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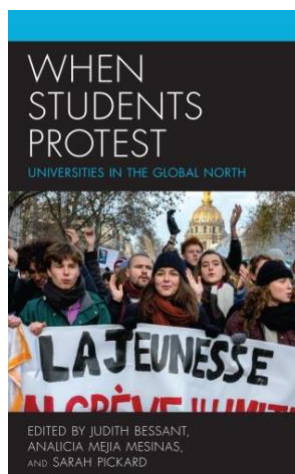


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Chapter

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« Different Struggles, the Same Fight »?

A comparative analysis of student movements in Chile (2011), Quebec (2012), and Hong Kong (2014)

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Summary

Are we witnessing the rise of “global” student anger, born in the wake of austerity policies and globalized educational reforms? To answer this question, this chapter is based on a comparison of the claims made in 3 post-2008 student movements: the student movement in Santiago de Chile (2011-2012), the “Maple Spring” in Montreal (2012), and the “Umbrellas Movement” in Hong Kong (2014). The comparative method is based on the statistical and qualitative analysis of “words of anger”, that is, slogans, writings and posters, collected directly in each of the disputes (n=1100). The comparison aims to identify the different repertoires mobilized, but also the common issues between these three movements. The chapter shows that beyond their contrasts, the discourses come together on the same fundamental frame, which address three principal issues, related to one-another: the value of education, the injustice of education debt, and the democratic renewal.

With movements challenging the neoliberal university, democratic uprisings and international climate demonstrations, the second decade of the 21st century is marked by significant large-scale student protests around the world. Should we understand this uprising of students as a global phenomenon? The central role of students in recent social movements reactivates the question of “generations” as Mannheim put it a century ago (Mannheim 1970 [1928]), but this time on a global scale: one wonders in what way this anger is the result of a now common student condition, from a generation of future graduates affected by the massification of higher education, the global recession of 2008 and the establishment of a new educational global order. This could mark the birth of a proper “generation” in the words of Mannheim (Mannheim 1970 [1928]), as this group of young people may face a common destiny, leading even to an awareness of itself beyond borders.

This question poses an empirical challenge for the social scientists: we need a comparative approach able to engage different student movements, which can bring out the real points of convergence between their diverse demands. For this purpose, this chapter relies on the direct and large-scale collection of “words of anger”— that is, slogans, writings and placards— in three post-2008 student movements that took place in different parts of the world: the student movement in Santiago in Chile (2011-2012), the “Maple Spring” in Montreal (2012), and the “Umbrella movement” in Hong Kong (2014). The comparative analysis of these protest writings makes it possible to establish whether, beyond the main differences in the forms of political action, there is a fundamental discourse of student anger that is common to these three movements.

Student protests: the comparative challenge

The central place of young people, as students or recent graduates, was emphasized in the first post-2008 social movement. Whether we are talking about the Arab Spring, the Indignados, or the Occupy movements, many researchers have highlighted the strong presence of students and “precarious graduates” at the heart of these movements, even when they were joined by other generations (Castells 2015, Glasius and Pleyers 2013, Della Porta and Mattoni 2014, Ancevolici, Dufour and Nez 2016, Van de Velde, 2016). These generational resonances have been linked to two factors: the economic and social effects of a globalized crisis on the prospects of young graduates (Van de Velde 2011, Rosenhek and Shalev 2014, Blavier 2016, Van de Velde 2019) and the new generational connections enabled by the increased mobilization of social networks (Feixa 2013, Castells 2015).

Only a few years later, and largely as a result of student movements in Chile, the United Kingdom, Quebec, Hong Kong and South Africa, researchers began to pay closer attention to post-2008 student protests with a focus on possible connections at the global level. Research highlighted in particular the vivacity of the politicization modes and the forms of action, which clearly contradicted those discourses denouncing the “political apathy” of the young people involved (Brooks 2016, Luescher and others 2016, Pickard and Bessant 2018). This group of research stresses how these new forms of expression are characterized both by a mistrust of representative democracy and by the development of direct and localized actions, which Sarah Pickard conceptualized as “Do-It-Ourselves Politics (DIO)” (Pickard 2019).

