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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Revisiting the Chilean Social Uprising: Explanations, Interpretations, and Over-Interpretations

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This essay reviews the following works:

The Circuit of Detachment: Understanding the Fate of a Neoliberal Laboratory. By Kathya Araujo. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 80. $22.00 e-book. ISBN: 1009310712.

Hilos tensados: Para leer el octubre chileno. Edited by Kathya Araujo. Santiago: Editorial USACH, 2019. Pp. 476. E-book. ISBN: 9789563034370. Open access at https://editorialusach.cl/producto/hilos-tensados-para-leer-el-octubre-chileno/.

18-O: Una radiografía desde la Academia. Edited by Claudio Espinoza and Luis Campos. Santiago: Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, 2020. Pp. 145. Open access at https://issuu.com/universidadacademia/docs/el_18_de_octubre/1.

Chile despertó. Lecturas desde la historia del estallido social de octubre. Edited by Mauricio Folchi. Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 2019. Pp. 108. E-book. ISBN: 9789561911659. Open access at https://filosofia.uchile.cl/dam/jcr:c1c55bfb-f142-4415-8b68-15fe01ab1eb0/chile-desperto769-lecturas-desde-la-historia.pdf.

Chile en movimientos. Edited by Karla Henríquez and Geoffrey Pleyers. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2023. Pp. 246. E-book. ISBN: 9789878135625. Open access at https://filosofia.uchile.cl/dam/jcr:c1c55bfb-f142-4415-8b68-15fe01ab1eb0/chile-desperto769-lecturas-desde-la-historia.pdf.

Pensar el malestar: La crisis de octubre y la cuestión constitucional. By Carlos Peña. Santiago: Taurus, 2020. Pp. 340. $36.17 paperback. ISBN: 9789569635403.

Revuelta social y nueva Constitución. By Nelly Richard. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2021. Pp. 68. E-book. ISBN: 9789878130668. Open access at https://www.clacso.org/revuelta-social-y-nueva-constitucion-2/.

Octubre chileno: La irrupción de un nuevo pueblo. By Carlos Ruiz Encina. Santiago: Penguin Random House, 2020. Pp. 117. $10.78 paperback. ISBN: 9789566042259.

The Chilean social uprising that occurred between October 18, 2019, and the end of December 2019 was a phenomenon in every sense of the word. First, because of the magnitude of the protests that spread throughout Chile: Hundreds of thousands of

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Chileans took to the streets to protest. Second, because of the duration of the protests: They lasted at least two months, which, had it not been for the vacation period and the onset of COVID-19, could well have been longer. Third, because of the uprising's decentralized origin, an aspect that tends to be overlooked given the leading role played by high school students in Santiago, who turned fare evasion on the city's subway into a leitmotif.[1] Fourth, because of the unusual levels of violence seen in some of these episodes, most notably the burning of dozens of subway stations. This social uprising was an unprecedented event that questioned the country's development model, criticizing particularly inequalities in access to health care, education, and pensions. At the uprising's rhetorical origin was a slogan that achieved extraordinary social success: "It wasn't thirty pesos, it was thirty years." This refers to the increase in public transport fares introduced on October 6, 2019 (due to the economically "rational" but politically inept decision of a committee of experts), and it quickly became a judgment on three decades of politics and Chile's difficult transition to democracy since 1990.[2] In this sense, the social uprising created an important critical juncture, challenging governability and the democratic system. In an attempt to curb the massive protests taking place in most of the country's cities, President Sebastián Piñera decreed a constitutional state of emergency, saying, "We are at war against a powerful enemy."[3] Another characteristic of the uprising was the emergence of noninstitutional social movements whose members had multiple socioeconomic origins, did not necessarily have a shared ideological or partisan position, and did not "require explicit adhesion."[4]

Such was the uprising's magnitude that academics and public intellectuals quickly offered explanations and interpretations based on the meteorological premise that "they did not see it coming."[5] In reality, numerous studies had warnings.[6] Yet social scientists could not have predicted the uprising itself. It would have been particularly difficult to predict an event in which so many factors came into play: from social discontent with the cost of living and economic inequality to issues related to the reaffirmation of gender and ethnic identities (Araujo, *Hilos tensados*). It is no coincidence, then, that many academics and public intellectuals viewed the uprising, often in a delirious way, as a practically revolutionary, virtuous, redemptive event.

[1] Metrics on this decentralized origin can be found in the book compiled by Alfredo Joignant and Nicolás Somma, *Social Protest and Conflict in Radical Neoliberalism: Chile, 2008–2020* (Palgrave, 2024), especially chapter 2, which highlights the early prominence of "neighbors" in the uprising's origin.

[2] An origin that is not new: For example, the wave of protests in Brazil in 2013 was also triggered by an increase in public transport prices (and the amount of public spending on hosting the 2014 World Cup), and the Yellow Vests movement in France was caused by a rise in fuel prices, which led to intense and prolonged protests in the periphery of large cities and the rural world.

