of the Washington Consensus, because after the crises the issue was the need to revive the world economy. The 2009 G20 in London was very good when, in half an hour, the group agreed that the International Monetary Fund, which had capital worth \$250 billion, should become \$750 billion instead. Because now the developed countries needed the Fund to save Europe. Right? Something that had been impossible to achieve during the past twenty years—that to arrive at the \$750 billion, the Special Drawing Rights [supplementary foreign exchange reserve assets managed by the IMF] would be \$250 billion. China supplied \$50 billion of these funds because China is interested in special rights that may eventually allow it to become the international currency of the future, instead of the dollar.

The 2009 G20 was decisive because similar policies existed between the United States and Europe to revive the economy. But it was in Pittsburgh in 2010 when those policies were developed. Obama was still saying, as he does today, although perhaps a bit more timidly, that we needed to reactivate the economy and Merkel [Angela Merkel, German chancellor, 2005–] was saying that the problem was inflation and austerity was the answer. And this provoked the end, I think, of a common politics in the G20 and it lost its relevance, its ability to face the crisis. And it was then, unfortunately, that Latin America, despite being in favor of Obama's policies—it didn't express this viewpoint with a single voice, with enough force. If you push me a little bit, I would say that we haven't really taken full advantage of our position in the G20 where, if we have three countries, we technically make up 15 percent of the group.

DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC MODELS

Politically, we obviously talk a lot about Latin America when we speak about democracy, about democratic models. Many political analysts who study Latin America suggest that it is an example for the rest of the world, including in the

sense of showing how to end dictatorships and arrive at a democracy, to achieve real democratic participation. What do you think?

I think two things. One, the ways in which we moved from dictatorial systems to democracy worked well in some cases, but it is certainly a slow process. If we take the case of Chile, I mean, the context in which these changes happen are very different. I liked to say to my Spanish friends, “You waited until Franco⁷ had died.” We achieved the transition while our Franco was still alive and commander in chief of the army. So it was a little different, right? But, that said, each context is different. In Argentina, the context was different because the transition happened in the context of the implosion resulting from the Falkland Islands disaster.⁸ In our case, the transition happened based on Pinochet’s constitution because it called for a plebiscite,⁹ and we thus defeated him in a plebiscite included in his own constitution. Chile is different.

Today in Chile, the man who was the head of Pinochet’s secret police has been sentenced to four hundred years in jail, and he’s still in prison. In other words, there is also something to show. The commissions created by Aylwin [Patricio Aylwin, president of Chile, 1990–94], the Rettig Report, published by the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, well, those who worked on that later went to work with Mandela [Nelson Mandela, president of South Africa, 1994–99]. Aylwin’s commission was first. But what the South Africans did was something that wasn’t done in Chile, that if you admitted to your crimes, you gained automatic amnesty. That’s an important point. If I go and I admit that there was torture, that you tortured, that I tortured, they can’t incriminate me. So, for admitting the truth, you gained amnesty. It wasn’t like that in the Chilean case because the courts could sentence you.

During my presidency, we appointed a presidential commission on political prisoners and torture—it is important to note that very few countries in the world have done investigations into political prison and torture. There are commissions on political killings, on the detained-disappeared, but there are so many people who were imprisoned and tortured. It’s hard. It opens wounds. How do I do it? What we decided to do was say that the commission would establish the truth about what had happened, but it wouldn’t bring people to justice. It’s one thing to establish the truth and say, yes, you were tortured and we must therefore remove your criminal record on Interpol because you were in prison not as a criminal but because you were politically persecuted by the dictatorship. Very well. Now, if

you want justice in regard to what you testified about before the commission, you have to go to and testify in court, and the court has the power to bring the torturer to justice if necessary. Do you understand the distinction?

This distinction allowed us to create a report on political prison and torture, which is a form of teaching. Now, reading the document, reading the report, it's a trip through hell. There are details about the places where people were detained, and these places are classified according to the kinds of torture that took place in them, because there were different kinds of torture in each place. But, in this sense, I think that the democratic models that emerge are also different. Today I would say that it is in a country like Brazil where you have the most democracy and the least democracy, when you choose a union leader as your president. I don't think that anybody thought that, fifteen years after democracy was established, Lula [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, 2003–11] would be the president of Brazil, or Dilma [Dilma Rousseff, 2011–], a woman and former militant of a guerrilla group. Or that you would have in Chile, sixteen years after Aylwin, that is, after the transition, a woman elected twice as the president of Chile.

