

5 The Chilean awakening in a global decade of social movements

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Introduction

The popular revolt that erupted on 18 October 2019 and came to be known as the “Chilean awakening” (Ganter et al. 2022) was unprecedented in its scale, impact, and meaning since the return of democracy to the country in 1988. More than two million people took to the streets in different parts of the country on 25 October 2019. In Santiago, 1.2 million people demonstrated – more than a fifth of the city’s population. In the following weeks, and until the pandemic lockdown, thousands of citizens gathered in the country’s squares, echoing Santiago’s iconic Plaza Italia, which they renamed the Plaza de la Dignidad (“Square of Dignity”). Massive union marches were organised on a weekly basis, and popular neighbourhood assemblies and town councils were formed with Chileans from various social backgrounds and generations taking part in the movement. They adopted a broad repertoire of actions, ranging from classic demonstrations to symbolic direct action in shopping malls – to raise awareness of consumer culture and the working conditions of employees – and outside pharmacies, to denounce the high cost of medicines and demand a better public healthcare system.

While this was a profoundly Chilean event, the 2019 outburst was also part of a global wave of social movements that have shaken countries in all regions of the world since 2011 (Bringel and Pleyers 2017). This wave of movements and citizen uprisings was particularly strong in 2019, with outbursts in several Latin American countries (Muggenthaler, Bringel, and Martínez 2021) and dozens of countries worldwide. Such a “global wave of movements” (Glasius and Pleyers 2013) is not embodied in a network that coordinates activists from different continents, let alone in an international organisation. Actions and movements “resonate” (McDonald 2006) across individuals, experiences, and movements. Like the global movement of 1968 or the people’s spring that shook Europe in 1848, the actors that take part act in a decentralised way and organise themselves at national and local scales. However, they share more than tactics, elements of their repertoire of action (such as the occupation of central squares in cities or the urban graphics), and forms of organising (including effective use of socio-digital

media). Across continents and under different political regimes, citizens and activists make similar claims and share similar values, demanding more democracy, more social justice, and, above all, personal dignity, and respect from the state (Glasius and Pleyers 2013).

Analysing the Chilean Awakening in the light of this global wave of movements without falling into “methodological globalism” (Pleyers 2023b) requires overcoming the false dichotomy between the “national” and the “global”. Like all movements in this wave, the Chilean Awakening is both profoundly national and an echo of a global movement; considering it a component of a global movement should not lead to denying its national character or its specificities. Instead, it invites us to see and analyse it in the light of features and dimensions shared with similar mobilisations in other countries, benefiting from the analyses and lessons learned from these movements to reach a better understanding of the features and challenges of the Chilean Awakening. From this perspective, a global sociology of social movements can help us understand the nature and challenges of contemporary social movements based on similar experiences in other countries.

In this chapter, I focus on features shared by the Chilean Awakening and other contemporary movements seeking democracy, social justice, and dignity, which I have organised into eight categories: scales and spaces of action; reticular and adhocratic forms of organising; claims formulated in terms of dignity, social justice, and democratisation; strong subjective dimensions; widespread expressive and artistic dimensions; spaces of encounters and experience; intersectional encounters and cross-fertilisation; the co-existence of a more pragmatic relationship to institutional politics and a stance against any specific political party. The chapter closes with reflection on the connections between social movements and social change, which is less linear and more complex than assumed by many actors and analysts of the effervescent moments of these movements.

The analysis draws on fieldwork research and interviews with activists that have taken part in citizens’ movements for democracy, social justice, and dignity since 2011 in cities including Paris, New York, Moscow, Tunis, and Barcelona. In November 2019, I conducted 27 interviews with activists of different generations who participated in the daily occupations of the “Plaza Dignidad” in Santiago. This research draws on epistemic and methodological considerations for a global sociology of social movements, outlined in a recent article (Pleyers 2023b).