Beyond the modes of action, researchers also find links in the demands made by students in different parts of the world. In particular, targeted comparative surveys shed light on some areas of convergence between the Chilean student movement and the Quebec Maple Spring (Peñafiel 2012, Perez-Roa 2019), between the Chilean and British student movements (Cini and Guzman-Concha 2017), and between South African movements and student protests in French-speaking Africa (Luescher et al. 2016). The previous works highlight the presence of a common discourse on the issues of increased student fees, debt and unequal access to higher education, in response to rising tuition fees and the progressive neo-liberalization of their educational systems.

Do these apparent proximities between the student movements allow us to say that there is a "global" student condition? In the wake of certain international events, some researchers hypothesize that student resistance could now be globally structured against a "new educational world" (Brooks 2016, Paneit Odara and Teodoro 2017). In this regard, Rachel Brooks emphasizes the need for a dual comparative reading of these student movements: according to her, the neo-liberalization of education systems has certainly encouraged the emergence of "global" resonances between student movements, but argues that student demands continue to be highly structured by the various "welfare states" and national political histories (Brooks 2016). In this respect, it should be noted that student movements against rising tuition fees have mainly taken place in liberal contexts, which have experienced an accelerated process of neoliberalisation of their education systems. It is currently difficult to empirically confirm convergences in student claims on a larger scale.

Three contrasting movements

In order to put to some kind of empirical test of the hypothesis of a convergence of student demands at the global level, this chapter proposes an extension of the usual terms of the comparison: the comparative device takes into account not only student movements identified as pro-educational (e.g. the 2011 student movement of Chile and the 2012 Quebec Maple Spring) but also a student movement identified as "pro-democratic" like the 2014 Hong Kong movement, also known as the Umbrella Revolution. These three movements are contextualised by different models of "welfare states" (Esping-Andersen 2013), operating in three different continents, which allows an expanded "panel of contrasts" (Paugam and Van de Velde 2010). The comparison of their respective claims will make it possible to check if there is a common discourse operating between these different student protests.

Three student movements 2011-2014

The **Santiago student movement** in Chile began in April and May 2011. It directly targeted educational demands, received massive support from the population and quickly gained momentum. The movement denounced the high cost of education, demanded free education and advocated for a greater role for the state in the Chilean education system. That system was then one of the most neoliberal regimes in the world, with particularly high registration fees. The first mobilizations were convened by the Confederation of

Chilean students in the first half of 2011, quickly joined by students from secondary schools, then by private colleges. Despite major police repression, the movement continued until 2012 and 2013. In December 2015, the establishment of free university was voted in Chile, under the presidency of Michelle Bachelet.

The **Quebec student movement** also known as the “Maple Spring” came shortly after, in early 2012, and took the form of the longest student strike in the history of Quebec and Canada. It initially focused, as the Chilean movement had done, on the issue of tuition fees in higher education in response to increased fees announced by the Liberal government of Quebec. Coordinated by the federations of student associations, the movement called for the cancellation of the fee increase, as well as free education, and used the symbol of a red square. It first took the form of a general student strike in many institutions of higher learning, which lasted from 13 February to 7 September 2012, and became associated with a series of massive demonstrations in Montreal and several cities in Quebec. From May 2011, it continued with the “casseroles movement” in response to the adoption of a special law. In September 2012, a new government rescinded the tuition fee increase by decree and de facto led to the cessation of the conflict.

The **Hong Kong Umbrella Revolution** began two years later, initially between September to October 2014. Arguably the June 2019 protests are an extension of this 2014 movement. It focused on more democratic demands: it opposed the Chinese government's plan to reform the election process of the Hong Kong executive, which replaced universal suffrage with a selection committee of 1,200 people. The movement was initiated by the Occupy Central collective, but it quickly came to be coordinated by the Hong Kong Students Federation that launched a campaign of civil disobedience, using the yellow ribbon symbol. The movement took its name from the use of umbrellas to protect against tear gas. On 26 September 2014, various locations in Hong Kong were occupied by students, including a section of the city's main artery. It was occupied for three weeks and then was dispersed by police on 15 October, which triggered the gradual end of the movement. The bill was quashed the following year.