And keep in mind that in Chile there wasn't serious debate around the idea that a woman could be president. I think why it happened is because there were two women who were in the best position to succeed me. Both had been members of my cabinet.

In Latin America there have been many women presidents. Not in the United States yet.

Not yet.

And why would that be?

Because they chose a black man first, an African American. I think that the 2008 elections were going to be a first because it was either going to be an African American or a woman. So, there was an important step. Now, I think that in Latin America a few of these women such as Evita Perón [1919–52] in her time, then Isabelita Perón [1974–76], both were wives of President Perón. The wives of former presidents. One could say something similar, more respectfully, about Cristina Fernández de Kirchner [president of Argentina, 2007–]. But I think that, in any case, Latin America has been able to advance more quickly in this sense.

Another generation, no?

Another generation, a generation for which the coup was what was in history books. And they were shocked to see what they saw, the movie *No*¹⁰ and all of those stories. So, the question that one poses is, in what moment do countries feel mature enough or strong enough to look at the past without fear, not to hide anything under the carpet? The Spanish are only recently daring to look into what happened during the Civil War. These days you can't travel the world without democratic credentials, without the credentials to say, "In my country we have a democracy, I'm a product of democracy, I was elected president, I didn't force my way into power." And I think that this is an important step forward. Now, how are things going to progress in the future? It's hard, it's hard. Why? Because these new generations aren't scared because they didn't live through the fear of the dictatorship and, therefore, they demand a lot more. It's a different way of approaching things.

Look, the coup d'état happened in 1973, and 20 years after the coup, in 1993 with Aylwin as president, very few in the media dared to show or write about the past. And 25 years after, in 1998, the media were still careful to present the real picture. After 30 years (2003), I thought that we had to do something to remember what happened in the Palace and we opened the door of La Moneda,¹¹ through which they had carried out Allende's body, and in spite of that fact, the media showed a little bit more of the 1973 events. But 40 years after the coup: an explosion on TV, suddenly there were *telenovelas*, *radioteatros*, there was everything. And they showed images that Chileans had never seen on public TV before. Why did Chilean society, 40 years after the coup, dare to look at the coup through different eyes?

THE FAMOUS FINGER: "WAS THAT *IT*?"

I've told this story a few times. I was with my grandchildren at an *asado*, a barbecue, and suddenly one of them says to me, "Hey, Grandpa, what is this story about the finger and Pinochet?" Well, I'm a little tired of the story, and so I told them, "It's on YouTube." And they said, "Oh, on YouTube, let's go watch it on YouTube!" They were excited to watch the video.

But then you could see the disappointment in their faces when they looked at me and said, "Grandpa, was that *it*? Getting annoyed with someone on TV isn't anything special. Everyone gets annoyed on TV." Can you



FIGURE 1.1. During a television appearance in 1988, President Lagos took the risk of pointing his finger in accusation against the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Internet reproduction from TV broadcast.

believe that's what they told me? But it's the context¹² that changes all the meaning.

Do you think that there is something to learn from Latin America in regard to the practice of democracy, about genuine and not only formal participation?

Well, that's a really important topic. Two things. One, in many of our countries we've already been able to establish state financial support for candidates in elections. And, as a result, they passed laws about this, and I remember very clearly when I asked a deputy from the lower house of Congress how much was spent in the last election. He told me, and I then questioned him, if he could really run with so little money. "Yes, it was enough," he said. "I didn't need to raise any extra money." And in the last presidential elections, for example, this worked and it worked relatively well. There is private money, but there's more than that, too.

The subject of participation is perhaps more difficult. Why? Because you have a rising middle class. If you go around the world saying proudly that you eliminated poverty, or that poverty has decreased significantly, well, those who raised themselves out of poverty consider themselves middle class and they have other demands, other needs. And they thus demand participation. So, if you go around the world saying, "Look here, today of the students in higher education or high school, seven out of ten are first

generation.” Well, those seven have computers and the rest of it, they have a different set of demands from those that there were twenty years ago. How do we satisfy these demands? How do you find a civilized way to resolve these demands so that it is not necessary to go to the Plaza to protest? Because, until now, the only way to make demands was to go the Plaza to protest.

