



**Thomas Miller Klubock.** *Ranquil: Rural Rebellion, Political Violence, and Historical Memory in Chile.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. Illustrations. 336 pp. \$50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-25313-9.

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In *Ranquil: Rural Rebellion, Political Violence, and Historical Memory in Chile*, Thomas Klubock builds on his two previous monographs—*Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951* (1998) and *La Frontera: Forests and Ecological Conflict in Chile's Frontier Territory* (2014)—by capturing the intersection of land privatization, state violence, and rural social conflict in twentieth-century Chile. *Ranquil* is a detailed history of a radical rural movement in Alto Bío Bío in southern Chile from the 1890s to 1934. It describes the consolidation, political evolution, and radicalization of the Sindicato Agrícola Lonquimay (Lonquimay Agricultural Union) alongside local Indigenous Pehuenches (who form part of the Mapuche people) that resulted in a 1934 rebellion. Klubock used national and regional archives in addition to four never-before-used volumes that include the judicial investigation of the rebellion's aftermath. Klubock argues that a deeper examination of the Ranquil events complicates histories that frame Chile as the longest-running democracy in Latin America from 1932 to 1973, describing Carlos Ibáñez del Campo's presidency (1927-31) as a quasi-dictatorship in contrast to Jorge Alessandri's presidency (1932-38) that oversaw the massacre and subsequent amnesty law.[1] He questions nar-

ratives of Chile's democratic exceptionalism by placing the Ranquil rebellion in a regional context with contemporary campesino insurrections across Latin America that advocated for socialist revolution.[2] This ultimately allows Klubock to examine whether historians' inclination to describe Ranquil as an uprising rather than an insurrection fits a preconceived understanding that understates the political consciousness and revolutionary intentionality of its rural participants.

As Klubock notes, to understand the radical character of the rebellion, he has to begin with the land conflicts of the 1890s and the legal battles with the Puelma and Bunster families who owned the largest estates. Chapter 1 describes Chilean colonization of Mapuche lands beginning in the 1850s, highlighting the experiences of the Pehuenches in Alto Bío Bío. He details the fraudulent selling of Indigenous lands from one investor to the next with the estate lines expanding in the process. The second chapter cites the 1896 and 1898 colonization laws as turning points that allowed, for the first time, national *colonos* (Chilean settlers) to acquire land titles with some families receiving titles and others joining corporate colonies with eventual promises of land. This land rush was also followed by *ocupantes* (squatters) along-

side many rural workers that included sharecroppers, seasonal workers, and *inquilinos* who held contracts with landowners. The rural landless population took part in a series of legal battles with the Chilean state and landowners that continued into the 1920s. Even with high-profile allies like the Democratic Party senator Zenón Torrealba, the campesinos made few gains. Chapter 3 explains the reasons for the Sindicato's double identity as a union for rural workers and a cooperative society for settlers demanding land. The Sindicato was a direct result of the 1924 legislation that legalized unions and promoted colonization in southern Chile. However, the 1925 constitution included stipulations on land distribution and rural workers were denied legal protection. When Ibáñez assumed power in 1927 he set in motion the passing of the 1928 Southern Property Law to settle land disputes, sparking land occupations and the Sindicato's founding.

While Paul Drake's seminal study on Chilean populism noted that the working class was "captivated by [Ibáñez's] labor policies," Klubock shows what Ibáñez's populist and corporatist policies meant in practice to Sindicato members and why they supported his presidency.[3] Chapter 4 opens with a meeting in December 1928 in which Democratic Party president Ibáñez pledged to Juan Segundo Leiva Tapia, the Sindicato's representative, to aid their demands. According to Klubock, the Sindicato's goals matched Ibáñez's hostility toward *hacendados* (hacienda owners) who had acquired their lands through dubious means. In addition to his corporatist "social peace" politics reflected in the 1928 Southern Property Law, Ibáñez viewed Chilean settlers as promoters of agricultural development in the South (pp. 101, 108). In chapter 5, Klubock examines what he calls Chile's first agrarian reform by detailing the legal battles and ongoing land occupations. Ibáñez officials proved supportive, describing the Sindicato favorably in official documents and ultimately expropriating thirty thousand hectares from Puelma Tupper's Ranquil es-

tate and four thousand from Bunster's Guayalí property, which the Puelmas accepted and the Bunsters rejected. But the tide shifted in 1931, which led to Ibáñez's 1931 resignation, as described in chapter 6. As discussed in Ángela Vergara's recent book, the "Great Depression unleashed political, economic, and social changes," and as Klubock demonstrates, it influenced the acceleration of political developments in the region. [4] Ibáñez's fall marked an opening for greater communist influence among Alto Bío Bío's campesinos whose parties had been forced underground by Ibáñez. In 1932, the rise and fall of the twelve-day Socialist Republic led by Colonel Marmaduke Grove reinvigorated social mobilizations as well as the formation of the Chilean Socialist Party. For the Sindicato, this tumultuous period placed their land titles on hold. Once Alessandri returned to the presidential seat in 1932, he intensified land expulsions of *ocupantes* and Mapuche communities, which drew the Sindicato closer to the Chilean Workers' Federation (FOCH) and the Chilean Communist Party (PCCh), which were politically intertwined.