The “words of anger”: an approach by slogans

In order to allow for the comparison of the claims made in these quite different protests, the research process adopted here relies on the direct, systematic and large-scale collection of writings - logos, posters, and posters – produced by the three targeted social movements. These protest writings are understood here as “acts of writing” (Fraenkel 2011), making it possible to integrate the multiplicity of “targets and claims” visible in any social movement (Tilly 2004). The collection took into account the great diversity of these slogans, including both collective messages as well as individualized messages produced within the protests. This approach extends the sociological view well beyond the militant circles and key speeches made in the course of the public debate. It not only takes into account the main demands of the protests, but also the many individual or collective claims made in the course of these movements, which can sometimes differ from institutional slogans. The slogans were collected by a mix of direct observation and photographs taken on-site. The photographs were taken at three different moments of the mobilization, in order to take into

account the evolution of the campaigns. From thousands of photographs, a common database was compiled with more than 1,100 slogans, which sums up to around 370 items collected per movement. All items have been translated into English and then subjected to a double analysis. This began with a statistical and textual analysis¹ - using the Iramuteq software – which made it possible to compare the word clouds of each of the protests, and to identify the multiple claims, the moral and political emotions and the main targets of the movements. The second step involved a qualitative analysis aimed at capturing the common patterns of the discourses, by identifying series of words and the associated directories in these claims, as well as their possible convergences.

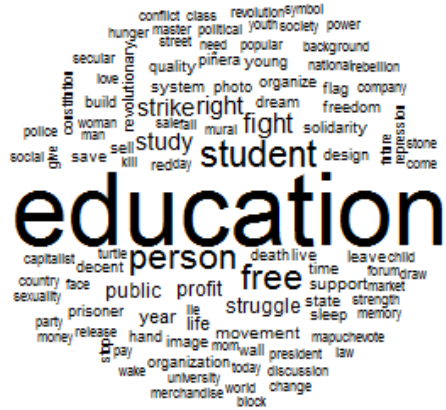
I. Word clouds: a comparison of the three student movements

What do each movement's "words of anger" tell us? First, I will provide a statistical visualization of the data by comparing the word clouds of each of the movements. Each word cloud lists the most frequent words for each of the protests and gives them a size that is proportional to their frequency.

Santiago: from the educational question to anti-capitalist criticism

The word cloud of the student movement of Santiago centres on a single word: "education". The theme of education is associated, in a more secondary way, with the social figure of the student. The writings refer to the defence of a right to free and quality education, with salient words such as "free", "right", "public", "quality". This defence mobilizes a strong rhetoric of conflict, as the words "conflict", "struggle" or "strike" show, with paradoxically few target figures, except for extended political institutions like the "Police", "state", or "party". The denunciation is not directly against specific people or entities, but rather against the consequences of the neoliberalisation of universities and society, evoked in terms of "profit", "debt", "pay", or "merchandise". There is also an important extension of claims that goes beyond the educational register alone, towards a more general criticism of capitalism or other inequalities, suggested by words like "social", "capitalist", "system", "class". These claims are associated with the register of existential emancipation against oppression ("person", "wake", "prisoner", "freedom", "solidarity", "kill", "decent"). Understood this way, the Santiago movement is revealed initially as a student movement, which broadens out to become a more general denunciation of the regulation of society in the interest of capital.

¹ The analysis of textual data makes it possible to study the statistical distribution of the different elements composing a corpus of text. In our survey, each corpus consists of all the slogans identified in each of the three movements. The textual analysis then makes it possible to count the most frequent words by corpus, to visualize them in the form of word clouds.

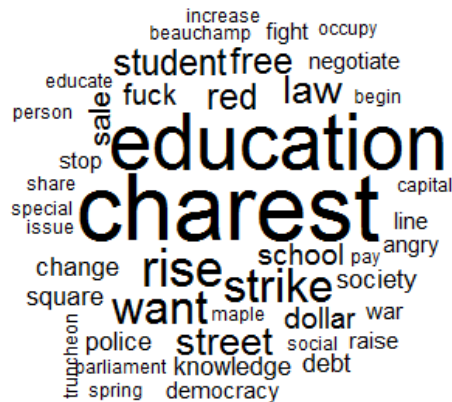


Word cloud of the Santiago de Chile

student movement in (2011-2012)

