

The 2019 uprisings in Chile: A student led movement

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¡Que vivan los estudiantes
Jardín de nuestra alegría!
Son aves que no se asustan
De animal ni policía
Y no le asustan las balas
Ni el ladrar de la jauría

- Violeta Parra -



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¹ (El Universal, 2019) <https://eluniversal.cl/contenido/6725/encuesta-esta-de-acuerdo-con-la-evasionmasiva-en-metrodesantiago>

RESEARCH QUESTION: Why were the students the ones who started the social uprisings of October 2019 in Chile?

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1. INTRODUCTION

The students have played a fundamental role in the social uprisings that started in October 2019 in Chile. The actions of evasion in the subway initiated by high school students, were the driving force behind the massive mobilizations that have been taking place throughout the country ever since.

The unrest was triggered by a \$0.04 increase in the subway fares in the city of Santiago. A few days later high school students began organizing and carrying out actions of evasion by jumping over the turnstiles without paying the ticket. “Evadir, no pagar, otra forma de luchar” (Evade, don’t pay, another way of fighting) was the slogan that the students chanted in chorus at the entrance of the subway. After a whole week of protests and evasion actions, the students called for a day of massive protests on October 18, and the population actively responded demonstrating in the main metro stations of the city. The Carabineros de Chile (the local police force) took action and confronted the protesters with brutal repression. The population, indignant at the police response and the government reaction, spilled out onto the streets (Ferretti, 2020). What started as a reaction to fare increases, transformed into a general challenge of the social and political system, which had prevailed in the country for the last 40 years. The structural inequality, the poor living conditions, the rate increases for public services, an authoritarian democratic system as well as the growing precariousness of social rights are among the main reasons behind the largest social outbreak since the recovery of democracy in Chile (Ferretti, 2020).

The role of these high school students is especially noteworthy because of the broader impact that such mobilizations had and are still having in the whole structure of the country. For this reason, it might be important to get a better understanding of what motivated these Chilean students to stage such a startling movement especially when the event that triggered it (increase in subway fees), was not directly related to an educational matter; and to comprehend why it was initiated by high school students and not other sectors of society. The purpose of this paper is to provide an integrative socio-psychological explanation of why the social movement that started in October 2019 in Chile was initiated by the students.

There is an extensive body of research in regards to the student mobilizations and protest in Chile. The following research offers new contributions to the existing literature in terms of content, argument and methodology. It focuses on the subjective aspects of the Chilean student actions of 2019. It primarily looks at the experiences and perceptions of the students and pays less attention to the actual content of the “objective” characteristics behind their actions. Instead of analyzing the different reasons for collective behavior as unconnected elements, it provides a socio-psychological integrative model, the social identity model of collective action, that links and explains them together. Lastly, due to the recent character of the 2019 social uprisings, the existing literature on it is quite limited. This paper would be among some of the first research tackling the October 2019 events and the role of students in them.

This article is organized as follows. I begin by discussing the Integrative social identity model of collective action (SIMCA), which I chose as a theoretical framework to analyze and explain the recent student actions in Chile. I expand its advantages over other models of collective action, and introduce its different components and the way they predict group behaviour.

After this, I contextualize the events under consideration, by providing a brief review of the recent political and social history of Chile. I focus on the role and development of the Chilean student movement

before, during and after the military dictatorship as well as in the new wave of student protests that emerged in the 2000s.

Next, I present the socio-psychological reasons that drove the students to initiate the protests of 2019, which I classify in three groups based on the elements of the SIMCA model: perceived injustice, perceived efficacy and social identity. I explain each of them and support them with evidence collected from academic papers, journalistic articles, and other sources.

I conclude with an explanation of how the aforementioned variables interacted with each other, emphasizing the importance of the development of a Chilean student identity, and how they led to the students actions of October 2019.

2. COLLECTIVE ACTION: THE SIMCA

Collective action has been a long-lasting topic of interest to many disciplines, including psychology, economics, political science, and sociology. The starting point of a large part of approaches to collective action is that it is the reaction to an objective state of disadvantage. This means that identifiable specific material conditions can be found as the underlying-causes for engaging in collective activities (Hovland & Sears, 1940). Objective conditions are undoubtedly important, nevertheless, large-scale systematic analyses have shown that their empirical relation to collective action, and protests behaviours is ambiguous and weak. (Green, Glaser, & Rich, 1998). As a result, there has been an increasing concern relating to the socio-psychological determinants of collective action (Klandermans, 1997). The starting assumption of these approaches is that people respond to a subjective sense of disadvantage, which does not necessarily need to match the physical objective conditions. Although there is an extensive and quite varied literature on the topic there is still missing some theoretical integration.

The social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) developed by Zomeran, Postmes, & Spears offers some benefits when it comes to explaining what drives people to engage in collective action. Unlike previous attempts of integration, this model successfully bridges the individual and social conditions that foster protests mobilization. The SIMCA constitutes an integrative psychological perspective that specifies the key subjective predictors of collective action as well as their interrelationships (Zomeran, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

This integrative theoretical approach formally defines collective action as those behaviours of members of a social group that are conducted with the intention of removing the perceived underlying reasons behind a group's disadvantage. (Zomeran, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). The model takes into account three subjective variables that affect collective action as well as the relationship between them. These predictors are perceived injustice, perceived efficacy and sense of social identity. (Klandermans, 1997). The defining characteristic of the SIMCA is that it places social identity as the central ingredient for collective action since this element directly drives individuals to engage in it and concurrently bridges the injustice and efficacy explanations of it.