[3] "In view of the repeated attacks and attacks against the stations and installations of the Santiago metro, against public order and public safety, and against both public and private property, which we have witnessed in recent days in the city of Santiago, which have seriously affected the free movement and safety of the inhabitants of Santiago, and have also seriously disturbed public order, and making use of the powers granted to me as President of Chile by the Constitution and the law, I have decreed a state of emergency." "Presidente Piñera decreta estado de emergencia para 'asegurar el orden y seguridad," posted by 24 Horas—TVN Chile, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd27UQVYdj4.

[4] Carlos Peña, *Pensar el malestar: La crisis de octubre y la cuestión constitucional* (Taurus, 2020), 13.

[5] An argument found in the chapter by Pablo Artaza in one of the books in this literature review, *Chile despertó* (79) and put forward by many other intellectuals and academics.

[6] Perhaps the most explicit warning was that of Manuel Canales in his book *La pregunta de Octubre: Fundación, apogeo y crisis del Chile neoliberal* (LOM, 2022), based on research conducted starting in 2017. A very important report published in 1998 by the Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), *Desarrollo Humano en Chile 1998: Las paradojas de la modernización*, had enormous political repercussions. It generated an intense debate among the elites of the Concertación, between the so-called *auto-flagelantes* (self-critical) and *auto-complacientes* (self-satisfied) groups. The debate was shut down through the intervention of President Frei Ruiz-Tagle himself.

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This literature review refers precisely to the efforts of an important part of Chilean academia to explain and interpret the uprising. The publications cited here are not an exhaustive list and do not include some very good articles published in excellent social science journals. However, the list represents an important sample of the enormous literature produced while the *estallido* was still taking place or in the weeks and months afterward. The texts selected constitute reflexive exercises on extremely important dimensions of the social uprising: How should we understand these massive protests that raised the need for significant sociopolitical changes in Chile? What effects has the persistence of the neoliberal social and economic model had on Chilean society?[7] These books offer a wide range of explanations: Depending on the author, the *estallido* involved either aimless riots or a potential revolution. What the books have in common is that they are all interpretations arrived at in the heat of events or very soon thereafter. This explains why work on the social uprising has mostly taken the form of essays rather than more rigorous analysis—often in the form of a chronicle or diary of events, an exercise that can be interesting and even brilliant, like Alain Touraine's "sociological diary" of the last days of the Unidad Popular government.[8] "They did not see it coming": Well, the selection of books that seeks to "explain" and, above all, interpret the social uprising perfectly reflects the supposedly spontaneous uprising (but one prefigured by many studies) and political character of a phenomenon that is not easy to comprehend.

Genesis of the event

The first question is about the origin of the uprising: Why did it occur? We know very little about the exact origin of the uprising, which began with decentralized protests by neighbors and, above all, fare evasion on the Santiago subway by high school students. What could have happened in neighborhoods to prompt their inhabitants to mobilize? All neighborhoods, or only some? How did they organize themselves? What role could social networks have played in the student-led mobilizations?[9] Was there some kind of contagion from Santiago to the rest of the country? On the last question, we know practically nothing. The books under review here examine the role of macro-level phenomena and processes in the collective action of the demonstrators.

In *Octubre chileno: La irrupción de un nuevo pueblo*, Carlos Ruiz asserts that the continuity of neoliberal policies and reforms following the democratic transition in the country shaped a form of state that favored the concentration of capital and the proliferation of socioeconomic inequality. This "concentration under state stimulus" played a role in the "awakening" of those who had never been able to enjoy "opportunities, nor equality." What happened was "only a state phenomenon of inequality" (68). While Ruiz's idea is convoluted, what needs to be understood is that the concentration of wealth and inequality in Chile resulted from state policies, not the spontaneous functioning of the market. Contrary to the expectedly paralyzing effects of "the worst of the prisons of consumption, the most degrading intellectual obsolescence at the hands of the stupefying effect of hollow social networks and other current cultural miscreations" (5), Chileans of all social classes rose up against the "model." The convoluted style of this phrasing muddles the argument: Contrary to the expectation that the consumerism and tattered

[7] On this question, see also Araujo, *The Circuit of Detachment*.

[8] Alain Touraine, *Vida y muerte del Chile popular* (Siglo XXI, 1974).

[9] Two good studies for understanding the role of social networks in the uprising are Andrés Scherman and Sebastián Rivera, "Social Media Use and Pathways to Protest Participation: Evidence from the 2019 Chilean Social Outburst," *Social Media + Society*, October–December 2021, 1–13, and Juan Pablo Luna, Sergio Toro, and Sebastián Valenzuela, "Amplifying Counter-Public Spheres on Social Media: News Sharing of Alternative versus Traditional Media After the 2019 Chilean Uprising," *Social Media + Society*, January–March 2022, 1–11.