Maple Spring: the confrontation

The word “education” also appears central in the Maple Spring, but compared to the Santiago movement, it is associated with a much more identified political balance of power: the most frequent word is “Charest”, the-then Liberal Prime Minister of Quebec, while the name of the Minister of Education, "Beauchamp", also appears in the cloud. The movement is dominated by the classical configuration of confrontation and opposition, with the words “strike”, “stop”, “rise”, “want”, “negotiate”, “fuck”, “war” and “red” (the latter word refers to the red square, symbol of the movement carried on clothes). The denunciation of police violence is also significant, as words “police” and “truncheon” are intended to evoke. The emotion of anger is perceptible, under the term “angry”. At the level of the demands, one reads in this cloud a criticism of the liberalization of the education under terms close to those of the movement of Santiago de Chile (“commodity”, “liberal”, “debt”, “pay”, “capital”, “dirty”), associated with the reactive defence of education as a value: “school”, “educate”, “knowledge”. In addition to this main register, we also see broader mobilization registers (“democracy”, “maple”, “spring”, “society”, “occupy”). These expanded claims grew in May 2012 during the “casseroles movement”.



Word cloud of the “Maple Spring” in Montreal (2012)

Hong Kong: a democratic and territorial defence

The cloud of Hong Kong presents a very distinct configuration, structured around a single word: “democracy”. There are specific political demands about universal suffrage (“universal”, “suffrage”, “vote”, “civil”, “right”), but also the mobilization of more general values (“peace”, “love”, “freedom”). The target figures are barely visible, but the cloud unveils two targets: a distant figure, evoking Chinese power (“Beijing”), and a nearer figure (“police”). Faced with this threat, which hardly speaks its name, the mobilized rhetoric is more directly defensive, perceptible in a marked call to solidarity (“solidarity”, “support”, “unity”), protection (“save”, “stand”, “protect”, “calm”) and hope (“hope”, “long”, “life”, “time”). This defence is structured around the local attachment to the city of Hong Kong, with expressions such as “home”, “heart”, “city”, and “proud”. It is associated with multiple emotions such as sadness or fear (“cry”, “afraid”). The collective identities appear diversified and with variable geometry: a dominant figure carries the movement - “student” - associated with other more universal identities: “person”, “human”, “world”. Thus united, the slogans of the Hong Kong movement testify to a collective uprising of defence against a double threat, both democratic and territorial.



Word cloud of the “Umbrella Revolution” in Hong Kong (2014)

II. Two ‘worlds’ of student anger?

This analysis of word clouds clearly highlights a preliminary distinction between two types of repertoires, one pro-educational, for the movements in Montreal and Santiago, and the other, pro-democratic for the movement in Hong Kong. But what does a more qualitative analysis of the slogans suggest about the meaning and the convergences of student demands?

1. Santiago and Montreal: from the education issues to democratic criticism

In the first place, the rhetoric of the Chilean and Quebec movements are striking because of their convergence. These movements are often reduced to “student campaigns” against rising tuition fees. An in-depth analysis of their slogans shows how these educational demands leads in both cases to a broader, systemic and democratic criticism. This will be articulated around three interdependent issues: a refusal of the commodification of knowledge, a denunciation of the injustice of student indebtedness, and a demand for democratic renewal. The table below compares different slogans collected within the two challenges.

Santiago	Montreal
Knowledge against the market	
“Education is not for sale”	“Education is not a consumer product”
“How much is education worth? \$\$\$\$”	“I think therefore I pay!”
“Master Card”	“Fast school”
“Education is no business!”	“Education for sale”
“From the classroom to the class struggle”	“The poor must pay!”
Debt as generational injustice	
“To study in Chile is to die in debt”	“A mortgage for life”
“5 years studying, 15 years repaying”	“Could you spare change to pay for my university fees?”

“Mum, Dad, I can’t choose between eating and studying”	“Be young and shut up”
“Enough profits, we want to study!”	“The fair share: 100%”
A demand for democratic renewal	
“Get your life back!”	“A choice for all!”
“Sorry for the inconvenience we are working for free, secular and intercultural education”	“Sorry for the inconvenience we’re trying to change the world”
“Youth power!”	“Mr. Charest, you have declared war on a whole generation”
“We are young and old stubborn rebels, our rights are non-negotiable”	“This is not a student strike, it is the awakening of society”

From the education issues to democratic criticism: thematic comparison of slogans collected in student movements in Santiago (2011) and Montreal (2012)