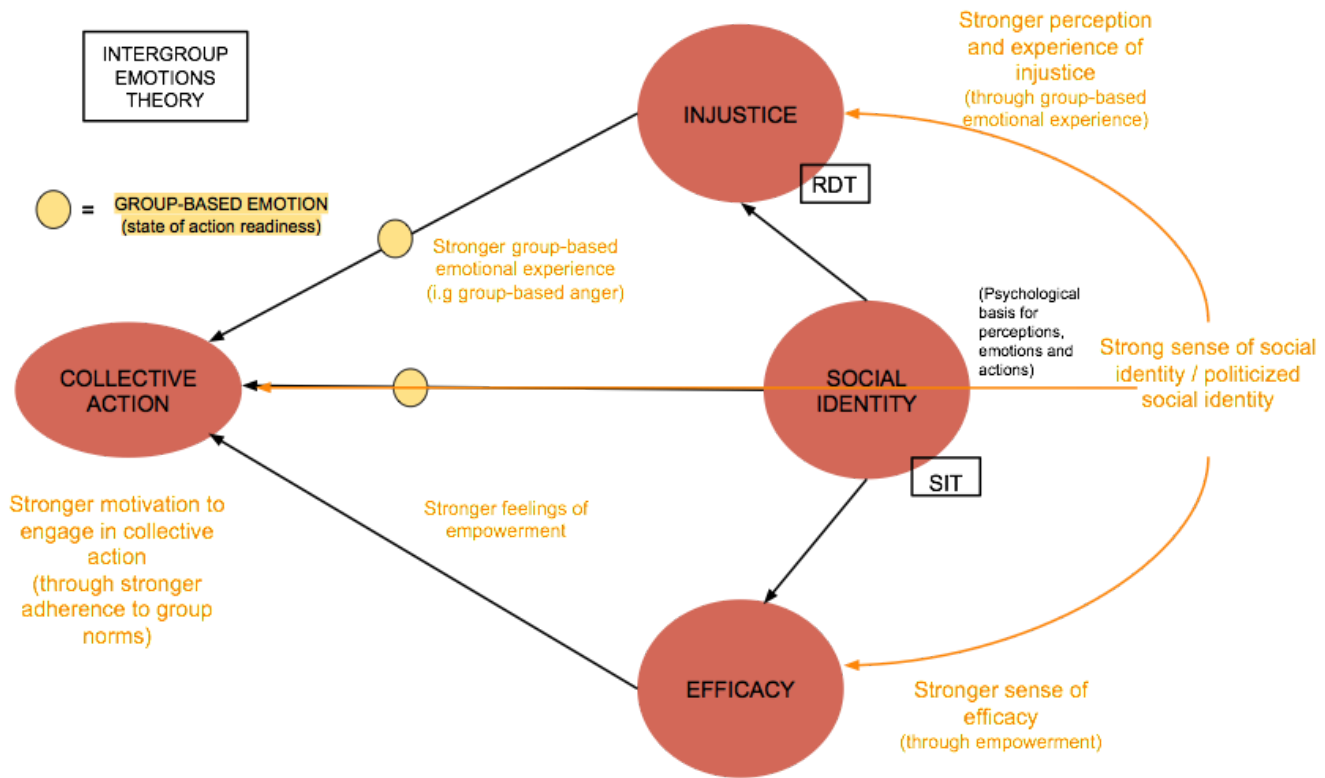


FIGURE 1: The SIMCA model. It illustrates the different subjective variables for collective action and how they interact.

The first variable, perceived injustice, has to do with the subjective experience of unjust disadvantage. It is guided by the Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT), which states that feelings of deprivation develop on the basis of group social comparison with specific others (Walker & Smith, 2002). When this social comparison results in a subjective sense of injustice then collective action to redress the injustice is likely to occur. As defined by the Intergroup emotions theory (Mackie & Smith, 2002; E. R. Smith, 1993), group-based interpretations or appraisal of an event determine specific group-based emotions (e.g., discontent or anger) that, in turn, predict concrete action behaviors. These Group-based emotions are functional responses to events or situations that are relevant for the group. When group-based deprivation or inequality is perceived as unjust, group based emotions like anger should inspire specific actions to confront those responsible in order to rectify the unfair deprivation. In other words, feelings of group-based anger or discontent are states of action readiness (Frijda, 1986).

The second variable, perceived efficacy, is described as the shared belief that one's group can resolve its grievances through unified effort (Mummendey, 1999). It is the perception of having the necessary power for achieving group based goals, such as transforming an unjust situation. Group efficacy gives people a sense of collective strength or power on the basis of which they believe themselves capable of transforming the circumstances and destiny of their group (Drury & Reicher, 1999). This means that the stronger the subjective sense of the group's efficacy is, the more likely group members are to engage in collective action (Mummendey, 1999).

The third variable and central element for collective action is social identity. Social identity is traditionally defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978). According to the Social Identity Theory (SIT), people generally strive for and benefit from positive social identities associated with their membership groups. SIT implicates three socio-structural variables which influence how people manage their identity issues: The permeability of group boundaries, the legitimacy of intergroup relations, and their stability. According to SIT, when members of a lower status group perceive the intergroup status differential to be illegitimate and unstable (which could be change), they are more likely to identify with their group and engage in collective action to change the intergroup social position (Tajfel, 1978). Identification with a social movement organization or other political groups is even more predictive of collective action, because the former is a politicized identity (Simon, et al, 1998). In such situations social identity is also referred as collective identity, which is a subtheory of SIT that relates to an activist and politicized identification. Collective identity is a group/social identity, which refers to identification with socially situated identity categories (Davis, Love, Fares, 2019). People manifest a politicized collective identity to the extent that they consciously engage as group members in a power struggle on behalf of their group knowing that there is a more inclusive societal context for which it should be fought for (Simon and Klandermans, 2001). The politicization of social identity allows the political to become a personal identity project, transforming individuals’ identity from one that is defined by social circumstance into a more agentic one (Drury & Reicher, 1999). A politicized identity connects people to the structural plight of the disadvantaged group, resulting in an internal “obligation” to participate in the group or organization activities (Sturmer & Simon, 2004)

Social identity functions as a system of shared social meaning (Turner, 1991). It allows for group-based emotions and perceptions that are shared with fellow group members. Thus, social identity has a direct influence on collective action but also influences the way in which group members appraise and feel about a particular situation or social structure (Zomeran, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). It functions as the psychological connection between injustice and efficacy elements (Zomeran, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). This means social identity predicts collective action directly as well as indirectly through the injustice and efficacy variables. When people strongly identify with their group, they are more likely to make intergroup comparisons and hence perceive and emotionally experience injustice on the basis of their social identity (Zomeran, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

The SIMCA states that a stronger sense of social identity should relate to a stronger motivation to engage in collective action, through stronger adherence to group norms; a stronger perception and experience of injustice, through group-based emotional experience; and a stronger sense of efficacy through empowerment (Zomeran, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

Next, a review of Chile's recent political and social history is presented, paying special attention to the role of students and their protest actions. These events shaped the circumstances of the contemporary Chilean students' protagonist of the October 2019 protests.

3. RECENT CHILEAN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY.

Chile's history throughout the 20th and 21st century has been marked by important political events and transformations, and by distinct cycles of social manifestations carried out by students around demanding changes in the education system, and other aspects of society.