Mobilisations focused on the national scale

A feature shared by the movements, revolts, and outbreaks that have emerged since 2011 is the inscription of their struggles and demands in a national framework, as they mainly organise at a national scale (Glasius and Pleyers 2013). This focus distinguishes them from the movements for greater democracy or equality of the previous decade, which targeted international

institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and met at regional or global events such as the World Social Forums.

The 2019 Chilean Awakening was no exception. It was a deeply national event, which was acted out in the squares of every city of the country and in many villages. With a focus on national politics, public healthcare, and pension systems, it was deeply embedded in the Chilean political, social, economic, and cultural context. Citizens were outraged by various scandals that impacted on the national conscience, such as revelations about the mistreatment and abuse of children and adolescents in the institutions of the National Service for Minors, corruption scandals, and abuses by the political and economic elite. The 2019 uprising built on two decades of national movements, more particularly the student movement of 2011, the mass mobilisations against private pension funds (Miranda 2021), and the feminist movement of 2018.

Intense use of socio-digital networks

The emergence of socio-digital media changed how movements are organised and experienced (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Rovira 2017), to the point that some analysts have referred to them as “Twitter revolutions”. Socio-digital media provided platforms from which to disseminate the Chilean movement (also known by its hashtag #18O, which resonates with the Spanish #15M in 2011) and organise it, express its claims, communicate among participants, and share reasons for their outrage and repertoire of actions, offer alternative information and narratives to mass media, and reach out to other citizens.

At the same time, a major feature of most protests since 2011 is not the transition from the “real” to the “virtual” but the combination of digital media with the “territorialisation” of the movements, which often occupied public squares in city centres. Some of these occupations were permanent, such as on Tahrir Square in Cairo or Plaza del Sol in Madrid in 2011. Others consisted in intermittent occupation, where participants did not camp on-site overnight but returned every day to the same square at the end of the afternoon, as was the case of the Place de la République in Paris in 2016 and the Plaza de la Dignidad in Santiago in 2019. In other countries, the movement took the form of daily or weekly marches that occupied the streets and squares of the city centres as well as national political and media spaces. In most cases, alongside the main demonstrations, less visible initiatives, such as popular assemblies in neighbourhoods, are driven by the will to re-appropriate urban spaces in neoliberal cities, reinforce the social fabric and the bonds between citizens, and open up spaces for participation and local initiatives. These movements have combined digital activism and activism “in real life”, socio-digital and mass media, online campaigns, and mobilisations in the street and on the square (Gerbaudo 2012).

Other forms of organising, other forms of activism

A third shared feature of the outbursts and revolts of this decade is the success of decentralised self-organising and the fact that traditional organisations and militancy have not played a central role in the rise of such protests. Citizens took to the streets in the name of their personal and collective outrage rather than following a call from civil society organisations, trade unions, or political leaders. In some countries, the activists who occupied the squares banned the flags and banners of parties, militant organisations, and often even associations (see Türkmen 2016 for the case of Gezi Park in Istanbul). In response, some sociologists, militants, and public intellectuals, notably in Chile, have considered these outbursts “unorganised” and insisted on the “need to organise the movement” to achieve concrete results. Asef Bayat (2017) refers to these seemingly unorganised citizen protests as “social non-movements”, which he understands as “collective actions of non-collective actors, ... ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change” (Bayat 2017, 15).

In Tunisia, the revolution surprised many left-wing militants and the main trade union (Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens, UGTT), elements that were not involved in the early rise of the protest. This scenario would repeat itself in citizens’ revolts throughout the decade. In Chile, militants from the Communist Party and leftist organisations with whom I spoke explained that they had been hoping for such a social revolt against neoliberalism for years but found themselves disoriented when the citizens’ revolt broke out in October 2019, wondering about their role and place in this unprecedented movement. Some wondered which organisations were responsible, as they could not comprehend a movement without a formal organisation behind it. Yet the absence of formal organisation does not mean that these movements were disorganised. On the contrary, citizens and activists organised themselves efficiently, opting for fluid networks, affinity groups, and “adhocratic” networks, defined as “fluid organisational structures in which members initially adopt ad-hoc roles to fulfil a personal purpose, based on individual life projects that are then interpreted as collective objectives” (Henríquez 2020, 42).