Knowledge against the market

Initially, the two movements are centred on the figure of an educational process threatened by the “market”. The slogans directly challenge the process of commodification that financializes the “value” of knowledge, represented by slogans like “How much is education worth? \$\$\$\$” in Santiago or “I think therefore I pay!” in Montreal. Learning is in both cases compared to a simple act of consumption or purchase evoked by the slogans “Fast School” (initially in English, in reference to the word “fast food”) in Santiago or “Master Card” in Montreal. Students also denounce the harmful consequences of imposing a cost on the inequalities of access to higher education: by slowing down the possibility of studying for the poorest, this high cost of education is presented as amplifying the class struggle, which leads for example to the expressions “From the classroom to the class struggle” in Santiago or “The poor must pay!” in Montreal. As a result, the two movements converge in the defence of a “right” to a “decent, quality and free” education. Their main differences mostly deal with the targets of student anger: if the Santiago movement is opposed to the weight of banks and private companies in the education system, the

Montreal movement is distinguished by the way it directly targets the Quebec government, which it holds responsible for the increase in tuition fees.

Debt as generational injustice

In both cases, however, writings centred on the issue of student debt as a symptom of social and generational injustice. The core concern of these campaigns was the shift away from public expenditure on education as a public good into private debt: which in effect amounts to reducing the public expenditure by increasing the personal debt of large numbers of young people. Austerity could be summed up as “making a generation pay”. In both movements, the slogans emphasized the way individuals were crushed to death by debt, or stifled by the weight of debt throughout their life (“To study in Chile is to die in debt” in Santiago, or “A mortgage for life” in Montreal). The collective consequences of this austerity were also denounced and associated with the collective impoverishment of a generation: we find in this respect the slogans “Enough profits, we want to study!” in Santiago, or “The fair share: 100%” in Montreal. However, it is not a simple generational conflict because the figures targeted for criticism are primarily the generations in power, rather than the older generations. This was emphasised in the slogans of Santiago which emphasized support for their “grandchildren”, which was not often the case in Montreal.

A demand for democratic renewal

From education to democracy: while they were not very present at the beginning of the movement, political and democratic demands were increasingly amplified over the course of the protests, leaving room for societal and pro-democratic demands. In both cases, such a shift occurs in response to a form of democratic tension, particularly after the introduction of the Special Act in Quebec, or after police violence in Chile. The slogans thus give a central place to the themes of contempt and listening, as well as individual and collective sovereignty (“Get your life back!” in Santiago or “A choice for all” in Montreal). These themes were evident in the strong criticism of representative democracy, an issue which led in both cases to some internal tensions between militants regarding the legitimacy of the vote in the elections. The protest writings emphasize the need for a counter-movement to build another “future”: this mobilization is at first generational, but the call for mobilization then extends to other social groups, as suggested by slogans like “We are young and old stubborn rebels, our rights are non-negotiable” in Santiago or “This is not a student strike, it is the awakening of society” in Montreal.

2. Hong Kong: education as a democratic force

In contrast to these first two movements, the main theme of the Hong Kong protest, on first appearances, is distinguished by its more directly pro-democratic dimension. However, closer analysis, suggest that themes of education and generational justice were also very much a part of the Hong Kong campaign even if they were still focused on with issues of citizenship.

Students as democratic vanguard
<p>“Students for democracy” “We are students, we want democracy” “Support students and democracy” “Democracy is all we want”</p>
The theft of a future
<p>“Fight for justice” “For our home, for our future, for our democracy, for our freedom” “Democracy is the future” “Because freedom is the only thing we can’t live without”</p>
Democracy as a collective fight
<p>“Even if we can't change anything finally, we have changed the history...” “We have only one shot, don't give up” “You can't arrest democracy” “Stay strong and united - democracy will win”</p>

Education as a democratic force: thematic selection of slogans from the “Umbrella Revolution” in Hong Kong (2014)

Students as democratic vanguard

Even if the Hong Kong movement did not start with a focus on educational issues, it eventually came to highlight issues of education. Education was represented as a tool for civic and democratic emancipation, a capability put at risk by the Chinese state’s desire to crush students. Writings like, “Support students and democracy”, represent this figure of the student as an enlightened vanguard of the democratic struggle, one which solicits external support to strengthen its fight. This invokes the figure of “us students” as a spokesman for a historic battle, struggling for democracy and against repression (“Democracy is all we want” or “We are students, we want democracy”). Education is thus represented as the pillar of “true” democracy, its defence intimately linked to issues of collective and territorial sovereignty.