3. 1 The Chilean student movement in the 20th century

The student/ social movements before 1973

The student movement in Chile emerged in the 20th century and it rapidly acquired such magnitude that it started being considered a relevant socio-political actor in the public life of the country (Cárdenas, Oyarzún, 2013). Within the framework of The Reform Movement ("El Movimiento por la Reforma")², a process that simultaneously took place in many countries of the region, the Chilean students exhibited a profound criticism towards the traditional conception of the university institutions, demanding greater internal democratization and questioning the general societal order. The University started being considered a key element in the struggle for social change and transformation, and the students were perceived to have a leading role in this whole process (Cárdenas, Oyarzún, 2013). The coordination between the university students with the working sector was one of the most outstanding features of this social movement cycle (Salazar, 2002)

The student/ social movements during the military dictatorship

In 1973, a military coup overturned Salvador Allende's government, bringing General Augusto Pinochet to power. During the first years of the regime, the opposition activity moved underground, as public expressions of civilian opposition were confronted with intense repression (Lavanchy 2008). With this, a long tradition in Chile of using mass protests to express social demands was shattered (Somma and Bargsted, 2014).

In the 1980s a forceful civil society re-emerged and initiated a new cycle of massive national protests ("protestas nacionales"), which became the principal form of opposition to the regime. This phenomena brought together popular sectors, students organizations, unions, and leftist party coalitions (De la Maza, Ochsenius, and Robles, 2004).

During the final years of the 80s, due to the escalating violence of the mobilizations, the main parties of the opposition decided that such a strategy was becoming too damaging since it was seen as creating fear and unpredictability (Oxhorn, 1994). Thus, a consensus was reached amongst the opposition parties to accept the military's institutional parameters. The fear of losing social harmony and the possible emergence of conflict that had contributed to the 1973 coup, shaped the actions of the future political

² The Reform Movement was a youth movement to democratize the university institution and give it a scientific character. It began with a student rebellion at the National University of Córdoba, in Argentina, and then quickly spread to the rest of Latin America countries (Cárdenas, Oyarzún, 2013).

class. The opposition formed the Concertación por el NO³, an opposition front that consisted of numerous political groups. While political parties remained united by the common goal of defeating Pinochet and restoring democracy (Somma and Bargsted, 2014) the social demands and the input of mass actors were devalued and neglected.

In 1988, the opposition coalition won the national plebiscite, and one year the Concertación's candidate won the presidential elections. This meant the end of Pinochet's military regime and the official transitioning of Chile to democracy (Cumming, 2015).

The transition to democracy and the consequences for the social/student movements

The negotiated nature of the transition to democracy initiated a phase of consolidation of power by Chilean party elites and a deactivation of civil society.

This situation was attributable to three main factors: First, the the initial Concertación governments had to accept certain conditions set by the military regime such as the admission of the 1980 Constitution, and diverse neoliberal policies and laws ⁴(Cárdenas, Oyarzún, 2013). These hindered the advance of any type of legislation by the Concertación governments (Cumming, 2015).

Second, the destabilizing experience of hyperpolarization in the early 1970s, drove the first governments of the Concertación to place stability as their central goal of their policies (Silva 2004; De la Maza, Ochsenius, Robles, 2004). In pursuit of this goal, these first administrations purposefully broke ties with social organizations and followed an elite-centered form of politics focused on negotiation and consensus-building (Saavedra, 2013). The Concertation leaders perceived the disarticulation of the social fabric and the maintenance of the political order as a necessary condition to give way to democracy, but at the same time they facilitated a model of transition of authoritarian character, which maintained the structure of the regime (Cárdenas, Oyarzún, 2013).

Lastly, civil society actors themselves also played a role in the social movement deactivation. Some actors felt the need to limit the demands placed on the governments of the transition; others simply felt satisfied with the introduction of democracy and became disinterested in further political activism.

This authoritarian, undemocratic and neoliberal constitutional order, hindered the development of social movements and prompted a cycle of youth silence (Cárdenas, Oyarzún, 2013).

3. 2 Reemergence of the student movement and the student actions in the 21st century.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, Chilean civil society reactivated with mass student mobilizations, opening a new cycle of student actions. The most recognized mobilizations for their massive and transversal adherence within it, were the ones of 2001 and especially those in 2006 and 2011.

³ Coalition of political parties of the left, center left and center, whose name referred to the call to vote "No" to Pinochet in the national plebiscite.

⁴ The organic laws ("leyes orgánicas") were constitutional measures passed by Pinochet before leaving office, which made super majorities a requirement and an impediment for passing reforms in any social, political or economical area.

In 2001, the secondary students led a protest known as the Mochilazo. This mobilization was motivated by an increase in the price of the students transport pass (Tamayo, Migliardi, 2019). The students conducted several marches and stoppages in schools, demanding that this service had to be transferred from private hands to the state apparatus (Domedel, Peña and Lillo 2008: 48). Such demonstrations led the government to give in to the students demands (Donoso, 2013).

In the years after the 2001 protests, discontent with the educational system grew bigger. The political sphere kept ignoring and diminishing the students' demands, which angered them and constituted the initial impulse of what evolved in the High school Penguin Movement of 2006, whose name was due to the black and white uniforms of the high schoolers (Donoso, 2013).

During a month the students conducted several protests and took over various schools ("tomas"). The penguins showed a refined understanding of the most obvious weaknesses of the educational system introduced by the military regime and consolidated by the Concertación government. They criticized the withdrawal of the State from the education field and, overall, the neoliberal character of the system (Donoso, 2014).

After years of latency, the university movement also exploded in 2011. This time it began, due to delays in the delivery of scholarships, problems with the National Student Card and because the measures taken by the political sphere during the previous years had not answered or solved most of the demands made by the students in 2006. The students protested and striked for months gaining broad support from the rest of the population (Aguilera, 2012).

Since then, the different student organisations continued to assert direct pressure within the political field, highlighting the limits of the current political and economical system (Bellei, Cabalin,& Orellana, 2014).

The 2019 student actions can be considered as the newest protest eruption within this cycle of student mobilizations that started in the 2000s. Most of the reasons and experiences that drove the 2006 and 2011 student actions are the same or are at least closely connected to those behind the 2019 events.

4. REASONS BEHIND THE STUDENT ACTIONS OF OCTOBER 2019

The actions of evasion initiated by Chilean high school students in 2019, are considered here as an act of collective action. The massive evasions acts in the subway of Santiago, respond to a subjective sense of disadvantage experienced by the students, who felt the raise of metro fees was the final straw in the long list of grievances experienced by the Chilean people due to an unjust social and political system. The students decided to engage in such actions because they perceived the situation was unfair and they wanted to change it.

