

Special Issue

A Decade of Contestation? Social Revolts in the Geography of Global Capitalism



Presentation of the Special Issue: “A Decade of Contestation? Social Revolts in the Geography of Global Capitalism”

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This Special Issue compiles research papers and theoretical reflections delving into critical moments reshaping cultural, social, economic, and political spheres in the world’s Capitalist geography over the last decade. It looks at various social movements and upheavals that have challenged political and economic powers in various nations. Iconic examples of such ‘social revolts’ were the waves of protest that swept Chile and Columbia in October 2019, November 2019, and April 2021. In both nations, massive citizens’ movements lay behind street protests, pot-banging demos, political and cultural activities, underground rail stations set ablaze, and tough demands made to governments. Despite the range of special national and other factors underlying these mass protests and the paths that led to them, this Special Issue looks at both the causes and consequences of these crises from a global standpoint.. It does so through a compilation of papers offering national-level analyses.

This collection of papers explores various normative and democratic aspects of both thematic and territorial struggles (Garretón, 2021; Touraine & Rivera-Vargas, 2017; Casassas et al., 2015). It focuses on analysing the Feminist, environmental, and regional struggles underpinning popular discontent. A good example of this can be found in The Global South's Feminist movements, which have taken diverse forms, shaped by their local contexts. At the same time, these movements have embraced decolonial, communal, Black, Indigenous, and popular perspectives. They challenge the dominant, somewhat hegemonic, political leadership and discourse within the Feminist movement that emerged from global centres.

This scenario begs the following question: Have we seen contestation signalling the decline of the Capitalist world? At root, protests seem to have given rise to deliberate counter-hegemonic actions (Alvarado-Espina, Rivera-Vargas, & Morales-Olivares, 2019; Rivera-Vargas, Neut-Aguayo, & Neut-Aguayo, 2020). Thus, this Special Issue seeks to go beyond the line of discourse taken in each specific case to give a broad overview of the many social upheavals shaping the global agenda over the last decade.

Within this framework, seven papers were compiled that tackled these issues from various standpoints, and covering different territories. They mainly focus on the epistemological standpoint of post-colonial or post-authoritarian societies (Huggan, 2013; Morales-Olivares, 2015). This scope goes beyond the territorial bounds commonly linked to The Global South to take in the whole world. In other words, these narratives cover the upwelling and reshaping of political movements and consider the extent to which they challenge the ingrained institutional order, Representative Democracy, and Neo-Liberalism in lands on the world's geo-political periphery (Madariaga, 2020; Alvarado-Espina, Morales-Olivares, & Rivera-Vargas, 2020). Over the past decade, there has been a shift that puts greater stress on collective agency. Within social theory, this stress partly stems from the debate on structure and agency (Serrano & Herzog, 2020). Sometimes, this comes together with a social ontology that prizes people's skill in crafting their own reflections and discourses. In troubled times, one needs to delve deeply into how each group in each place understands and creatively interprets its situation. The goal is to come up with meanings and guidance for collective action, whether territorial or bearing on given themes or sets of issues.

The emergence or consolidation of a counter-hegemony serves as the central theme driving the discussion in this Special Issue. The strength of movements pressing for changes in societal outlook is a strand running through all the papers. The goal here is to build new discursive boundaries that challenge institutions, norms, and the hierarchical structure of societies. One might therefore say that taken as a whole, these actions challenge the reality imposed by global Neo-Liberalism.

The papers focus on movements that all have one thing in common, to wit the demands for greater equality and acknowledgment that institutions and the dominant cultural narrative have done so much to stifle and quell.

Each of the seven papers in this collective, multi-disciplinary Special Issue deals with a local facet of this broader theme. The subjects covered by the papers are listed below:

1. The pro-abortion movement in Argentina.
2. New mobilisation processes in contexts of austerity and Conservatism in Spain.
3. The political crisis in Bolivia following the 2019 General Elections.
4. Feminist resistance strategies in Mesoamerica.
5. The political challenge to Neo-Liberalism posed by the Chilean ‘social revolt’ (2019-2021).
6. From the ‘social revolt’ to Constitutional change: The political impact of the wave of protests in Chile.
7. The collective resistance of Afro-Columbian women.