What about the student movement?

What happened in Chile was shocking, especially because of the force that the movement had. And this force was due to two factors. First, it was more a movement of the middle classes than the working classes. The majority of protests didn’t involve the very poor, because they were entitled to fellowships that paid their tuition. And second, when it occurred to the students one weekend to say, “We are going to march this weekend so that our parents can come with us to our protest.” Well, it ended up being a huge civic party because the parents went, of course, and they brought the babies because there wasn’t anyone to leave them with, and others came with their grandmothers. And you were there, and you saw people in jeans, in uniforms, in everything. But you also saw people with different demands.

So the question was, what demands are going to arise? Is it going to be possible to say, look, if a law passes in Parliament, I want us, the people who are the owners of popular sovereignty, to be able to revoke the law because we don’t like it? In a few well-established democracies, if you can gather a significant number of signatures on a petition you can demand a binding plebiscite and revoke the law. Wow. Wow. I want to see the legislation of a congress that knows that the people can revoke the laws it passes. Wow. In Peru, for example, or in Venezuela’s constitution, halfway through your presidency, in Peru halfway through your term as mayor, the people can demand a revocation of your mandate. Now, the way one governs becomes completely different. Because each political reform has an impact on the way you govern.

If I know I was elected president for six years and that three years into my term the people can revoke my presidency, well, I’ll wait to pass contentious reforms until after the three years. In other words, governance takes on a different form, right? It’s not free. You can’t just come along and make a decision—it sounds really democratic that halfway through your presidency you can have your power revoked. But it has political consequences. It’s going to lead to a different way of governing.

President Peña Nieto [Enrique Peña Nieto, Mexico, 2012–] told me, “You have to pass all the reforms in your first year because in the next five you have to implement them. Otherwise, you’re a failure.” And he’s tried, no? To pass reforms very quickly. So, you realize that it’s a complicated topic. OK. What is participation going to look like? Which political institutions will emerge? And Latin America has offered a few, no? Well, Hugo Chávez’s [president of Venezuela, 1999–2013] constitution in Venezuela established that halfway through your presidency you can—and I think that now, many of the protesters and whatnot, they are thinking more about revoking Maduro’s [Nicolás Maduro, president of Venezuela, 2013–] mandate after three years than actually going to vote now.

May we talk more about how all of this might be meaningful for the rest of the world?

I think that if there are these kinds of institutions in the rest of the world, Latin America will have something to export. Note that the PT [Workers’ Party] in Brazil introduced participatory budgeting at the municipal level long before the PT won the presidency with Lula. This was already a trademark of the PT in the municipalities that they controlled, like Porto Alegre. So they asked businessmen, “Aren’t you scared of Lula?” Many of them said, “No, because now I have participation in local government when before nobody asked me anything.”

Now, this little machine, the Internet, also allows face-to-face, no? In Santiago, on the website of my foundation we have a thing called the Quinto Poder. Obviously, this is because the press is the Fourth Estate, so the Internet is the Fifth Estate. Well, in the Quinto Poder, there was, for example, a discussion that cyclists—where there aren’t bike lanes, they can ride on the sidewalk, right? “Well,” one mayor said, “no, they can’t ride on the sidewalk because there are people walking on sidewalks.” And there was a debate. And then the cyclists said, “Next Saturday, we are all going to ride our bikes to go protest to the governor.” Well, to everyone’s surprise over one thousand cyclists arrived at his office. I don’t need to add that the deputies quickly sent a bill to resolve the problem.

It’s one thing for people to be annoyed and talking on social media, on Twitter. But it’s another when you say things face-to-face. When people said, “Why don’t we protest on our bicycles?” and others saw the physical magnitude of the protest, well, there was a change. In other



FIGURE 1.2. Che Guevara image on the cap of a man in Shanghai, 2013. Photo by Matthew Gutmann.

words, I think this is an example where perhaps in Latin America, as a result of having arrived later to the discussion about transitions from dictatorships to democracy, we have been able to keep an open mind and keep advancing toward greater participation. I would say that this is an area in which Latin America is rather advanced, in regard to civil participation.