The theft of a future: a generational injustice

This student defence is based on a central argument: the injustice, for current and future generations, of the government's plan to change the way in which the Hong Kong Executive Committee was to be elected. The slogans come together in the accusation of a forced decision that is historically unfair (“Fight for justice”), in that it imposes an attack on democracy at a cost to young people who have not yet participated in this decision but which will have to bear the cost of it in the long term (“For our home, for our future, for our democracy, for our freedom”). We thus find the theme of a “capture” of the future of younger generations. The Hong Kong movement emphasized what was at stake and why a whole generation needed to refuse any compromise with the Hong Kong government which was the point of referring to other historical struggles like the French Revolution, and of calling for the collective reconstruction of a future (“Because freedom is the only thing we can’t live without” or “Democracy is the future”).

Saving democracy: a collective fight

Compared to the movements in Santiago and Quebec, the generational speech of Hong Kong focuses not on “renewing” but rather “saving” representative democracy: slogans are built around the figure of the threat of an invisible and authoritarian power, intent on the destruction of a democratic Hong Kong and threatening the future of the younger generations. The challenge is to contain the violence of its reaction, which would question and delegitimize this fight and solicit solidarity and support to avoid repression. Against this threatening figure, democracy is associated with irreversible progress and historical necessity (“You can’t arrest democracy”), even if the fight is presented as hopeless (“We only have one shot, do not give up” or “Even if we can’t change anything finally, we have changed the history...”).

III. Education, intergenerational justice, democracy: a common thread

Beyond their differences, can we find points of convergence between these two “worlds of anger”? Here I bring out some of the common issues shared by the three student movements. Beyond some obvious differences, the discourses come together around the same basic thread, which can be summarized as: “My life, your debt, our democracy”. This dialectic thus articulates three fundamental issues related to each other: the value of education, the injustice of debt, and democratic renewal.

1. Against the damage of education: defending the value of knowledge

Refusing the threat to education: the first element of this common discourse is a basic defence of education and its place in society. The prospect of a social devaluation of education is the starting point of each movement: education is the question that is most often associated with the lexicon of refusal and indignation, with many “no” imperative forms and exclamations. To express this opposition, the slogans summon the image of a death of education, with existential words evoking loss, deprivation of life or “theft” of a future. There are, for example, the slogans “The system murders the dreams of our

students” in Santiago, “RIP education” in Montreal or “You can arrest students, you can't arrest democracy” in Hong Kong.

In the Santiago and Montreal movements, the damage to education is the cost associated with “putting knowledge on sale”, and the slogans denounce the high price of tuition fees, forcing some individuals to give up higher education, and others to go into debt for life. They are often accompanied, in both cases, by the visual evocation of hanging or suffocation by credit. In Hong Kong, this damage is more often associated with the actual killing, repression and physical silencing of students. The evocation of police violence is direct and the slogans denounce the crushing of a generation of students who fight for a better future despite the repression. It should be noted that this theme of repression of a generation is not specific to Hong Kong: it is also found, though in a less acute form, in Santiago and Montreal.

This denunciation leads, in the speeches, to a rhetoric of generational mobilization to defend the true “value” of education as an agent of social and civic emancipation, for example in the slogans “Worthy education, free for all” in Santiago, “Knowledge is neither for sale nor to consume but to share” in Montreal, or “Let's not forget that education is for life” in Hong Kong.

Against the damage of education...
<p>“The system murders the dreams of our students” (Santiago) “RIP education” (Montréal) “You can arrest students, you can't arrest democracy” (Hong Kong)</p>
... defending the value of knowledge
<p>“Worthy education, free for all” (Santiago) “Knowledge is neither for sale nor to consume but to share” (Montréal) “Let's not forget that education is for life” (Hong Kong)</p>

Education: thematic selection of slogans from the student movements of Santiago (2011), Montreal (2012), and Hong Kong (2014)

2. Against inter-generational injustice: mobilizing for future generations

In direct relation to the educational question, the second element of this common discourse raises the question of intergenerational injustice. What is transversely denounced is the unjust weight of past decisions that burdens today's generation of students, forcing them to make decisions and bear costs for which they are not responsible. This theme of injustice is reflected in the slogans' presence of a new actor to be protected: “future generations”,

who undergo decisions in which they cannot take part. It is striking to note how much the questions of the future and the generations are invoked in many student slogans, as in “Stop mortgaging our future!” in Santiago, “We will not negotiate our impoverishment!” in Montreal, or “My parents are crying for me, I am crying for the future” in Hong Kong.