Yet, the students were not the only ones who thought the raise of fees was wrong or that the whole system in Chile was unequal and illegitimate. Why then were the protests initiated by the students and not other sectors of society?

Hereunder, an attempt to provide an integrative and inclusive argument for the students' decision to engage in such collective action, is introduced. The integrative social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) is used as a theoretical framework to analyze the different reasons that came into play and the way they interacted with each other to encourage these high school students to start protesting. The main explanations have been sorted in the already mentioned three variables of the SIMCA: perceived injustice, perceived efficacy and social identity.

The following model serves as a guide to understand how each of the explanations fits into the different variables of the model, and how they interact with each other to predict collective action. The variables are discussed extensively below .

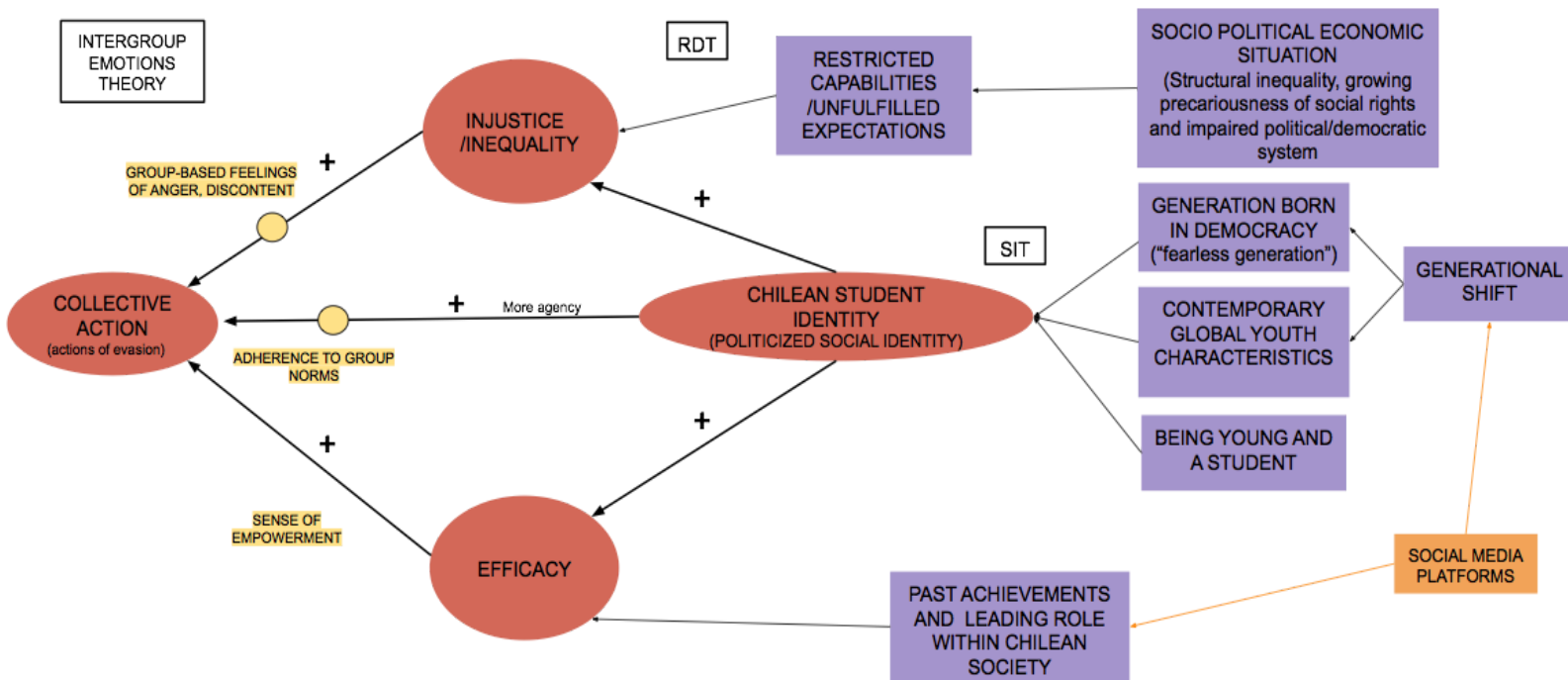


FIGURE 2: The contextual reasons behind students actions in October 2019 applied to the SIMCA model.

4. 1 PERCEIVED INJUSTICE

Educational, political and economical factors since the return of democracy created a gap between expectations and capabilities of the students. This situation was perceived as unfair and prompted anger and discontent feelings amongst the contemporary Chilean students.

4. 1. 1 An unequal educational system

One of the main reasons instigating the thwarting of the students expectation was the unequal nature of the educational system, since it generated a false promise of social mobility.

The military regime's legacy in the educational area, and the Concertacion government's failure to introduce structural changes, sustained an educational system of a privatized and decentralized nature. Market-oriented educational policies which included voucher programs⁵, school choice⁶, privatization and co-payment mechanisms⁷, were originally introduced as a way to increase the autonomy of public schools and promote efficiency by encouraging competition to attract larger numbers of students (Grugel, Singh, 2015). This meant a significant increase in access to education for the new generation of students. Due to this enlargement in coverage, more Chileans expected that they would have the opportunity to reach higher education which simultaneously inflated expectation for social mobility and a higher quality of life.

However, since the primary and secondary school levels, students were segregated by socioeconomic status. While low-SES students mainly attended public schools, middle-SES students attended voucher private schools, and high-SES students attended non-subsidized private schools (Valenzuela, Bellei, Ríos, 2013) Segregation based on income continued at the university level. In Chile, admission to universities is based on the results of a standardized test (Siavelis 2012). In 2012 students coming from public schools scored an average of almost 100 points lower than those coming from private schools (Marco 2014). Thus, public school students, generally from poorer backgrounds, were in a disadvantaged position when it was about accessing Chile's elite universities (Siavelis 2012).

To this should be added, the problematic inflated prices of university tuition fees. According to the "Education at a Glance 2017" Chilean students pay some of the highest tuition fees in the world, second only to the United States (OECD, 2017). Given that Chilean families financed the larger percentage of the students' education, paying to send children to universities was a financial burden that sent many families and students into debt (Cumming, 2015).

While the increased access to education raised students' expectations of social mobility, high tuition fees and school segregation rates hindered actual capabilities. Many students, graduates and their families which expected that their lives could be positively transformed by reaching a higher education degree were let down by the reality of the education system (Cumming, 2015).

⁵ Public schools continued to receive funding from the central government, but municipalities were now paid a subsidy (voucher) for each student enrolled in their schools. Private schools —non-profit and forprofit— that did not charge tuition fees received the same per-pupil subsidy for every student as public schools.