On this point, the outburst of 2019 contrasted with the massive student movement of 2011, in which structured organisations, particularly student federations and some political parties, played a significant role (Disi 2018). This is not to say that trade unions did not take an active part in the Chilean outbreak in 2019. A series of strikes and union marches extended the dimension of the outburst (Osorio Lavín and Velásquez 2021), and allowed the movement to reach out to new sectors of Chilean society. The citizens’ uprising also took up some of the main union claims, including the struggle for better working conditions and pensions, and against the private pension funds (Julián-Vejar, Osorio, and Pérez 2022; Miranda 2021).

However, as was the case in the Tunisian revolution, the Spanish 15M, Occupy Wall Street in New York City, or the yellow vest in France (Bérourd

et al. 2022), union organisations did not play a central role in the emergence of the movement and its organisation, nor in the experience of the citizens who gathered in the squares or the popular assemblies. Labour issues were part of citizens' claims, but they expressed them through other frames, references, and actions. Many trade unionists participated in the protests as citizens rather than as members of a union organisation.

More than the presence or absence of trade unions, however, what has characterised the “post-2011 movements” are new relations, tensions, articulations, and collaborations between trade unions and citizen movements or networks (Bérout et al. 2022; Braga 2017). In Chile, the massive movement against the private pension funds were born out of convergences, tensions, and collaborations between a citizens' movement and trade unions (Miranda 2021). A similar logic preceded the active participation of trade unions in the outbreak of 2019 and the social and political processes that followed.

Dignity, democracy, and social justice

The Tunisian revolution of 2011, the first of this “decade of social movements”, called itself “the revolution of dignity”. At the end of the decade, Chileans also put dignity at the centre of their outburst. In Santiago, the square they occupied every evening was renamed Plaza Dignidad, while the walls of the city centre declaimed the word in countless slogans and street art designs. In the 1990s and 2000s, philosophers and sociologists associated dignity with the repertoire of recognition and “post-materialist” values. What characterises the 2010s movements, however, is the close link between socio-economic and cultural spheres in asserting and demanding *dignity*. For the activists I interviewed, dignity is closely associated with dimensions of recognition and with social and economic claims. As a young Tunisian I interviewed in 2013 explained:

Dignity is the possibility of living without having to ask my mother for a handout every week when I am already 25 years old. If I have a job, I can earn a living, I can walk with my head held high.

Similarly, in 2019 Chilean citizens demanded to be treated by the state with respect, and for changes in the social and economic system that would ensure material conditions to “live with dignity”. This was well expressed in the words of a 46-year-old man on Plaza Dignidad in Santiago:

What most affects our dignity is the case of grandparents who have to live on 100 lucas [100,000 pesos], which in Chile is nothing. This money is barely enough to buy medicine. It is obviously an attack on people's dignity.

(Interview, November 2019)

While social and economic claims have been at the core of square occupations and citizens' uprisings in the 2010s, these movements have stopped short of "anti-capitalist" claims that some left-wing intellectuals and militants have projected onto them. From the Arab revolutions to the 2019 outbursts in Latin America, citizens have demanded to be able to live with dignity on the salaries they earn, and to end the abuses and privileges of the economic and political elites. However, in no country have these citizens' movements for democracy challenged the foundations of the capitalist system, contrasting with the discourses and claims of significant swathes of the environmental, Indigenous, and alter-globalisation movements.

This was the case in Chile. Inequality and economic injustices were the main sources of the citizens' outrage and unrest (Araujo 2021) that fuelled the uprising. However, far from making anti-capitalist claims, most protesters demanded the right to live with dignity on their salaries, to be able to gather some savings to ensure a decent retirement, and not to have to indebt themselves at unsustainable rates to get access to higher education, while some called for a less unfair distribution of income. These claims reflect a break with the beliefs in the neoliberal and meritocratic model held by a part of the population (Cortés 2022), and with the idea that Chile was a prosperous "oasis" of stability and well-being. They also reveal the moderation of the movement's demands, which called for constitutional reforms and a less unjust form of capitalism, but did not seek radical change and an alternative model of society.