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social fabric of neoliberal Chile would prevent collective political action, Chileans of all social classes rose up against the model. However, even if we accept the role of neoliberal policy in triggering the protests, how could discontent lead to mass—and in some cases, violent—protests, particularly when the individual protesting had never protested before?[10] What is the articulation between agency and the structure that triggers it? Moreover, what happens to those who do not protest? How are they exposed to the uprising, and what attitudes do they adopt in the face of the event? Azun Candina Polomer offers us some clues in a chapter of the book *Chile despertó* in which she argues (without providing any empirical data) that the uprising had its origin in the middle class (53–57).[11] That may be so. However, like Azun Candina Polomer, Ruiz fails to offer empirical support for his claim that the neoliberal policy model triggered the protests. His argument is mostly confined to a moral critique of neoliberalism. This limitation is apparent in many of the works reviewed here, which are rich in essayistic political criticism but often lack empirical evidence, let alone scientific demonstration.

Since at least 2011, there has been important essayistic reflection on the possible collapse of the Chilean model or the need to move to "another model" through profound reforms.[12] This makes it quite logical to associate the uprising with widespread social and intellectual criticism of the model and its pathologies. Similarly, it is plausible to posit a relationship between criticism of the development model and its crisis, in that criticism helped generate the crisis of legitimacy that was expressed in social discontent and demonstrations in demand for profound transformations. This is related particularly to how, thanks to the enshrinement of the principle of subsidiarity in the country's constitution, public goods, such as education, health, and pensions, reproduce social inequalities due to the participation of the private sector in their provision.[13]

This is precisely what Kathya Araujo addresses in her chapter in *Hilos tensados*. She refers to how the neoliberal model has generated multiple consequences in terms of creating labor precariousness, social inequity, loss of protections, and privatization of social services, which has led people to feel much more pressured by the system to manage

[10] Emmanuelle Barozet et al., "'Pero si a mí me ha ido bien con estas reglas del juego': Narrativas de primo manifestantes de derecha contra el cambio social en Chile," *Anuario de la Escuela de Historia Virtual* 13, no. 21 (2022): 97–129; Carolina Aguilera et al., *Los primo manifestantes del "estallido social" en 2019: Espontaneidad disruptiva y politización latente* (COES, 2023), https://coes.cl/wp-content/uploads/COES_LOS-PRIMO-MANIFESTANTES-DEL-ESTALLIDO-SOCIAL-EN-2019_2024-03-27.pdf; Carolina Aguilera et al., "Les primo-manifestants de l'estallido chilien en 2019: Spontanéité disruptive et politisation latente," *L'Homme et la Société*, no. 2019 (2023): 37–70.

[11] This interpretation about malaise with the country's development model first appeared in 1998, starting with the publication of the PNUD report on the "paradoxes of modernization." The dispute of the leader of the research team, sociologist Norbert Lechner, with the great sociologist José Joaquín Brunner, then spokesperson of the government of President Frei Ruiz-Tagle, is very illuminating: Norbert Lechner, "Nuestros miedos," *Perfiles Latinoamericanos,* December 13, 1998, 179–198; José Joaquín Brunner, "Malestar en la sociedad chilena: ¿De qué, exactamente, estamos hablando?," *Estudios Públicos* 72 (Spring 1998): 173–198. The gist of the controversy was very simple: Chile had been incubating a diffuse feeling of malaise not captured by opinion polls, due to the inflation of expectations generated by rapid capitalist modernization, and, eight years after the restoration of democracy, satisfaction was waning, particularly among the new middle classes.

[12] Alberto Mayol, *El derrumbe del modelo. La crisis de la economía de mercado en el Chile contemporáneo* (LOM, 2012); Fernando Atria et al., *El otro modelo: Del orden neoliberal al régimen de lo público* (Debate, 2013). For an analysis of the general intellectual debate, see Tomás Undurraga et al., "The Cultural Battle for the Chilean Model: Intellectual Elites in Times of Politicisation (2010–17)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 55, no. 1 (2023): 293–321; Tomás Undurraga and Manuel Gárate, "The Cultural Decline of the Chilean Model: The Aftermath of the 2019 Social Uprising," *History of Political Economy* 55, suppl. (2023): 227–254.

[13] The principle of subsidiarity, enshrined in the 1980 Constitution promulgated by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, is a central concept in Chile's economic and social organization. It establishes that the state should intervene in society only when individuals or intermediate bodies (e.g., family, local communities, private organizations) are unable to meet their needs on their own. In practical terms, it has meant strong promotion of private initiative and limited state intervention in the economy.