Chapter 7 details the Alessandri government's attempts in 1933 and 1934 to remove campesinos from the Nitrito Valley on the Guayalí estate to less fertile and higher altitude lands. Altercations between the police and estate employees, on the one side, and the campesinos and Mapuche, on the other, intensified as Sindicato leaders were beaten and tortured. The political development of Sindicato members and supporters is described through a series of manifestos, pamphlets, and meetings that demonstrated a strong understanding of their historical land claims. In chapter 8, Klubock closely scrutinizes the politics of future insurgents. As the Sindicato moved closer to the PCCh, their discourse mirrored Soviet racial politics anchored in class solidarity and shared opposition to hacendado abuse and the state's complicity. Similarly, calls for an Araucanian Republic echoed Soviet politics of national liberation and self-determination.[5] Yet, as Klubock notes, the Sindic-

ato and Pehuenche communities did not advocate for soviets and land collectivization, but the FOCH's calls for vengeance, worker emancipation, and solidarity resonated with local leaders. The FOCH recruited workers at nearby gold placer mines, a tunnel construction project, and Mapuche communities expanding their Campesino and Indian Committees. Klubock questions the extent of the influence of the Comintern's Third Period politics in the 1934 uprising. He underscores that neither the Comintern nor the PCCh leadership advocated for an insurrection, but, like Jody Pavilak (*Mining for the Nation: The Politics of Chile's Coal Communities from the Popular Front to the Cold War* [2011]), Klubock shows that party members adjusted to local and regional politics.

Chapter 9 describes the rebellion, spotlighting the role of Sindicato leaders Leiva Tapia and the Sagredo family, Pehuenche leader Ignacio Maripi, and the PCCh militant known as Alarcón. Klubock describes how groups of campesinos occupied *pulperías* (company stores). Campesinos killed some estate employees and overseers as a result of personal animosity due to their participation in beating inquilinos and Mapuche or denying them store credit in hard times. Klubock describes how campesinos stripped captured overseers and police of their social hierarchy by removing clothing that denoted authority and participated in social inversion by taking goods or drinking mate and smoking cigarettes in the pulpería kitchen. However, the arrival of police forces turned the situation against the campesinos since most of them did not have firearms. Klubock recounts how witnesses testified that groups of captured rebels were taken away to the edges of the Bío Bío River, never to be seen again.

In his final chapter, Klubock discusses how the historical memory of the Ranquil rebellion was formed by sensational headlines and political compromises. The initial coverage exaggerated the role of women, describing them as dancing and singing over dead bodies. The gendered narratives

of “bloodthirsty” women highlight a continuity of female demonization during moments of social unrest as seen in the European witch hunts and *les petroleuses* (women incendiaries) of the Paris Commune.[6] As the government contemplated charges against the surviving rebels, political parties from the left and right settled on an amnesty law that extricated the police and the majority of prisoners from prosecution. Klubock notes that Alessandri's administration and his political allies supported amnesty to avoid exculpation in the 1932 coup while the Communist Party hoped to see their comrades held since 1932 freed. Minus a few dissenters from the other parties, the Socialist Party was the sole party that voted in a block against amnesty. The amnesty law stated that *olvido* (forgetting) was necessary for national unity, which, as Klubock notes, appears as an ominous prelude to the Pinochet regime's 1978 amnesty law. While initial judicial investigation captured police testimonies that claimed that detainees simply threw themselves into the river, Klubock probes how these statements were actually descriptions of executions. Among the 250-350 disappeared were Leiva Tapia, Maripi, Alarcón, and the majority of the Sagredo family.

As Klubock concludes, reclaiming the historical memory of Ranquil has been obfuscated by Chile's tumultuous twentieth-century history. Nevertheless, *Ranquil* brings to light the political character of the movement and its participants while challenging established histories. Klubock demonstrates that local and rural histories can illuminate bigger questions for Latin American historiography. *Ranquil* is a testament to socially conscious scholarship beyond its historiographical implications: that the disappeared and their political movement will not be forgotten.

#### Notes

[1]. Paul Drake describes it as “Ibáñez's virtual dictatorship.” See Paul Drake, *Socialism and Populism in Chile, 1932-1952* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 59. In popular culture, see the

film *The Dance of Reality* (2013), directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky.

[2]. Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt Letelier, “¿Un proyecto nacional exitoso? La supuesta excepcionalidad chilena,” in *Relatos de nación: La construcción de las identidades nacionales en el mundo hispánico*, ed. Francisco Colom González (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005), 41-42.

[3]. Drake, *Socialism and Populism in Chile*, 63.

[4]. Ángela Vergara, *Fighting Unemployment in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), 17.

[5]. The year 1934 was a turning point in Soviet politics with Joseph Stalin’s purges and support for Soviet patriotism, moving away from Vladimir Lenin’s conception of self-determination. See Boris Meissner, “The Soviet Concept of Nation and the Right of National Self-Determination,” *International Journal* 32, no. 1 (1976): 61.

[6]. About the European witch hunt, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation of Capital* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004); and about *les petroleuses*, see Edith Thomas, *The Women Incendiaries* (1967; repr., Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007).

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