These movements and revolts also had a generational component. On the one hand, in several Latin American countries, notably Chile and Brazil, the first generation who grew up after the dictatorship led the movement, demanding more from democracy than merely being protected from dictatorship's abuses. On the other hand, from the Arab world (Khosrokhavar 2012) to Latin America (Brunner 2021; Disi 2018), the protests found one of their sources in the tension generated by the contrasting landscapes generated by the massification of higher education in political and economic systems that limit the possibilities of realising personal (and) collective aspirations, and condemn most young people to precarity and debt.

Subjective dimensions

Individual and collective subjectivities are asserted and constructed in social movements, which provide "spaces of experience" favourable to experimentation and processes of subjectivation, where the self-production of oneself as a person and the perception of one's impact on society mutually reinforce each other (Pleyers 2010). These spaces and events constitute an ephemeral but intense and meaningful experience for their participants, and often have a long-term impact on their social and political values and commitment (McAdam 1989), as well as on their worldview and the construction of themselves as individuals and citizens.

For those who took part in it, the 2019 revolt has not only been a collective and political process but also a deeply personal experience (Ganter et al. 2022; Sandoval 2023). Based on processes of personal subjectification, understood as the construction of oneself as a person and the conception of the life one wants to live (Bajoit 2012), the experience of the revolt led to participants' questioning the promises of the Chilean neoliberal social and economic model that claimed to be based on "meritocracy". During the evenings they spent on the squares, they recounted their lives, listened to others doing the same, and realised that their personal destiny was collective and that the difficulties they faced in daily life found their source in a model of society that is deeply unfair. This "opened their eyes", as many repeated in interviews and as street art claimed on the walls of the cities of Chile, and they revisited their life histories based on this new perspective. After devoting most of their time and energy to work (Araujo and Martucceli 2012), many interviewees expressed their desire to "get their life back". One worker present at Plaza Dignidad shared this in these terms during the interview:

At one point, I asked myself, "At what point did we become like this?" because we lived stressed, tired. I worked in a bank. I went in at seven in the morning and sometimes I left at two at night! What kind of life did I have with my family? ... Since 18 October, there has been something, a phenomenon, that I still can't identify. All I know is that I feel happy ... It's such a selfish world. We were taught to be selfish. In these 20–25 years, we were not taught to be people, but to be "neoliberals" ... I don't know what we became. When did this happen to us? When did this happen to me, locked up in the world of work, work, work, and I didn't realise how it happened. 30 years passed by me!

(Interview, Plaza Dignidad, November 2019)

Expressive and artistic dimensions

Artistic creativity has emerged as a consubstantial part of all the square movements and citizens' revolts during the 2010s. Street arts, poems, songs, and performances have expressed outrage at injustice, anger at state violence, and demands for social justice. The Tunisian Revolution failed to provide a better future for its youth; however, it has profoundly permeated the subjectivity of many citizens, particularly among young people, transforming their relationship with the state, society, and themselves (Diaco et al. 2017). The expression of these subjectivities is embodied in particular in a dynamism and artistic creativity that touches all fields, from cinema and music to street art (see Laine, Suurpää, and Ltifi 2017 on the Tunisian case).