CHE

I'm looking for a photograph to ask you a very different kind of question. I took this photo in Shanghai last fall, and it prompts me to ask you why Che's image, his symbol, is so widely seen all over the world?

Because Che embodied rebellion. Lots of people embody rebellion and, precisely because he was a rebel, he was successful, but also a practitioner who was president of the Central Bank of Cuba.

That's a part of his story many people don't know about.

But people do know that he was up there with Fidel at the pinnacle of power. And they do know that once he arrived at the pinnacle of power he said, "I've completed my task in Cuba, now I'm going to the Sierra Maestra, to another Sierra Maestra, to participate in the revolution in Africa." So, he went to Africa, and then to other places, and he ended in Bolivia; we all know how his story ended. Those of us who are older know where we were when Kennedy was assassinated; we also know where we were when we heard of Che's death in Bolivia. I was climbing a staircase as the recently appointed director of the School of Political Science, and the president of the students told me, "They killed Che in Bolivia!" I couldn't believe it.

I think that above and beyond the photo, the icon, is another theme. That famous photo. There are lots of stories about the photo, how it happened, why is he in it? The photo is about utopia, rebellion, and the need to take risks. It's clearly not only about what happened to him because when he ends up as an image on T-shirts around the world, it's not just the photograph. It's Che's history. Che the romantic. It's the romance of it.

Does that apply to Latin America more generally?

There are lots of romantic parts. Think about what the rest of the world thought of Fidel Castro's revolution at the end of the 1950s, beginning of the 1960s. The Cuban Revolution clearly captured the world's imagination. Afterward, it took different directions, other paths.

Well, if you are a revolutionary you have to die young.

It's good that he knew to die at the age of thirty-three.

MESTIZAJE

What can we learn from Latin America about el mestizaje?

Oh, how interesting. But is there only one Latin America in this sense? Or are there various? Was *mestizaje* in Brazil, between whites and blacks, the same as in other parts of Latin America, *mestizaje* of the Indians and the Spanish? I've always noticed the drastic difference between the indigenous population and the white population in Peru, for example. It's the same in our country as well. But not with as much force. And I think that this is because all those who consider themselves white, or have Spanish last names, know that they have some Mapuche blood. As Carlos Fuentes said,

we are all immigrants in Latin America because the first immigrants arrived through the Bering Strait. And now they are saying that there were others who came from the South, no? Through Antarctica. Otherwise it would be hard to explain how human beings were in Puerto Montt 14,000 years before Christ. They say it would have taken longer to arrive in Puerto Montt through the Bering Strait, and they've started to uncover evidence that Antarctica was attached to South America and they therefore arrived from there on an ice bridge.

We do know that these people arrived 15,000 years ago, and they obviously didn't have passports, but they arrived, and then the Spanish came later. And then the Afro-Americans arrived as slaves, 400 to 350 years ago. And that's when the mixing started, and it was related to how people adapted themselves. Then there's that famous scene when the Spanish conquerors say to Atahualpa, "This is the Bible. God speaks in this book." And the guy grabs it, puts it to his ear and says, "I can't hear anything." It's dramatic, this clash of two cultures, they were so stunned. That's how the two came together.

Here in the United States, the colonialists didn't come to conquer or to evangelize. They arrived simply to have the right to a religion, a right they didn't have in their country. And therefore there was no interest in evangelizing the natives. Here the natives ran away. And they were also massacred.

And it is a *mestizaje* that is also about the Spanish that you speak. That's why the Real Academia Española accepts *argentanismos*, *chilenismos*, and the rest of it. But there is only one language. It is different in Portuguese. Many books that are published in Portuguese are translated into "Brazilian." That is, the language spoken in Brazil today is different from that spoken in Portugal. They are different books. But in the Spanish case, the Spanish is the same. And what is Latin America for the rest of the world? We speak through the arts of our poets, novelists, musicians, and painters.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a challenge that you have dedicated many years to, and it's a topic that is immensely important in the world. I want to know whether there are green paradigms in Latin America from which we can learn in other parts of the world?

