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Fabiola Miranda & René Jara, editors (2016)

Chili actuel: gouverner et résister dans une société néolibérale

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*Mature Neoliberalism and Social Movement
in Chile: reflections for a contemporary
research agenda*

The rise of the anti-austerity movements in Europe and the long-term anti-neoliberal conflicts in Latin-America have renewed interest in the political economy of social movements. As Donatella Della Porta (2015) has claimed, neoliberalism and political economy are back in social movement studies. The book *Actual Chile: Governing and Resisting in a Neoliberal Society* is a significant contribution to this trend. Through a compilation of 13 articles, presented during an international colloquium at Grenoble in 2013, the book offers a diverse and rich panoramic of cases and approaches to study the dynamic social conflict in Chile. The book stands out for two reasons. First, the compilation offers a panoramic view of the current dynamic of social conflicts, acting as a map of contentious activity in contemporary Chile. Secondly, the book proposes basic elements for a new research agenda in social movement's studies, acting as a draft for a new research agenda on social conflict and neoliberalism in Chile.

Mapping the Chilean conflict

In its modality of map, the compilation of articles produces a panoramic view of the current state of social conflicts and their relationships with different expressions of neoliberalism. The map covers eight conflicts, including emblematic ones such as students', indigenous', women's, and workers', and other emergent conflicts like the housing movement, environmental struggles, and transformations in political parties. The main particularity of this map is to offer a reading of the sectorial fissures and spaces of contention of neoliberal hegemony, based on the analysis of the relationships of codetermination between neoliberalism and collective agency in Chile.

The alternation between sectorial conflicts and panoramic views embraced in the book produces a well-balanced map that combines local analysis with global readings of social conflict. The majority of the articles include an inductive and ideographic approach to neoliberalism. They highlight how neoliberalism is reproduced, expanded or contested,

from the perspective of structures and institutions, subjectivities and agents, and power apparatuses and mechanisms. This collage of local conflicts is well synthesized in the concluding chapter and epilogue, which give a panoramic reflection of the compilation and a critical analysis of the historical trajectories of collective action under the neoliberal order. Consequently, the book successfully introduces the reader to a strategic perspective of the multiple spheres of contention of Chilean neoliberalism, acting as a strategic map of conflicts and struggles.

Towards a new research agenda

In its modality of research agenda, the book confronts the dilemmas of suggesting a distinctive research field and an emergent epistemological object. From the perspective of the research field, the book is focused on the last two decades of Chilean history. This historical delimitation expands the research field beyond the study of the first waves of neoliberal reforms, which have concentrated the attention of most of the studies. This effort is part of the Chile's new wave of studies which focus on sociopolitical processes that followed the transitional period, after the successive waves of social movements since 2005 (e.g. Garretón, 2012; Ruiz, 2015; Donoso & Von Bulöw, 2017).

In this new research context, the book stands out in offering novel interpretations for Chilean conflicts, based on different modalities of inquiry and diverse conceptual tools, which are predominantly

taken from critical disciplines such as a historical institutionalism, critical discourse analysis, political geography and narrative studies. This pluralism is notably exposed in the Introduction, which offers a detailed combination and interplay between current international trends in the comprehension of neoliberalism and the most relevant contributions of national researchers. This effort draws a map of the main axis of debate, and it identifies Chile as a significant case study in the general context of research and critiques on neoliberalism.

The counter effect of this pluralism is the tensions that the connection of different theoretical traditions provokes, for they otherwise are in mutual rupture. The most significant tensions are between neo-Marxist and post-Marxist approaches, and their opposite emphasis on the reproductive or contentious character of neoliberalism. Neo-Marxist approaches tend to describe neoliberalism as a set of global governance mechanisms able to capture or appropriate the logic of social order and the processes of subjective constitution. In contrast, post-Marxist views highlight the generative condition that neoliberalism has over the contentious activity of the subjects under its regime. If those conceptualizations show how complex neoliberalism is, they make difficult to offer a cohesive dialogue and view between articles, blurring the possibility of a convergent view or critique able to define what exactly neoliberalism is and how it operates specifically in Chile.

Chile: A mature neoliberal society?

As the editors recognize “the richness of the various workshops and the contribution of the discussants also showed difficulties in problematizing the ‘neoliberalism object’” (p.23).¹ This difficulty became particularly problematic when the book tries to propose a distinctive epistemological object for the new research agenda.

Implicitly or explicitly, the majority of articles conceptualize Chile as a case of mature neoliberal society, which means that Chile is the country with one of the earliest and most widespread transitions to neoliberalism, and a society where neoliberalism widely determines the dynamics of social interaction. One dilemma of this characterization is to place Chile as an incommensurable case

¹ „[L]a richesse des divers ateliers et l'apport des discutants savait aussi montré des difficultés à problématiser l'objet 'néolibéralisme'.” (Author's translation)

study, whose particularities are beyond the general characteristics of current neoliberalism. This characterization includes the risk of mystifying Chile as a case of study and producing an isolated research program, where Chile is singularized from the international waves of neoliberal studies and from regional understandings of oppositions to neoliberalism. By fortune, the still preliminary characterization of Chile and its neoliberal order keeps the debate open to further discussion.

Bibliography

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