Artistic creativity has been a central component of the Chilean uprising. In the months that followed 18 October 2019, dozens of artists wrote songs dedicated to the movement, to the point that David Ponce (2020) speaks of a "sound uprising" (*un estallido sonoro*). The outburst cannot be recounted, let

alone understood, without the countless poems narrating and disseminating the hopes, fears, and experiences of those who lived through it (Ganter et al. 2022). Other participants expressed their outrage and hope through embroidery and burlap. Street art and graffiti were of particular significance, populating and shaping the space of the movements and embodying the reappropriation of the neoliberal city by a popular movement. It provided the visible dimension of the transformation of these squares into spaces of experience, hopes, encounters among citizens, and confrontation with the police (Paredes 2021). Paintings and graffiti remained on the walls of downtown Santiago until May 2023: the sediment of the revolt and its creativity, recalling the energy and creativity of the revolt and maintaining its memory. Such residue acted as traces of the struggle and its hopes and values, and the alternative project for society it represented. It was not an abstract declaration but embodied in the experience of the people who gathered on these squares. The images prolonged the movement and its claims, addressing the actors who lived through it and still carry it with them, as well as the political authorities and passers-by (Henríquez 2022), questioning them about the injustices of a social and economic model that rules a profoundly neoliberal and unequal country.

Yet creativity and the affirmation of subjectivities are not merely the means used to promote a cause; they are at the core of resistance to the invasion of the world by the forces of neoliberal cities. The vindication of these subjectivities and creativity opposes the process of subjugation and formatting by an economic and cultural system.

Beyond convergence: Spaces of encounter

A key element of these movements is that they provided spaces where participants wove dense and deep social relations. The squares became “spaces of experience”, understood as “places distanced from the capitalist society that allow actors to live according to their own principles, enter into different relationships, express their subjectivity and that favour processes of subjectification” (Pleyers 2010, 39).

In all the cities of Chile, the occupied squares became spaces of sociability where citizens shared the difficulties of their lives and their hopes. They opened up to the other not only with their convictions but also their political and existential doubts, the fragility of their experience, and their processes of personal subjectivation. These relationships of trust, openness, and attention to the other that characterised social relations in Plaza Dignidad contrasted with the extent of distrust that characterises Chilean society (Brunner 2021), both towards politics and among citizens. Friendships and mutual support networks were formed on the squares (Henríquez 2022), the ground on which mutual aid and local solidarity networks would emerge or consolidate during the pandemic to confront the failures of the state to address basic needs in popular neighbourhoods confronted with strict confinement measures (Pleyers 2023a).

All over the world, the square occupations also fostered encounters between people from different social backgrounds. People who usually “don’t mix”, either in everyday life or in social mobilisations, met, shared their lives, and suffered the repression together. Those who were in Plaza Dignidad will remember the flags of rival football teams flying above the statue on the square. Those who were part of the front line confronting the police will remember the support of some members of the football fan radicals, the “*barras bravas*”, who used their experience of confrontations with the police in the stadiums when defending the occupied square. The same happened in Cairo during the 2011 revolution when the “ultras” of rival clubs allied to defend Tahrir Square against the armed forces or the Gezi movement in Istanbul in 2013.

Intersectional movements

As mentioned above, the “movements of the 2010s” are characterised by a close articulation of economic and cultural (materialist and post-materialist) claims (Glasius and Pleyers 2013), and also an intersectional dimension.

The feminisation of social movements was already an essential element of mobilisations at the beginning of the decade. Women took centre stage in the Tunisian revolution, in the Spanish 15M, and even more so in the Gezi movement in Turkey in 2013 (Türkmen 2016), among others. This was reinforced throughout the decade, exemplified by the democracy movement in Sudan (Handique 2020) and the Women, Freedom, Life -movement in Iran in 2022 (Khosrokhavar 2023), to name the most emblematic cases. Transcending its protagonists, this feminisation shows the growing influence of feminist culture and practices in contemporary social movements (Suárez-Krabbe 2020), notably embodied in the importance of care to activists, expressed in their attention to other participants, the different style of leadership, and the production of spaces in which human relations can be expressed through mutuality.

The feminist dimension was crucial in the Chilean uprising, prolonging the 2018 national “feminist uprising” (Ponce Lara 2020), while the performance of the feminist collective Las Tesis resonated globally and was reproduced in dozens of countries. The aftermath of the 2019 uprising also saw the history-making feminist march on 8 March 2020. Echoes on a personal level and in producing relations between citizens are even more important. When I asked what the outburst had changed, a young activist replied, “Since 18 October, we talk about our emotions at dinner in my family” (interview with a law student, 21 years old, Santiago, November 2019).