I think that the first Latin American issue has to do with something particular to Latin America, which is deforestation. I mean, of the total global emissions 20 percent is from deforestation, but in Latin America 49 percent of total emissions come from deforestation. And I'm going to tell you something that is even more unbelievable. All of the carbon emissions produced by the Brazilian economy, that is, its GDP, are 800,000 tons of carbon dioxide. Deforestation accounts for 1,000,000 tons. That is, deforestation in Brazil contributes more to carbon dioxide emissions than the emissions produced by the Brazilian economy. It's unbelievable. What I do think is that Latin America could take a big step to become a sort of soft power to the rest of the world, to say, "Look, I've reduced deforestation." Why? Because reducing deforestation means that, especially in the Brazilian case, deforestation has been undertaken mostly to create space for agriculture or big hydroelectric dams or mining. Of course, Brazil's leadership is fundamental because of the theme of the Amazon. It's true that ten South American countries possess a part of the Amazon, but the Amazon's true number one is Brazil. Brazil is the star, right? There is clearly a network of Amazonian countries, but the star is Brazil.

Now, on the other hand, Latin America as a whole clearly has to play a role in the issue of climate change. I think that in order to advance, Latin America also has to stop pretending that countries that aren't the most developed have the right to keep emitting whatever we like because I think that in the future this won't be very feasible. That is, we are all going to need to contribute, especially a continent that is economically successful, for which things are going well. The question of the twenty-first century is going to be, "Tell me: how much do you pollute? You go around the world proudly saying, 'Look, I've got a per capita of \$15,000, and at this rate, I'll soon achieve \$20,000 per citizen.' What are your greenhouse gas emissions per capita?" That is going to be the mark of your civility or incivility.

And has Latin America been a pioneer in any way with regard to climate change?

I think that in terms of technological innovation, Latin America hasn't contributed much. There have been some processes of adaptation in Latin America, adaptation to natural phenomena that aren't necessarily related to climate change. Now, will there be a process of adaptation to climate change or only relief efforts? The Caribbean countries obviously have a lot to say on that topic because for them relief efforts are really important, right? But I also think that countries like the United States are going to have to start undertaking more relief efforts. Someone told me that

Hurricane Sandy had a bigger impact in the United States than one thousand climate change conferences. It caused people to say, “It looks like this climate change might actually be serious,” right?

We’ll see if any of this means anything.

LATIN AMERICA’S CULTURAL WEALTH

Let’s return to Latin America’s literature, paintings, language, music, and telenovelas. What has Latin America’s impact been? A few days ago Gabriel García Márquez died [17 April 2014], which makes it all the more poignant to try to understand these questions.

I think that is true. I think it’s true that there is great wealth in Latin America and that this wealth has been exported, like Che, for example. This wealth, and perhaps Che has to do with this as well, is part of a romantic culture. The romance of the man who sells bars of ice, or mirrors, whatever the case may be. Artisans and all that. I think that Latin America has a great wealth in that sense.

I don’t think García Márquez invented magical realism [see Stavans this volume]. Instead, he was a magician because of his ability to write about reality. It’s a different thing. Because he imagined the things he imagined. Let me tell you a story about a dinner that we had. García Márquez told us that he had a friend who read his works before they were published, and when he finished the novel *The General in His Labyrinth*, about Simón Bolívar, his friend says, “Hey, people are going to say you are lying because you say that the general, alone, abandoned by everyone, isn’t able to sleep, so after his meal he goes for a stroll, and he is walking along, awaiting the next day when he will be able to travel to the Caribbean by boat along the Magdalena River, when he sees a full moon rising between the trees. Who told you, Gabo [affectionate nickname for García Márquez], that there was a full moon that night?”

“I just came up with it,” García Márquez replies. “Who is going to refute that there was a full moon?” “Did you know that there was a full moon that night?” “No, no, I didn’t,” he responds. “But the world knows whether there was a full moon or not.” “Who knows that?” “The Royal Observatory of Greenwich, in the United Kingdom. Write to them.” So, García Márquez told us that he wrote to the Royal Observatory to ask whether on that day in 1831 there had been a full moon. And in those days, one sent letters, and

the answer took time. Waiting for the postman to arrive, he said that he was like a groom awaiting his bride. He would approach the window every time he saw the postman to see whether there was a letter for him. But it was only electric bills and that kind of thing. After about forty days, he received an envelope: "Royal Observatory of Greenwich." He didn't dare open it, but finally he did. There had been a full moon that night!