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their lives (20). She refers to "excessive demands" (20–21) by the neoliberal model as lying at the origin not of the malaise but of a form of collective "irritation" provoked by "the language of abuse and disrespect," which soon became a "natural expression to designate the intolerable" (27). Based on many in-depth interviews, Araujo argues (in *The Circuit of Detachment in Chile*) that the uprising can be interpreted as the result of a long "circuit of detachment." This circuit comprises four subjective stages that can be understood as incremental and cumulative. First is the naturalization of hierarchies, which presupposes deference and acceptance insofar as these hierarchies have always existed—in other words, something similar to traditional domination as understood by Max Weber. Second is the "logic of privilege" disguised by "fake meritocracy," with all the associated frustrations (especially the loss in value of diplomas, which created discontent among many educated Chileans). In the third stage, the "logic of authoritarianism" involves the imposition of a definition of order on the basis of privilege. Fourth is the "exercise of power," which leads to access to "goods, prerogatives over their use," or to the place that "a person occupies in society." All this implies a "new sensibility," which is far from being the inevitable result of the articulation of the four subjective stages. Each stage corresponds to a specific attitude that is collected in interviews and focus groups. According to Araujo, what really produces detachment, and therefore the subjective basis for protest, is "the clash between expectations of horizontality and the continuing reality of these logics [that] undermined the promise of equality" (25) during the rule of the center-left Concertación coalition between 1990 and 2010.

Kathya Araujo's research is very interesting because it takes us from the diffuse state of "malaise" to incremental forms of "irritation" that could logically have served as the subjective basis for the social uprising. Araujo carefully distinguishes between different forms of irritation, ranging from irritation with institutions for not satisfying needs to irritation conceived in terms of "power" that operates as a "source of abuse and humiliation" (35). However, according to Araujo, irritation does not suffice to move on to a form of collective action like the uprising. What is present first is the detachment produced by this subjective circuit, understood as "an irregular and multiform process of estrangement and disengagement from the principles, rationalities, and legitimacies that order the social bond." To put it another way, "detachment is associated with a loosening of the links that bind us to society" (36). For Araujo, detachment as a social phenomenon also affects politics, because it "indicates that individuals' relationships with politics have become much less ideologically or organizationally coherent" (48). In Araujo's view, the attitudinal or subjective circuit is formed by excessiveness, a fact expressed in the frustration that people feel from the overload they endure to aspire to achieve what Bourdieu calls the freedom of choice—that is, by very hard forms of need satisfaction by the individuals themselves, often without state support, to which is added disenchantment, irritation, and detachment. Each of these subjective states brings with it attitudes and behaviors that open up the possibility of moving on to protest.

Araujo's demonstration is suggestive but too harmonious or logical. It is as if the protest behavior that led to the uprising went through clearly differentiated (and necessary?) attitudinal and psychological stages, without the intervention of mediating factors that permitted passage from one attitudinal stage to another or the skipping of a stage and a direct move to protest. One of these possibly mediating factors is political disaffection or the emotional stress of a life of competing needs. While this idea of mediation is expressed in Araujo's book—"The combined stress of high social demands and meager institutional support is revealed both in the fierce forms of competition and individual affirmation that cross social life, and in the worldwide increased prevalence of emotional discomfort and mental illness. Symptoms such as political disaffection appear in many societies" (57)—it is not shown how these subjective states served as leverage to move to protest and sometimes violence.

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Essentially, the blind spot in essayistic reflection on the attitudinal effects of the neoliberal model and its behavioral expressions (in this case, protest) is that the articulation between the one and the other (what Alexander and coauthors called, in theoretical terms, the "micro-macro link"[14]) is not obvious. True, Araujo's four stages suggest many clues as to this link, yet largely disregard the macro and meso levels. By contrast, studies referring to the macro level (e.g., "neoliberalism," the "model") abound and rarely attempt to clarify the link between the macro, meso, and micro levels or, to put it another way, between structure and agency. This is a very important debate in the social sciences and is not resolved theoretically but empirically on the basis of case studies. Unfortunately, the texts under review make little attempt at illustrating the link between structure and agency. For instance, what of the possibility that individuals with singular life trajectories may have protested not as a result of progression through subjective stages but as a result of biographical leaps in which the uprising itself played an important socializing role, so important that it permitted the "skipping" of vital moments?

Carlos Peña's book *Pensar el malestar: La crisis de octubre y la cuestión constitucional* is the best example of an essayistic interpretation that neglects the agency of those who protested but is, at the same time, trapped in the logic of the economic modernization of Chilean society. Peña is unable to say anything about the motives for the protest behavior of thousands of individual Chileans. What he does discuss, without any empirical data, are the effects of rapid capitalist modernization in generating frustrations and "hysteresis" in Chileans, who were socialized under the meritocratic promise of success through effort and felt cheated by the declining value of diplomas and structural restrictions on upward social mobility.[15] In Peña's argument, there is a strong and justified emphasis on the effects of education on feelings of political competence and on the propensity to be interested in causes and participate in collective action.[16] This is why Peña sees malaise as "a generational issue" that reflects the existence of a "more educated generation" (50) that, thanks to its credentials, is far more autonomous than previous generations. In these new generations who were protagonists of the social uprising, Peña sees a "demand for community, for social bonds" with its roots in needs unsatisfied by the market that "eroded the social cement" (52). Peña is careful to differentiate his interpretation from the American modernization theory of the 1950s. While this theory (from Rostow to Parsons) asserts that "all societies, as they improve their adaptive capacity, tend to converge in the same type or model of society" (54), Peña emphasizes that "Chile has experienced a marked and rapid change in its material conditions of existence, a broad process of abstraction of its social relations—driven especially by the generalization of the market" (54). As a result, politics has lost centrality, contributing not only to its own impotence to solve problems and meet needs but also to the "individuation or subjectivization of life" (54). In other words, in Peña's argument, the weakness of