⁶ School choice is a potential contributing factor to SES educational segregation in Chile, since parents with higher SES tend to seek out high performance schools and more prestigious schools for their children, producing a polarization of schools by social class and students' achievement.

⁷ The co-payment system allows subsidized schools to charge students' families with a mandatory fee on top of the public voucher

Ayelen Salgado and Victor Chanfreau, lead spokespeople of the ACES (student-run Coordinating Assembly for Secondary Students), expressed this perception in a interview about the students protests of 2019:

“Education in Chile is a privilege, not a right. Public education here is terrible, and the only people who can access higher education are those who go to school in privileged areas.”
(McGowan, 2020)

4. 1. 2 Structural inequality and growing precariousness of social rights and services

Contributing to the frustration of the students' expectations was the unequal nature of Chile's economic growth and the commodification of the social system. The accumulated experiences and learning processes achieved through the most recent waves of student protests had deepened the students' diagnosis of the close link between the crisis in the educational model and the problems of the economy-political system (Donoso, 2014).

After the return of democracy, Chile's economy grew robustly. The country has now the highest GDP per capita in Latin America, and the World Economic Forum ranks it as the region's most competitive country. Most significantly, sustained economic growth together with the implementation of modest social support programs, cut extreme poverty by more than 30 percent by 2017 (Global Competitiveness Report , 2017-2018)

These significant increases in income had an impact on Chileans' demands. In the early 1990s many Chileans still placed the strongest value on satisfying basic physiological needs. However, as the economy grew and many Chileans rose to the middle class, the economic poverty restrictions disappeared. Having the means to take day-to-day physiological needs for granted, the current students now had middle-class demands and expectations (Cumming, 2015).

Nevertheless, this economic growth had a highly unequal character. Chile is the most unequal country in the OECD, with an income gap that's about 65% higher than the average (OECD, 2020). The top 1% of the population accumulates 26% of the GDP, while the 50% of households with lower incomes only account for the 2.1% of the country's wealth (ECLAC, 2019).

Nicole Contreras, a student interviewed by the BBC reflected upon this point:

“Chile has lots of money but it's totally unfair. My family is middle class and they've busted their backsides, all by themselves.” (Watson, 2019)

The grievances of inequality included the increasing costs, the growing precariousness of social rights as well as the increasing debt amongst the population. These had to do especially with the precariousness of the health care system, the private pension system, the costs of living and the low wages; as well as other issues such as the high cost of public transport (the raise of subway fees that trigger the protest, is a clear example of this matter) and the privatization of natural resources (Fraser, 2019).

The health care system is characterized by a lack of resources, absence of hospitals and specialists and huge waiting lists. Only 20% of the population can pay for better quality care (Paúl, 2019, October 21).

The pension system currently in force, which is provided by the Pension Fund Administrators (AFP⁸), is not capable of delivering "decent pensions" and has collaborated with the concentration of wealth and income inequality (Paúl, 2019, October 21). Additionally, the cost of living in Chile has gotten increasingly expensive while wages have remained unreasonably low. Half of Chileans earn below just 400,000 Chilean Pesos per month (equivalent to \$500), and the distribution of household income in the country shows that just the top 20 percent earn more than they spend every month on basic services like food, transport and housing (Paúl, 2019, October 21). These numbers are absolutely insufficient to pay for life and keep a much greater percentage of the population in poverty than that admitted in the official statistics (Durán, Kremerman, 2018). This situation ideally explains the high levels of debt among the population, which, according to recent data from the Central Bank, in 2019 reached record levels that represent 75% of the disposable income of Chilean households (Central Bank of Chile, 2019).

This reality is clearly reflected on the declaration from the ex-presidents of the FECh (The University of Chile Student Federation) Nicolas Grau and Felipe Melo:

"They say that Chile has changed. That Chileans have cell phones, that they buy in malls, that 80% feel part of the middle class, that almost 40% of young people of studying age, study. But these speeches hide a different reality. Because we know, you, your friends and everyone knows that the "consumer paradise" hides a less glamorous reality. We are talking about the new social problems in Chile, about the reality that you have to live day by day. About us, who are slaves to banks and shops, about those who owe millions to the University [...]" (Melo and Grau 2012: 13).

4. 1. 3 An authoritarian and undemocratic political system

Behind the list of grievances just mentioned, there was a strong political reason. Chile's deficient and authoritarian political system was also understood as a critical issue in fueling injustice feelings.

Chile has often been dubbed as "the Latin American tiger", by international technocrats, for its political stability (Langman, 2019). The difficult transition to democracy in Chile was indeed perceived as successful. A policy of consensus and agreements led by the Concertación Parties gave the country continuity in the government project. However, as time passes, there is a growing mismatch between a society that has experienced economic and social changes, on the one hand, and structures and leadership politicians who appear more and more distant from the population, on the other (Valenzuela, 2011).

The disenchantment with politics in Chile can be understood as a serious crisis of the representation and legitimization of the system (Valenzuela, 2011). Chilean society, and especially the students, do not feel represented on the part of those who must do so and distrust the design of the political system.

The crisis of representation has to do with the inability of the political institutions to channel and carry out the demands of citizens and students, as well as with the spread perception of an immoral political class attached to its personal interests or economic and power groups (Valenzuela, 2011).

⁸ Private financial institutions that are in charge of managing the funds. The AFP was created in 1982, during the military government led by Augusto Pinochet.

Despite some limited reforms in the early years of democracy and substantial reforms after 2006, considered as “patch solutions”, Chile is still ruled by the 1980 Constitution inherited from the dictatorship. The Chilean constitution remains a problem for political life not only because of its illegitimacy of origin but also, because of its contents and its perceived presence in everyday life (Heiss, 2017). The major elements of Chile’s 1980 constitution were designed to enhance stability, but it did so at the cost of other important dimensions of democracy like representation, accountability and legitimacy (Siavelis, 2016). Nothing can be changed without the blessing and agreement of the right wing or the governing group at the time. This extends, for example, to wages, the AFP, the system of public education, etc. It establishes an insuperable barrier that impedes the democratic process by which the will of the people translates into law and public policy, which is the basic feature of democracy (Heiss, 2017). Thus, the citizens have no meaningful tools to change their situation.