Perhaps we Latin Americans are, for some reason, richer in this sense of romantic culture and in regard to the other things we talked about earlier.

NOTES

1. This interview with President Lagos was conducted on 21 April 2014, in Providence, Rhode Island, by Matthew Gutmann. The conversation was transcribed and translated by Yelena Bide and edited by Matthew Gutmann and Ricardo Lagos.

2. Carlos Fuentes (1928–2012) was an essayist and novelist from Mexico who was part of the *boom* generation of Latin American authors in the 1960s and 1970s. The Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa (1936–) also occupied a key role in the *boom* generation and was recognized for his fiction and nonfiction with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010.

3. Alfonsín won the presidency in 1983 as a member of the Radical Party, becoming the country's first democratically elected majority president in nearly forty years. His administration took power from a brutal military junta that relinquished its grip in the face of a devastated economy, military defeat in the Falkland, or Malvinas, Islands, and mounting popular opposition. Alfonsín played a central role in the opposition movement, helping to found in 1977 the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights. As president he established the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons to investigate crimes under the military dictatorship.

4. The Washington Consensus originated as a set of ten policy prescriptions offered by the English economist John Williamson in 1989 to steer what U.S. and international financial institutions (most based in Washington, DC) saw as necessary stages for economic growth. Including recommendations for financial and trade liberalization, privatization, and deregulation, the framework espoused intensified integration into the international economy and macroeconomic stability. This neoliberal view of economic growth has shaped approaches to development in Latin America and other regions over the past three decades, though many economists and politicians have levied strong critiques against the Consensus philosophy as the best approach for so-called developing countries.

5. In December 1994 the Mexican government devalued its national currency, the peso, in response to political instability and warning signs of capital flight. The

devaluation sparked a financial crisis that pulled the country into a recession with soaring inflation and a peso at half of its original value. Also known as the “Peso Crisis,” the Tequila Crisis sent shockwaves throughout Latin America and other emerging markets and prompted the United States and the International Monetary Fund to offer a bailout package.

6. The “Chicago Boys” were a crew of economists from Latin America trained mostly at the University of Chicago (under Milton Friedman and Arnold Harberger) and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. With roots in the U.S. State Department’s “Chile Project” of the 1950s, the influence of this group rose especially during the early years of General Augusto Pinochet’s reign (1973–90), when the new government adopted the Chicago Boys’ neoliberal program of deregulation, privatization, and other free market policies.

7. After successfully overthrowing a republican government in the brutal Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939, General Francisco Franco (1892–1975) established a totalitarian state that lasted until his death. Franco’s successor, Prince Juan Carlos (grandson of Spain’s former king), initiated Spain’s transition to a constitutional monarchy in the late 1970s.

8. In April 1982 the military junta in Argentina sent soldiers to invade the Malvinas, or Falkland, Islands, a remote colonial outpost of Britain. The effort to resuscitate the flagging regime through an anti-imperialist and nationalist campaign elicited a surprisingly strong reaction from Margaret Thatcher’s government. The ten-week conflict ended in humiliation for the dictatorship in Argentina, which subsequently yielded to civilian rule.

9. Mass opposition to Chilean dictator Pinochet mounted throughout the 1980s. Pressure from the democratic movement forced concessions from Pinochet, who called for a plebiscite—a vote by all members of the nation—on his rule in October 1988. Chileans voted down another term for Pinochet by 54.6 percent.

10. A 2012 film directed by Pablo Larraín and starring Gael García Bernal about advertising tactics used in the plebiscite of 1988.

11. La Moneda is a block-long palace and seat of the president of the Republic of Chile. As President, Lagos opened some of the inner courtyards to the public in 2000, as soon as it was inaugurated, and restored Morandé 80, a door on the side of the palace that symbolizes a democratic Chile. It was this door that was opened in 2003.

12. The specific context here was Lagos’s 25 April 1988 appearance on the program *De cara al país*, one of the few sites for public political discourse and opposition in Pinochet’s Chile at the time. Lagos, who had become leader of the recently created Partido por la Democracia (PPD), levied direct criticism against Pinochet’s abuses of power and urged support for a “No” vote in the 1988 plebiscite that would ultimately lead to the dictator’s removal from office.