[14] Jeffrey Alexander et al., *The Micro-Macro Link* (University of California Press, 1987).

[15] Bourdieu understood the effects of hysteresis as "a lag between a system of dispositions that continues to operate inertially in a world that is no longer that in which the habitus was created and updated." Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Minuit, 1980).

[16] Alfredo Joignant, "Compétence politique et bricolage: Les formes profanes du rapport au politique," *Revue Française De Science Politique* 57, no. 6 (2007): 799–817; Rodolfo Disi Pavlic and Roberto Mardones, "Teaching with an Attitude: How Effective Has Citizen Education Been in Chile?," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 29, no. 15 (2021): https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.29.4969; Ernesto Treviño, Cristóbal Villalobos, Consuelo Béjares, and Eloísa Naranjo, "Forms of Youth Political Participation and Educational System: The Role of the School for 8th Grade Students in Chile," Young 27, no. 3 (2019): 279–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308818787691.

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institutions plays an important role, as they fail to channel the demands and their responses, thus provoking protests.[17]

Peña's argument is relevant because his capitalist modernization approach enables us to understand the attainment of "relative well-being, but [which] accentuates frustration" (59). Does this, then, explain the social uprising? No—nor does it explain inequality, because if inequality were the trigger, "neither Latin America nor Africa nor India would have a single moment of tranquility" (85). Thus stated, the explanation is highly problematic: Contextual elements and aspects of economic history are backed by satisfactory welfare figures (decline in poverty, slow decline in the Gini index, increase in gross domestic product in all its facets), but they have no correlation in the perception of inequality. How can this be explained? Peña's essay does not address the empirical articulation between macro-level data and the micro-level effects on individual agency and completely overlooks the meso level. It is too easy to explain the genesis of the social uprising only in terms of general contextual elements without observing or understanding the connection between macro-level indicators and micro-level protest behaviors. In this sense, the great problem of an essayistic approach is the excessively aggregated level of analysis, which does not consider the conditions that explain the step from what the macro-level indicators tell us to micro-level protest behavior (or, by the same token, the inexplicable character of behavior that is refractory to protest).

The mobilizing and socializing effect of the social uprising

It is no accident that experts who study social movements were the first to take an interest in the Chilean uprising. These researchers, generally sociologists, use empirical resources, especially focus groups and interviews. An excellent example is Karla Henríquez, who, in an interesting chapter of the book *Chile en movimientos*, examines the role of social movements and collective actions on people. She describes them as "a source of accelerated socialization" (185). This is consistent with research in other countries insofar as "in the social revolt, people from different classes and social realities met," affecting even those who merely witnessed the event (the "spectators") (187, 189).[18] Indeed, in the social uprising (as well as major historical events in other countries[19]), many people changed their minds about what they perceived and experienced. Through becoming familiar with critical positions, they came to see their reality as more problematic and accepted the demand for dignity as their own. This cognitive socialization is very important because it refers to what the Chileans who supported the social uprising (there were many[20]) experienced in the form of attitudinal changes that, once the uprising was over, prompted "a phase of reflexive withdrawal in which they process the experiences lived through" (188). Not many studies have taken the time to analyze specific individuals

[17] Nicolás Somma, Matías Bargsted, and Felipe Sánchez, "Protest Issues and Political Inequality in Latin America," *American Behavioral Scientist* 64, no. 9 (2020): 1299–1323. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220941233.

[18] Olivier Ihl, "Événement et socialisation politique," *Revue Française de Science Politique* 52, nos. 2–3 (2002): 125–144; Paul Almeida, *Social Movements: The Structure of Collective Mobilization* (University of California Press, 2019). In the same vein, though with a different methodology, a study by Hilbink and Salas Ramos found evidence of the empowering effect of participation in protests in Chile, even among the most disadvantaged groups. Lisa Hilbink and Valentina Salas Ramos, "Citizen Awakening? Exploring Legal Consciousness in a Context of Mass Political Mobilization," *Law & Society Review* 58, no. 2 (2024): 243–269, https://doi.org/10.1017/lsr.2024.11.