Another intersectional dimension of the square movements in the 2010s that has been repeated in many countries has been the encounter between urban and “non-racialised” citizens with popular, “racialised” and/or ethnic actors, dominated in the national context by institutionalised racism and/or colonial practices. The active participation of oppressed minorities in the

“post-2011” movements contrasts sharply with the wave of anti-globalisation protests in the late 1990s and early 2000s. While the Zapatista movement was an inspiration shared by many of the young activists, alter-globalisation protests overwhelmingly gathered “non-racialised” (i.e. White), middle-class citizens, to the extent that the question, “Where was the colour in Seattle?”¹ (Martines 2000) became a major concern for the movement.

A decade later, the square occupations of the 2010s were spaces of encounters between citizens and activists from different social backgrounds. In New York, Occupy Wall Street was an important moment of interaction between students and middle-class activists and “racialised” (mostly Black and Latinx) activists from the city’s more popular neighbourhoods. The relationships of trust and support they forged during the encounter led to solidarity actions when popular neighbourhoods were flooded by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and to a vibrant Black Lives Matter movement in the city a few years later. In Istanbul, the 2013 Gezi Park occupation brought together religious citizens and atheists, and middle-class Turkish activists and Kurdish citizens oppressed and repressed by the regime, producing shared understanding, interpersonal trust, and mutual support for their causes; this converged in demands for a more democratic country and the rejection of increasing state control and repression. These encounters fostered a new perspective on Kurdish activists and strengthened the new pro-peace party in Turkey, the People’s Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), which won 13% of the votes nationally in the 2015 elections before being heavily repressed by the Erdogan government.

In Chile, the strong presence of Mapuche flags and Mapuche language graffiti on the Plaza de la Dignidad in Santiago and across the country became a symbol for one of the most significant dimensions of the uprising: the encounter between activists and urban movements, and elements of Mapuche culture, worldview, and identity. As Fernando Pairican and Juan Porma explain, “Mapurbidad² was not only present. It played a fundamental political and symbolic role” (Pairican and Porma 2022). The Chilean Awakening had a decolonial dimension and contributed to broadening what Pairican (2022) has called “plurinationality from below”. Carrying Mapuche flags during the square occupation, young people sought to show the Indigenous component of their identity or their solidarity with the Mapuche people’s struggle. They denounced repression of the movement, the robbery of Indigenous lands by the Chilean state (Pu Lov y las Comunidades Lavkenche en Resistencia 2017) and the invisibilisation of Mapuche identity and culture in the colonial construction of Chilean identity. Indeed, the encounters in square occupations and their aftermaths have transformed how many participants see their country. As happened in other Latin American countries with the Zapatista movement and with *sumak kawsay/buen vivir* (see Radcliffe, this volume), some parts of the Mapuche worldview have become an inspiration for a new generation of activists in thinking about our relationship with nature (of which we are a part), what living with dignity

means, and the pluricultural reality of Chile. It has translated into a different way of conceptualising democracy (Díaz Polanco and Pacheco 2002; Pairican and Porma 2022) that stresses the need to consider collective subjects and rights and to acknowledge and protect different nations and cultures in twenty-first-century democracies.

Relationship to institutional politics

It is an analytical mistake to reduce the outcomes of social movements to their impact on institutional politics while ignoring the complex relations between these two arenas and their actors, which evolved significantly during the movements and revolts of the 2010s. At the dawn of the decade, most actors in the citizen revolts and square occupations – including the Arab revolutions (Khosrokhavar 2012), the Spanish 15M, Occupy Wall Street, the Gezi Park movement, and the June 2013 protests in Brazil (Bringel and Pleyers 2019) – adopted an anti-party and anti-institutional stance (sometimes falsely labelled as “anti-politics”). They focused on non-representative and prefigurative practices (Pleyers 2010), implementing the horizontality and democratic values of the movement in the assemblies themselves, as well as in the thematic committees deployed in the squares.