One of the chants repeated by the students during the protests showed this perception: *"Let them come to see, Let them come see this is not democracy, it is dictatorship without Pinochet."*

In essence, with the transition to democracy Chile experienced a state of relative economic and national success that heightened the students’ expectations. Increased access to education, economic growth and the introduction of a democratic system, created a prospect for social mobility, higher quality of life and political representation, for most students. Nevertheless, the unequal nature of the educational system, the unfair distribution of wealth, as well as the increasing costs and the growing precariousness of social rights, inhibited actual capabilities. Additionally, Chile’s deficient and authoritarian political system did not allow them to introduce any real change, equally contributing to the frustration of the students’ expectations.

Objective indicators do not dictate feelings of injustice. According to the RDT, Individuals feel a sense of injustice when they perceive a gap between what they believe they are entitled to and what they are able to obtain (Walker & Smith, 2002). In the case of Chile, there was a growing mismatch between the students who belonged to a society that had experienced economic and social changes, on the one hand, and the presence of an unequal and illegitimate social and political system, on the other. New rights and the expectations of the new generation of students transformed their societal perceptions regarding justice and injustice (Heiss, 2017). As a result, this new generation of students, undeniable more fortunate than its predecessors, perceived their situation as quite unfair (Cumming, 2015). This perceived injustice caused the students to feel discontent (see FIGURE 2). Group based emotions, such as discontent, are a necessary condition for generating protest behaviours. Discontent motivates collective action because it invokes specific conducts to confront those responsible in order to redress the unfair deprivation. However, these feelings might not be sufficient to generate protest action. Since the costs of collective action tend to out-weigh the benefits, aggrieved individuals rarely protest (Lichbach 1998).

As Valentina Miranda, spokeswoman for the National Coordinator of Secondary Students (CONES), stated in reference to the 2019 mobilizations:

"There were weeks of awareness, expulsion of anger, wanting to change everything," (The Clinic, 2019)

4. 2 PERCEIVED EFFICACY

For collective action to take place, perceived feelings of injustice must be accompanied by a sense of efficacy. Students must see themselves as capable of transforming the situation of their group.

Chilean students have gained support from a large part of the population and have come to see themselves as having a leading role in reshaping the country's civil society and changing the social and political situation. This perception is shared in an interview to a Chilean student collective conducted by Sandoval and Carballo:

“The social break began to occur, and the awareness of us as citizens began to occur in 2006, without much background yet, learning little by little, and more maturely occurred in 2011. And there we began to realize that, [pucha] we want to participate, we want to make changes, that we are capable of doing different things, that we want to be protagonists (...). (Sandoval, Carballo, 2019)

Right from the beginning, the actions of the students in October of 2019 received approval and support from a significant part of the Chilean population (Paul, 2019). This endorsement was the result of a progressive process related to the nature and effects of the student actions that had been taking place since the 2000s. The accumulated experiences and achievements accounted for by the previous student mobilizations might have accounted for the immediate large support the students received in this occasion and their decision to engage in collective action.

This endorsement is outlined in an interview with Ayelén Salgado, spokesperson for ACES (student-run Coordinating Assembly for Secondary Students):

“Today and for a long time, one of the biggest motivations is knowing that there is great support from the people, that “Chile woke up” is real and that we woke up with anger. As high school students who were not listened to, with many people thanking us for jumping the turnstiles, today we cannot stop this fight”. (Alarcón, 2020)

Snow's Frame Amplification processes can help explain how Chilean students since the 2000s have drawn broad citizen support and become successful actors in the path for political and social change. By Frame Amplification, we refer to the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue or problem (Snow and Benford, 1986). Student actions and demands will resonate in public opinion if there is an elevation, and identification of values relevant to the issue at stake, which are presumed to be basic to prospective supporters. This is a variety of frame amplification that Snow defines as value amplification. Additionally, the students will gain general support if there is an apparent evidence base on the diagnosis made by the social group, if the articulated discomfort constitutes an experience of daily life of the average citizens, and if there is a spread belief about the probability of change or efficacy of the collective action. Snow defined the latter three, as belief amplification (Snow and Benford, 1986)

Chilean students drew support from the broader public by appealing to the basic value of equality, and by targeting general social, political and economical issues (Cumming, 2015). Especially since the uprisings in 2011, university students have gradually expanded their initial demands, of free, quality public

education, for changes in the constitution and in the electoral system, as well as reforms in the tax system (Donoso, 2014).

In a interview, the president of the Student Federation of the University of Chile, Emilia Schneider, touched upon this topic when reflecting on the student action of 2019:

“Today the student community has come together to fight for all social demands: the price of basic services and the high cost of living in general, low wages, poor quality of health, low pensions, and the fact that this country profits from all aspects of our lives.”

“What the students did was vitally important, they managed to mobilize the entire society with a topic that did not even directly affect them (...).” (Página12, 2019)

Equally, few could deny the influence on the political agenda that the Student Movement has had in Chile in recent years. Through the last two decades, important parts of the student demands for education and political reforms have been assumed by the most prominent leaders of the center-left, and some have even been implemented (Grugel and Singh, 2015). The students' actions, which have been taking place since the 2000s, have come to be seen as an efficient mechanism for advancing change. Before the rise of these new wave of students actions, neither the way in which the policy was elaborated and implemented nor the type of public policies had been efficiently questioned by other social actors (Grugel and Singh, 2015)

Collective action is contingent on anticipated outcomes (Klandermans, 1984). If people are to act collectively, it is argued, then they "must believe that such action would be efficacious, i.e., that change is possible but that it will not happen automatically, without collective action" (Oliver, 1993). Optimism about the outcome of a collective challenge will thus enhance the probability of participation.

As it follows from the model in FIGURE 2, The support from the general population, and the achievements accounted by the previous student mobilization led the current students to develop a sense of group efficacy and to think of themselves as having a leading role in the road for social and political change. The students saw themselves as having the power of transforming the situation and destiny of their country (Ouvina, 2012). This subjective sense of group efficacy empowered students to engage in the collective actions of October 2019.

“The student movement represents the Chilean society as a whole, not only the students, but also our parents, our grandparents, our children, a discontented society, a society indignant with social injustice, a society who wants to see a fairer, more equitable, more egalitarian, more fraternal country.” Interview to student leader (Cárdenas, Oyarzún, 2013).

4. 3 SOCIAL IDENTITY

People's perceptions of injustice and efficacy to change things, develop and are strengthened when they are accompanied by feelings of belonging to the group affected by them. The students' actions that took place in 2019, together with the student mobilizations that had been taking place throughout the last two decades, respond to a generational shift which has led to the development of a strong group identity.