[19] Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *What Is an Event?* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[20] In October 2020, according to the Pulso Ciudadano survey, 61.7 percent of Chileans considered that the social uprising was positive for Chile (https://chile.activasite.com/estudios/pulso-ciudadano-16/), while the December 2019 CEP survey showed that 55 percent of respondents supported the demonstrations (https://static.cepchile.cl/uploads/cepchile/2022/09/encuestacep_diciembre2019.pdf).

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in the real time of the events, but we know these produced effects.[21] The question is whether the effects, in the form of something like awareness or "awakening" about the reasons that led to the social uprising, will be lasting in personal biographies. Naturally, the question remains open.

Complementing the above, the chapter by Geoffrey Pleyers looks at the characteristics of twenty-first-century social movements that could be observed in the Chilean social uprising. Pleyers stresses the importance of the forms of organization, marked by national ideas spread through socio-digital networks, and how activism is associated with strong subjectivism and is not necessarily related to experiences of formal organization (63). Of particular note is his conclusion about how this process has an impact of "profound transformation of what it means to be Chilean in the twenty-first century" (70).

The essayistic literature does not lack excellent intuitions on the matter. In *Octubre chileno,* Carlos Ruiz suggestively argues, "It is the street, and not the factory or the office, which has long been allowing the multitude to recognize itself as a majority" (47). The question is how people moved to the street from the factory or the office, or without passing through these two spaces. This, in turn, raises the empirical question about the rapid socialization processes that took place in different social sites. Unfortunately, there is no empirical research but many speculations: for example, about the socializing role that may have been played by "meeting points, the call to march, the arranged schedules" where "everything is structured through social networks" (on this point, see the chapter by Danilo Martucelli in *Hilos tensados*, 395, and Geoffrey Pleyers in *Chile en movimientos*, 55). There is no doubt that social networks played an essential coordinating role. Nonetheless, can we really assert that social networks are an immaterial space of mobilization and socialization that can dispense with concrete and practical spaces (what the literature on resource mobilization refers to as "social infrastructure") such as the classroom, groups of friends, or the neighborhood? It does not suffice to note that "at the heart of the events of October 2019 lies hard real life," a notion that "attempts to account for what tends to be common at the level of many social experiences" (Martucelli in *Hilos tensados*, 420). In what social sites? How is the experience of hard real life materialized? What are the paths from it to protest?[22] Martucelli, as well as Kathya Araujo, tells us about the role that may have been played by the "common feeling of suffocation" (Araujo in *Hilos tensados*, 425), which generates this feeling of a hard existence. In their view, this shared feeling predisposes people to mobilization but does not mobilize them in itself. However, how and through what mechanisms did this lead to the experience of protesting (often for the first time) and sometimes to violence? Martucelli rightly notes that "what becomes central is what is produced by and within the mobilization itself" (Martucelli in *Hilos tensados*, 433), which is equivalent to saying that things happen in the mobilization and that they serve as sites of socialization. True, but we do not know much about what these things could consist of. Are they the occasional conversations that took place there, the relationships that may have been formed, or what Durkheim would call the "moral density" of the group that emerged within the demonstrating mass or the different subgroups that made up the mass? We do not know.

Nelly Richard is correct when, in *Revuelta social y nueva Constitución*, she notes that "the revolt of October 2019 gave course to multiple flows of social rebellion that, without

[21] A notable exception was a survey conducted by academics and students at the University of Chile. While the methodology is very basic, the information collected is noteworthy and rich in lessons: *Encuesta zona cero*, Informe de resultados, Núcleo de sociología contingente, November 2019.

[22] To answer such questions, it seems essential to analyze the individual trajectories of those who have experienced hard life, somewhat in the manner of Bourdieu and his colleagues in *La misère du monde* (Seuil, 1993), a remarkable book in which personal misfortune (which is actually social) and biographical misery are narrated by those who experience it.

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previous political coordination or an articulated program of transformation, *developed communitarian energies*" (31). This observation is important in emphasizing the revolt's generation of its own life and the resulting creation of common spaces where social networks and relations were produced. Put in a more political way, Richard asserts that "what would be born in the fervor of the street" is a space that is "the irreducible guarantor of the rebellious spontaneity of an outraged population" (42), which means that the street and the activity that takes place there are the fundamental space of protest mobilization and socialization. Richard's argument may be somewhat tautological in that it characterizes mobilization as producing mobilization without answering the question of what led ordinary people to mobilize and enter a space of socialization whose effects—we assume—may go far beyond the motives and emotions that triggered personal involvement in the first place. Richard's is fundamentally a political reflection on what underlies what Raúl Zarzuri called (in his chapter in the book *18-O: Una radiografía desde la Academia*) a "wave of anger in movement" (17). Its expression forces us to reflect on the type of people involved, whose spontaneity is highlighted by Tomás Moulian in the same book (39–40). This also becomes relevant for assessing Richard's proposal for the process of drawing up a new constitution after the uprising: through evaluating, deliberating, and fighting in the name of the people.

A new people?