The rejection of institutional politics and actors left a vacuum in electoral politics. In some countries, it was filled by charismatic progressive leaders whose discourses resonated with some of the demands being made and who managed to combine elements of “movement culture” with the logic of institutional politics (Della Porta et al. 2017), as was the case of Podemos in Spain, Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party in the UK, and the campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Alexandra Ocasio Cortéz in the United States. In Egypt, the well-organised Muslim Brotherhood filled the space, before being crushed by the El Sisi coup in 2014. In many other countries, the void was filled by far-right actors. Authoritarianism grew in Arab countries and the peaceful revolutions in Syria and Bahrain were crushed. In Turkey, the democratic atmosphere of Gezi gave way to an authoritarian turn, marked by the assassinations of Kurdish political, social, and cultural actors, along with the arrest of hundreds of President Erdogan’s opponents. In Brazil, the 2013 marches were animated by progressive demands and actors calling for more democracy, participation, and equality, better public services, and less state violence. However, a year later, movements from the far right took over the leadership of the protest cycle (Bringel and Pleyers 2019), promoting President Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment, the Temer government’s neoliberal policies, and, later, Jair Bolsonaro’s successful campaign. If we maintain that social movements contribute to the production of society, it is indispensable to recognise that it is not only progressive movements that produce society; conservative movements and the “global capitalism movement” do likewise (Sklair 1997).

Latin America movements are traditionally closer to party politics than those elsewhere. All over the continent, the movements of the 2010s opened

space for political co-optation. They also introduced political innovations, seeking to combine the logic of movements and party politics. For example, in Brazil, “plurinominal candidacies” at local and state elections, and a series of other political innovations, emerged in the aftermath of the 2013 protests (Faria 2020), resulting in a significant increase of women of colour and activists in municipal councils without losing the autonomy of activist collectives.

In this panorama, the Chilean case stands out as one of the most interesting representations of the translation of the movements into the political-institutional arena. The uprising contributed to the historic election of a 35-year-old former student leader to the Presidency of the Republic in 2021. Gabriel Boric belongs to a party alliance that emerged in the aftermath of the 2011 student protests, in a process partly similar to what happened after the Spanish *indignados* (Marzolf and Ganuza 2016). In Chile, the dynamism of social movements found its main political translation in the first constituent assembly. The majority of its members were elected from lists of candidates who were independent of political parties, most of them with strong roots in civil society and social movements, which resulted in one of the most progressive proposals for a constitution globally. This composition increased the challenge of connecting the ethical logic of social movements with the negotiation logic of representative politics (Garretón 2016), particularly with articulating this constituent process beyond the most progressive sectors of the Chilean population.

Thanks to the infrastructures and connections built after the 2011 student protest, some political translations of the 2019 uprising operated much faster than in other countries; however, some of the actors in these movements maintained a strong opposition to the practices of party politics. It translated, for example, into a campaign in favour of the null vote in the May 2023 elections for councillors, in which the proportion of null and blank votes reached 21%.

Social movements, politics, and social change

The impact of revolts and citizens’ movements on institutional politics is rarely linear and often does not go in the direction of the movements. This is not specific to the political processes that unfolded after the citizens’ uprising. A few weeks after May 1968, with the largest workers’ strike in France since the Second World War and the student revolt that became a global symbol, the national elections of June 1968 delivered the most pronounced victory for right-wing parties since 1945. In the more recent history of the Americas, only five years separate the mass protests of Junho 2013 (June 2013) by citizens demanding a fairer and more democratic Brazil and the electoral victory of far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro. Five years is also the period between Occupy Wall Street and the election of Donald Trump to the White House.