We talk about these young students, protagonists of the cycle of mobilizations of the last 20 years, as a political generation. Understanding generation as a group of people who share a certain time or epoch and who are marked by the specific socio-historical conditions of that time, which makes them share certain singularities and distinctive features with respect to other groups (Abramson, 2001). A generational identity is then a type of social identity, defined as an individual's awareness of her or his membership in a generational group and the emotional significance of this group to the individual (Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Martocchio, 2010).

This generation of students is also categorized as a political group. As discussed in section 2, people manifest a politicized social identity or collective identity to the extent that they consciously engage in a power struggle on behalf of their group, knowing that there is a more inclusive societal context which should be fought for (Simon and Klandermans, 2001). Collective identity creates effective connections between group members that "oblige one to protest along with or on behalf of them" (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Two types of factors influence political socialization: the "life cycle" effect and the "generational" effect.

The first aspect proposes that people acquire experiences over time, so that particular styles of action become more likely at certain periods in the life cycle, due to the sociological and psychological characteristics of that phase of life (Jaime Castillo, 2008). These high school kids had certain characteristics associated with their young age and their student situation which might have stimulated their political interest. Research on political participation has addressed the role of youth, considered as in general more prone to engage in protest action, and less in conventional action (della Porta, 2019). This might be because protesting seems to require some biographical availability⁹, which tends to be higher among young people (McAdam, 1986). Emotional characteristics connected to the youth have also been mentioned as facilitating commitment to various causes (della Porta, 2019). Lastly their studentship position, that is the state of being a student, can also be a facilitator for "acting collectively in the public sphere" to express ideas, make demands to authorities, or hold those authorities accountable. The propensity of the students to engage in collective political action lies in the characteristics of studentship as a life stage. Developmentally, studentship has been associated with higher levels of emotional, cognitive and pragmatic maturity and also with the sustenance of abstract and idealistic ideas (Klemenčič, 2014, p. 399).

The second factor suggests that political socialization is determined by the configuration and contextual factors of each generation. In this way, a generation would not be determined only by a shared political history, but also by the social and economic trends and milestones that unfold in its immediate environment and which are constituted in the context of socialization that shapes and interprets its own story (Jaime Castillo, 2008). These Chilean students are different from that of previous generations, marked both by the local history (democracy, dictatorship years, etc) and the current global situation (Barozet, 2016).

⁹ Biographical Availability refers to the "absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities" (McAdam 1986)

4.3.1 Generation borned in democracy: “Fearless Generation”

These students were born in democracy and built their relationship with politics from the characteristics of the post-dictatorship years. (Sandoval, Carvallo, 2019). As opposed to their predecessors, they did not fear political protest as a destabilizing force for democracy (Cumming, 2015), and this generational characteristic defined these students and tied them together.

Experiences with violent protests and conflict can impact peoples’ attitudes toward democracy throughout their lifetimes (Kiewiet, 2013). The divided, contentious politics of the early 1970s, the military coup, and Pinochet’s violent dictatorship influenced the actions of Chileans in the long term. These experiences lead Pinochet-era citizens to be extremely concerned with democratic stability and to be fearful towards potentially destabilizing protest action during the transitional years of democracy (Cumming, 2015). Traumatic situations, products of political violence have consequences over several generations and not only over the direct victims (Arnosó, Cárdenas, Páez, 2012). However, even if that is the case, the significance of the event will be different for different cohorts. The fact of having lived an experience constitutes a fundamental source of meaning of what is remembered (Arnosó, Cárdenas, Páez, 2012). According to Mannheim, those who did not experience the event first hand will probably interpret it in terms of the world they experienced during their own lifetime (Mannheim, 1952). This is the main difference between those who lived during the dictatorship and those that were born and grew up in democracy. The memories of post-Pinochet Chileans, about the military regime, come from simple mediations. The attitudes of these students were formed by experiences after the dictatorship, so their standpoint towards protest action and democracy were different from those of their predecessors. (Cumming, 2015).

As post-Pinochet students related differently to the political past of the country, this also allowed them to reconnect with the student radicalism of previous movement cycles. When traumatic events occur, subjects who experienced them tend to distance themselves from what happened. (Arnosó, Cárdenas, Páez, 2012) The generations that lived in the period of repression commonly tend not to approach the past, as they deal with a more intense affectivity in relation to those years (Levi, 2000). On the contrary, the generation socialized in democracy tends to show less avoidance on the issue of the political history of Chile (Arnosó, Cárdenas, Páez, 2012). The students were not held back by memories of fear and began exploring Chile’s dictatorship and pre-1973 history. Chilean students had been a radical force throughout the twentieth century and occupied a pivotal place in the national political landscape (both before and during the dictatorship years), and this was a part of history from which the current students learned and emulated.

As one of the banners splashed across the walls of the city of Santiago during the 2019 mobilizations claimed:

“We inherited the rebellion. We evade injustice. Yesterday's fights are tomorrow's fights” (foto 1, 2019) (see Evidence Appendix.).

These new generations of highschool students, socialized in a democratic context, were probably then more influenced by the recent waves of student mobilizations and even by the more radical past of the students (which resembled these new cycle of protests), than by the dictatorial regime.

The loss of fear that defined this generation became a characteristic that created a connection between these students and differentiated them from previous cohorts. This was a specially forceful identity because it evoked strong unifying feelings among the students and empowered them to engage in protest action (Cummin, 2015). These students defined themselves as the “sons of democracy” which no longer fear expressing their opinions (Reyes, Cornejo, Cruz, Carrillo y Caviedes, 2015: 263).

Camila Vallejo, who was the president of the Student Federation of the University of Chile during the 2011 student movement, in a 2012 interview, described this generation of young people as follows:

“(...) we do not have that fear in the genes, and also, we are young. (...) In a way, we are the generation that lost fear, who knows about repression but also knows how to face it, who believes that they have enough power to stand up politically, which is something that was not seen last year or the year before.” (Ouviña, 2012)

4. 3. 2 A new global youth generation

Likewise, these Chilean highschool students have been shaped by recent global, cultural, social, political, and technological transformations. They are part of a world youth generation determined by different processes like globalization which brings an intensive use of information technologies, and changes in the ways of being young in contemporary societies (Scherman, Arriagada, & Valenzuela, 2014). These processes have also come to define these students, becoming part of their identity.

Different challenges and processes in the last decades, have transformed the principles and attitudes that guide today's youth. This new generation of youngsters, of which the Chilean students are part of, have been characterized by important cultural shifts of various kinds. Aesthetic changes, changes in relationships with their bodies, their sexuality, how they dress, the relationships they establish, new forms of work and, perhaps most evidently, a strong use of digital communication that facilitates the exchange of information (Garcés, 2019). As part of an online interconnected world, the Chilean students developed some type of “global youth identity”; they acquired a more universal sense of belonging and way of thinking which linked them with other young people and their different situations, and influenced the way these Chilean students thought and felt about their own national circumstances.