Such was the magnitude of the protests and their capacity to signify objects and things (from walls to monuments) that it is not surprising that, in this selection of books, different definitions of those who were protesting are put forward. In his book *Octubre chileno*, Carlos Ruiz had no doubt in seeing the social uprising as "a process of constitution of a new people" based on "social practices of action and organization," which position as adversary "that caste" which has its origin in "the concentration of wealth and opportunities of the neoliberal carousing" (26). He sees in this new emerging people Chileans who "are depositaries of the affection and admiration of the immense majority of society" (5) without providing any proof of the existence of this supposed majority. For Ruiz, its emergence is the result of "dynamic processes of formation of new social identities" that prefigure "a new time," a "time of prelude" (46, 59). We assume that the formation of new identities originated in states of the world prior to the uprising and that the latter accelerated this process of formation. Unfortunately, we do not know concretely how different social identities (from the identity of sexual minorities to the identity of popular classes and the popularization of the identity of the Mapuche people) form, consolidate, and expand. Ruiz is not wrong in pointing out that "this people is not asking to be represented" but is "demanding participation and to be a determining actor in the formulation of its own future" (62). In the identification of this demand to participate, is there no blind spot regarding who issues the demand, who interprets it, and who satisfies it? Do we really know what this new people wanted, demanded, and desired?

Can we really interpret the will of a "multitude," so often evoked by Rodrigo Karmy and, in the selection of books reviewed here, Nelly Richard, based on a rereading of Negri and Agamben?[23] Richard refers to this "crowd" or "multitude" as the "popular Chile" (18) and its action—the "destituent fury of the street" (42)—whose function is not to create reality but to overcome an institutional reality that resists change. In this sense, reform and the conduct that accompanies it, reformism, are neither possible nor acceptable in Richard's eyes. Reform is equivalent to endorsing the premises and assumptions of the Chilean

[23] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin Books, 2005); Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

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model because it would imply introducing modifications within the model in circumstances in which the aim is to replace it—hence the appeal to the logic of the destitution of order.

In this dimension of the social uprising, the social status of the demonstrator, or rather the collective agent who is protesting, is not clear. The question of what moves individuals is logically absent because what matters is the nature of the collective agent, whose existence is beyond doubt, whatever the name used ("people," "mass," "street," "crowd," or "multitude"). A collective agent, precisely because it is collective, can express itself without the mediation of spokespersons and, instead, does so in town meetings and assemblies that pose a threat to the representative dimension of democracy.[24] Whatever its form, what stands out in the social uprising is what Nibaldo Cáceres, in his chapter in *18-0: Una radiografía desde la academia*, refers to as a "popular rebellion" led by the "underclass" (*bajo pueblo*) (26), a return to the terminology of Gabriel Salazar.[25] We do not know how this underclass, multitude, or crowd was able to undertake collective actions in support of different causes, not only disproving the Olsonian paradox of the free rider but also dispensing with mediating forces that were well known and recognized in the functioning of democracy, starting with the political parties.[26]

It is this people, referred to in different ways, that permitted different general interpretations of the social uprising, a phenomenon that we can agree is difficult to comprehend, let alone explain. All that remains is to interpret it.

Overinterpretation of the social uprising

All that has been said so far inevitably gives rise to general interpretations of the social uprising. The phenomenon is sufficiently complex to rule out crude and simplistic interpretations such as that of Lucy Oporto, popular with the right-wing Chilean press. The title of her pamphlet says it all: *Lumpenconsumismo, saqueadores y escorias varias: Tener, poseer, destruir (Lumpen-consumerism, looters and various scum: To have, to possess, to destroy).*[27] Oporto depicts a nefarious lumpen-people who, rather than protesting, loot to consume the proceeds. Conversely, in several of the books reviewed here, there is an overinterpretation of the social uprising in virtuous terms. Was it as "luminous" as suggested by José Bengoa in his chapter of *18-0: Una radiografía desde la academia* (106)? This overinterpretation is anchored in various aspects of the protest phenomenon, from its orientation (its telos, if you will) to the meaning of the uprising. Martucelli is not mistaken when, in his chapter of *Hilos tensados*, he notes the "heterogeneous set of processes and situations" that were at the uprising's origin and played a role in its development. He emphasizes that "the events that took place do not make a system among themselves" (372). This is right, which is equivalent to saying that it is neither logical nor reasonable to assume homogeneity of interests, let alone a project, in the uprising. Instead, it involved "a veritable festival of representations." The magnitude of the event was such that "the mobilizations thus became a surprising epistemological phenomenon: they had the capacity to demonstrate all the interpretations at the same time" (373). This assertion is important in showing that an essayistic approach offers not proof but rather some

[24] This aspect is brought to the fore by Butler in her theory of the public assembly. Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

[25] Gabriel Salazar, ed., *Chile historia y "bajo pueblo," Proposiciones* 19 (Ediciones SUR, 1990).

[26] Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Harvard University Press, 1965).