In Chile, a succession of historic social movements, including the student movement of 2011 and the massive protest against private pension funds, did not prevent the return to the presidency of Sebastián Piñera, the businessman who most embodied the system that these movements denounced. After a first mandate between 2010 and 2014, his re-election in 2017 invites us to moderate assumptions of the immediate impacts of progressive movements on institutional politics and not to ignore the agency and adaptability of actors who sought to maintain the “Chilean socio-political matrix” (Garretón 2016). Piñera’s second election demonstrated the ability of right-wing parties and actors to adapt to new contexts created by social movements and to limit the depth of the social changes driven by the student movement (Cortés 2022); however, it did not invalidate the dynamics of the social movements – quite the contrary. Mobilisation against private pension funds reached its peak in 2017. A year later, in 2018, the same thing happened to the feminist movement. In 2019, the explosion occurred, and a year after its explosion, the Constituent Assembly process began.

The connections between social revolts and institutional politics are never straightforward. One should recall that the primary purpose of social movements is not to change institutional politics but to change society. Reducing social movements to their impact on institutional politics or the electoral arena is an analytical bias that prevents us from understanding some fundamental dimensions of these actors and the essential part in the change that they drive. Although June 1968 gave the largest electoral victory to the French right in the twentieth century, the historical impact of these elections was less than that of the social and cultural movement that immediately preceded them. Nobody remembers the elections of June 1968, while May of the same year had a profound impact on French society, remaining a turning point and a global reference. Likewise, the impact of the feminist movement cannot be summed up in a series of laws that have asserted gender equality, granted the right to vote, or provided legal access to abortion. It is more than that, transforming women’s and men’s subjectivities, behaviours, and visions of the world in everyday life in professional, educational, and public spheres (Federici 2018; Suárez-Krabbe 2020). A fundamental dimension of movements and revolts, such as May 1968 in Paris and 15M and the *indignados*, is precisely to question the centrality of institutional politics in the mechanisms of social change (Arranz Guilarte 2021; Rancière 2015). The progressive movements of the 2010s remind us that democracy is not only about institutions and elections. It is about living democracy as an experience, in everyday practices, and as a personal ethic (Pleyers 2023c).

Conclusion

Analysing the Chilean outburst within the wave of citizen movements and revolts that have shaken countries and political regimes in all regions of the world since 2011 provides a broader understanding of the contributions and

challenges of the Chilean movement in regard to the social, cultural, and political dynamics it fostered and strengthened.

The fate of the citizens' movements and the social and political dynamics that unfolded in these countries in the 2010s, reminds us that social change towards a more just and democratic world is not a linear process. It goes through advances and setbacks, passing through the euphoria of sharing with thousands of people in public squares and political and social victories, and the disillusionment when electoral processes reveal that the actors of the democratising movement are a minority in the country's population, or that the state has managed to repress democratic aspirations in a violent but effective manner.

Similarly, the lessons of social movements in different countries invite us to integrate the role of reactionary actors and movements more effectively into analyses of contemporary social movements. They also temper the illusory optimism of a rapid and limbo-free mutation to a more just and democratic society. Chile has already gone through this stage. Six years after the historic student movement of 2011, Sebastián Piñera was returned to the Presidency of the Republic. The failure of the progressive actors to institute a process that would provide Chile with a new constitution is a reminder that the people who "woke up" in the 2019 uprising only constitute a part of the Chilean population. Among progressive intellectuals, there is also a tendency to look at and analyse only one side of the social and political landscape.

At the same time, it is becoming increasingly clear that the "Chilean awakening" was not limited to its political impact; rather, it reflects the operations of social movements in the strong sense that Alain Touraine (1981) assigned to the concept: actors who take their struggles to the level of historicity and seek to transform a society's central cultural values. The uprising has shaken many dimensions of Chilean society and of the citizens who participated in it. It has instigated transformative processes in multiple spheres, from politics to everyday life and family relations, resulting in a profound transformation of what it means to be Chilean in the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1 A reference to the protest against the WTO in December 1999 that took place in Seattle, USA.
- 2 Mapurbidad refers to the Mapuche identity, culture, cosmovision, and way of being in the world.

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