This generation tends to be more realistic, tolerant of diversity and civic-minded (Scherman, Arriagada, & Valenzuela, 2014 ; Fernandez, Suarez, 2019). The recent social and political events across the world, have also made this young group of people more prone to hold post materialistic values that promote self-expression and elite-challenging behavior (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). They reject traditional politics and are more inclined to engage in collective protest activities than previous generations.

Alfredo Vielma, who was the leader of ACES in 2015, vocalized this point in the following statement:

“Social protests are an expression of our freedom and our power to reclaim the streets. They reflect our ability to express what we think . . . Street protests are weapons to achieve our goals, including education” (Grugel, Singh, 2015)

The role of social media.

In the last decade the use of social media in Chile has increased enormously, being especially predominant among the youngest sectors of society (World Internet Project-Chile, 2015).

Potential for collective action is affected by the impact of social media on young people's ways of reasoning, feeling and evaluating. In the countries most hit by crisis, such as Chile, "social media have become emotional conduits for reconstructing a sense of togetherness among a spatially dispersed constituency, so as to facilitate its physical coming together in public space" (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 159). The increased use of social network platforms among the Chilean students can be understood as a cultural resource that one hand contributed to the development of a politicized collective identity and on the other, increased the subjective sense of efficiency, bringing the general population closer to the students actions and broadening their support for the cause.

The 2019 mobilizations arose very spontaneously and with a direct link with social networks. After the decision to raise the metro ticket fee was announced, a group of high school students began to spread the idea of carrying out a 'mass evasion' on social networks. It all began with a meme Instagram account, called "Cursedin", which was administered by students from the National Institute. The proposal was that many students would gather at the same time on the stations to jump the turnstiles together and thus avoid paying the ticket price in rush hour. Thousands of students attended the call, which was registered almost day by day on Instagram (Bonino, 2019).

5. CHILEAN STUDENT IDENTITY AND THE STUDENTS ACTIONS OF 2019

As it has been presented, these Chilean students defined themselves as part of a generation marked by specific historical, political and sociological circumstances (Reyes, Cornejo, Cruz, Carrillo y Caviedes, 2015: 263): their young age; their position as students; having been borned in democracy; and belonging to a global youth generation with new values and ways thinking. These generational characteristics became the basic foundation of a politicized generational identity, a Chilean student identity (see FIGURE 2).

The SIMCA model places social identity as the central element for collective action. This means that the students' politicized generational identity directly motivated participation in collective action and simultaneously bridged the injustice and efficacy explanations. This is because social identity is a psychological basis for group-based perceptions and emotions. Their politicized identity, strongly tied the students together and connected them with the structural plight, resulting in an "inner obligation" to participate in social group actions; at the same time it influenced how the students appraised and felt both about their social and political circumstances, and about the efficiency of their group to change things. Since the students identified strongly with their group, this made them increase their perception of injustice in regards to the social, political and economical system in Chile which caused them to experience stronger feelings of anger and discontent. Likewise this forceful group identity increased the

students' sense of efficacy. It boosted their beliefs of having a leading role to advance change as well as having the necessary power and capacity for it.

As illustrated in FIGURE 2, each of these elements predicted, to certain extent, the engagement in collective action of the Chilean students, but it was the presence of the three and their combination, what differentiated these students from other members of society and what actually triggered them to start protesting when they did. In conjunction these three subjective variables (perceived injustice, efficacy and social identity) explained why the students engaged in collective action and why it was them who initiated the social uprisings of 2019 in Chile.

6. DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

I defend that the SIMCA, which focuses on the subjective experiences of an event, has clear advantages as a theoretical framework to analyze the actions of the students and answer the question of why it was them who initiated the latest protests in Chile. Although there were certain “objective” factors, such as the unequal social and political system, behind their decision to engage in collective action, it was the perceptions and the feelings that those “objective” characteristics triggered in the students that actually accounted for their behaviour. It is not that much a matter of what is actually happening, but more of how people perceive it. The political and social situation was the same for a large majority of the Chilean population, nevertheless, I demonstrated that the students perceived in a specific manner which sets them apart from other sub groups of society.

This connects with what I considered to be the second advantage of using the SIMCA as an analytical structure, which is its emphasis on the fundamental role of social identity over the other variables that predict collective action. It is here where the bigger difference between the Chilean students and the other citizens lies. It was the fearless and anti-traditional character of these students that tied them together and drove them to react, in comparison to other sectors of society who were not defined by such a politicized identity. This strong collective identity that characterized these students affected how they perceived their national situation as well as their sense of efficacy to change things.

Likewise, there are some obvious limitations to this research. Although it was mentioned that these Chilean students were part of a global youth generation with specific characteristics that made them more inclined to protest, this paper did not compare their behaviour with those of students in different places of the world, or how this event fitted in the social movements' dynamics both within and outside Chile. Future research on this topic should reflect deeper on this sociological character of the students actions and explain how exactly the 2019 situation was shaped and connects with the previous students movements in Chile as well with those happening in other parts of the world. New analyses should also look into the concrete events that shaped the current global youth, which trigger them to reject traditional political values, making them more prone to engage in collective action. This is important to formulate a more complete analysis of the events being discussed here and the actions of the Chilean students.

Lastly, due to the recent character of the events, a significant amount of the arguments used in this paper were based on articles written about the 2006 and 2011 student protests in Chile. Although there seem to be numerous similarities between the students actions of 2019 and these previous protests waves, there are certainly also key differences. Future research on the topic should pay more attention to the specific features of the 2019 protest and the role of the students, how they differed from the previous protests and how they developed to the situation being discussed here.

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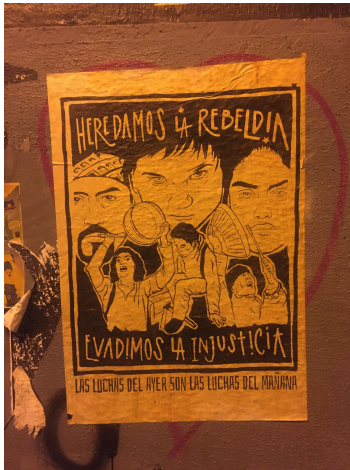


Foto 1. Clara Gomez. Santiago de Chile (Oct, 2019)