This Special Issue consists of empirical papers and theoretical reflections organised as follows:

The first paper, titled *#AbortoLegalYa [#Legal Abortion Now] — Digital Activism for Legal Abortion in Argentina, 2018-2020* is by Argentine scholars and researchers Victoria Álvarez and Luisina Ferrante. It delves into the strategies and actions that let the Feminist movement highlight their demand for legal, voluntary abortion — a campaign that was crowned with success when an Abortion Act was passed by parliament. The paper also stresses real-time digital coverage and activism during the debate spanning from 2018 to 2020.

The second paper, by researchers Lluís Parcerisa and Antoni Verger, is titled *New Social Movements in Times of Conservatism and Austerity: Analysis of the political process of educational mobilisation in The Balearic Islands (2013-2015)*. This paper explores the collective resistance against the educational policies imposed by the Balearic Government between 2011 and 2015. Using a political process approach, the paper analyses the social mobilisation against these reforms and how the campaign finally put a stop to both the austerity measures and the proposed language model.

In the third paper, titled *What’s happening in Bolivia? From the botched 2019 elections to MAS’ triumphal return in 2020, and beyond*, Brazilian scholar Clayton Cunha Filho examines the reasons behind the overthrow of Evo Morales and the MAS Party in 2019, as well as their swift return to power after the 2020 elections. The paper focuses on MAS’ links to its social bases and how these weakened after the party had led several governments in a row.

The fourth paper is by scholars Judith Muñoz, Soledad Ascencio, and Zoila Madrid and is titled *Berta Cáceres, Agency and Resistance: A Feminist-indigenous interpellation of the Capital / Life crisis*. It delves into the relationship and convergence between Feminist agencies and the resistance strategies of indigenous women's movements in Mesoamerica. The authors undertake a discourse analysis of the late indigenous activist Berta Cáceres Flores, leader of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras (COPINH). The study focuses on three dimensions: Agency; Resistance Strategies; Community-Indigenous Feminisms.

The fifth paper is by Chilean academics and researchers Eduardo Alvarado-Espina, Rommy Morales-Olivares, and Pablo Rivera-Vargas — the co-ordinator of this Special Issue — and is titled *Social Revolt in Chile: A political counter-hegemony challenging the Neo-Liberal narrative?* It looks at whether or not the social uprising gave rise to a new anti-Neo-Liberal political-institutional trend. The paper focuses on the political dimension of the 2019 wave of protest in Chile, delving into two cleavages (elites/people; parties/independents). It also considers the representation of the anti-Neo-Liberal democratic narrative within the body (The Constitutional Convention) charged with drafting a New Constitution.

The sixth paper is titled *From the Wave of Protests in October 2019 to Constitutional Change: The political significance of social mobilisations in Chile* and is by Manuel Antonio Garretón and Rommy Morales-Olivares. The authors delve into what led to the 'social revolt' in Chile in October 2019 and the path taken in the stormy relationship between institutional politics and social mobilisations, and that led to the 2020 referendum on the proposed New Constitution (which was voted down). Drawing on a review of key sociological analyses of the period, the paper discusses the causes of the October 2019 uprising. Specifically, it looks at: (a) the emergence of a new socio-economic order to overcome the model rooted in the dictatorship; (b) the forging of new links between traditional politics and the social movement in efforts to bury Chilean-style Neo-Liberalism.

The seventh paper is titled *The collective resistance of Afro-Colombian women surviving victims in Colombia: A counter-hegemonic bet*. The study by two Colombian researchers, Alba Cruz Castillo and Diego Barragán, looks at the collective resistance of Afro-Colombian women. In their research, the authors showcase the experiences of counter-hegemonic political agency among a group of Afro-Colombian women who lived through the country's long armed conflict. To this end, the authors use a decolonial, case-based approach. They argue that the women's collective action advanced counter-hegemonic challenges to institutional notions of reparation. The Afro-Colombian women came up with new alternatives to heal the scars of Colombia's armed conflict, drawing on their lived experiences and, in doing so, challenged institutionalised narratives.

Thus, the reflections in this Special Issue shift away from Euro-centric, exclusionary notions of social change. Instead, they empirically show the growing trend to

build a new, inclusive narrative of global society. This involves bringing diverse perspectives to bear on the crises of the recent past and that stem from the Neo-Liberal Capitalist Order.

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