[27] Lucy Oporto, *Lumpenconsumismo, saqueadores y escorias varias: Tener, poseer, destruir*, www.letras.mysite.com, 2019.

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principle of plausibility about what is being interpreted. If every interpretation is possible and acceptable, then the social uprising is incomprehensible.

One of the many (over)interpretations is that of Nelly Richard. In *Revuelta social y nueva Constitución*, she is interested in "the figure of *evasion* as a trigger for the revolt" (30). There is no doubt that fare evasion on the Santiago subway acted as a trigger, but it does not constitute an explanation. Furthermore, Richard takes the "anarchizing" nature of the revolt seriously as unleashing "communitarian energies" (31), which translated into the ephemeral short-lived domination of the collective in the form of "direct participation, 'evading' any mediation, representation, or political-institutional delegation" (32). However, what was central was the act of evading, which Richard addresses metaphorically, that is, as a form of destitution of order in the sense that "the revolt projects a spectral shadow that will continue to attack any normativity that seeks to forcibly tranquilize the social body" (35). In this sense, the agreement reached by political parties on November 15, 2019, was seen as a forced act of tranquility, of *pax politica*, that violated the spontaneous (and, therefore, genuine) meaning that emerged from the social uprising. This may be the case, but Richard's argument does not explain why the convention elected, after the uprising, in the first constituent episode had an antiparty and ultraleft orientation and met with resounding failure in a plebiscite on September 4, 2022 (only 38 percent of Chileans supported the proposed new Constitution, which the right did not hesitate to qualify as "octubrista" and associate with the social uprising). True, Nelly Richard had no way of foreseeing the future, but praise for spontaneity (which, in the election of the convention's members in May 2021, was reflected in the fact that independent persons were allowed to form lists of candidates as if they were parties) resulted in a massive rejection, negating the virtuosity of the social movements and the redemptive function of the social uprising. Insofar as there is no explanation for such a failure (the intellectuals who passionately supported the uprising also evaded questions about the erroneousness of their beliefs regarding what finally happened), it only remains to note the overinterpretation of the event that Nelly Richard was able to offer.[28]

Richard is not alone. In an intuitively interesting way, Mauricio Folchi asserted (in *Chile despertó*) that the social uprising was "a way of settling accounts with history" (9–10); what the uprising expressed was "the crisis of neoliberalism" and its political expression in "restricted, tutelary democracy" (according to Sergio Grez in his chapter, 13). This judgment is impressive because it resonates with the enormous literature that, as with the 2007–2008 financial crisis and its global effects, sees not only the debacle of neoliberalism but also the end of capitalism.[29] It is doubtful whether Sergio Grez had even read Wolfgang Streeck and all the literature critical of neoliberalism.[30] However, this was not an obstacle to a chauvinistic and politically mistaken thesis affirming that Chile will be the tomb of neoliberalism.

All this is part of the collective exercise of overinterpretation in which many Chilean public intellectuals indulged without realizing the political and intellectual implications of their assertions. This is what is surprising. So many things were said categorically and grandiloquently without real empirical investigation. Was it the result of what Pablo Artaza related to "a deep and generalized disaffection" (78)? Maybe, but causally relating disaffection to the uprising calls for a mobilization of methodological resources that is beyond an essayistic approach.

[28] Nelly Richard's tone and approach to the social uprising are very different in a recent interview with *La Segunda* newspaper, where she is strongly critical of left-wing spontaneity: Nelly Richard, "El rechazo en el plebiscito fue la mayor derrota que sufrió la izquierda (en los últimos 50 años)," *La Segunda,* July 2, 2024.

[29] In the sense of Rosa, which forces us to question the conditions that make the loss of resonance possible. Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (Polity, 2021).

[30] Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* (Verso, 2016).

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In many ways, the social uprising was a profoundly enigmatic phenomenon. We know ever more about it. However, some aspects remain shrouded in mystery. For instance, we know nothing about the burning of dozens of subway stations: Not even the police evidence helps us decipher what happened there and how it could have happened. The essayistic literature that is the focus of this literature review is completely blind to the reasons for this mass arson attack. Rather, it reflects on structural aspects and, in some cases, is based on ideals about potential factors or dimensions that conditioned collective behavior from the outbreak of the uprising. Despite this blind spot in the research on this important specific point, essayistic work on the social uprising provides us with many intuitions but few proofs. From a scientific perspective, this is a problem.

Every essay, precisely because it is an essay, is a prisoner of its own arguments and limitations. In *Pensar el malestar*, Peña graciously acknowledges the "hasty" nature of his essay (6). He is an example of the many intellectuals who seek to capture and interpret reality. These interpretations are rarely successful. Unlike with Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, an extraordinary text that connected with the spirit or Zeitgeist of an epoch, nothing remotely similar happened with Chile's volcanic uprising. Only a sociology of the intellectuals and their interventions could explain why. The questions that the Chilean social uprising of 2019 raised are only the prolegomena.

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