In the movements in Santiago de Chile and Montreal, this generational injustice is denounced in financial terms. The slogans denounce the transformation of a public debt into a private debt, returning to “pay” the price of austerity by younger generations. In the Umbrella Revolution, this is treated more as a political issue, associated with the weight of a decision considered as unfair but with irremediable consequences for generations to come.

In these three movements, this denunciation centres on the denunciation of a “debt” - economic, political, or even sometimes environmental - unfairly transferred onto young people by the generations who are in power. This denunciation leads to a rhetoric of collective “awakening” in the name of generational justice, with the aim of defending the collective future of the younger generations and the following generations (“If the present is a struggle, the future is ours” in Santiago, “Are you bothered? We just want to change Quebec” in Montreal, or “Refuse the shadow of the past” in Hong Kong).

Against inter-generational injustice...
<p>“Stop mortgaging our future!” (Santiago) “We will not negotiate our impoverishment!” (Montreal) “My parents are crying for me, I am crying for the future” (Hong Kong)</p>
... mobilizing for future generations
<p>“If the present is a struggle, the future is ours” (Santiago) “Are you bothered? We just want to change Quebec” (Montreal) “Refuse the shadow of the past” (Hong Kong)</p>

Intergenerational injustice: thematic selection of slogans from student movements in Santiago (2011), Montreal (2012), and Hong Kong (2014)

3. Against democratic denial: regaining a place in democracy

These first two issues or themes lead to a third point of convergence: the democratic challenge. Each of the movements studied evolved in response to decisions that threatened the right of expression, decision or democratic demonstration: even in the Montreal and Santiago movements, the question of democratic denial increasingly took on a greater significance. As a result, a common feature of these student demonstrations was the claim

they made, to varying degrees, to demand a “true democracy”, a claim that was also central to most post-2008 movements. It is associated here with a strong criticism of the electoral and party system and a radical attack on the cynicism or arrogance of the political world, evident in slogans like “Your indifference is more violent than any barricade” in Santiago, “I feel bad about my democracy” in Montreal, or “Your arrogance keeps us here, solidarity will see us through” in Hong Kong.

This case for “true democracy” takes on different faces depending on the student movement. In Hong Kong, the priority was to “save” a representative democracy under attack, with slogans focused on maintaining universal suffrage and mobilizing many historical and international references. In Santiago and Montreal, it was more a question of “renewing” representative democracy, which manifested itself in calls for constitutional change and more direct democracy.

The democratic defence mobilizes a rhetoric of the generational “fight”, presented as indispensable if young people are to claim their rightful place in society. The fundamental spring of the mobilization is to find a form of individual and collective sovereignty through two claims: the right to choose and the right to speak. Students therefore insist both on the right to participate in decisions that are critical to the future of society, and on the legitimacy of direct and egalitarian speech, despite the status of young students. Witness the slogans: “1789, off with their heads! The revolution is the education of students” in Santiago, “Let’s cry out louder so no one ignores us” in Montreal, or “Get up, stand up! Don’t give up the fight!” in Hong Kong.

Against democratic denial...
<p>“Your indifference is more violent than any barricade” (Santiago) “I feel bad about my democracy” (Montreal) “Your arrogance keeps us here, solidarity will see us through” (Hong Kong)</p>
... regaining a place in democracy
<p>“1789, off with their heads! The revolution is the education of students” (Santiago) “Let’s cry out louder so no one ignore us” (Montreal) “Get up, stand up! Don’t give up the fight!” (Hong Kong)</p>

Democracy: thematic selection of slogans from the student movements of Santiago (2011), Montreal (2012), and Hong Kong (2014)

Conclusion

When students protest what do they claim? In spite of the range of different challenges facing students in Chile, Quebec and Hong Kong, a fundamental discourse of student anger

emerges. Beyond the specific and context driven demands, each of mobilizations were based on a common set of core demands, which included defending the value of education, denouncing intergenerational injustice, and refusing attempts to erode or subvert democracy. The existence of this common lexicon in these campaigns reinforces the hypothesis of profound resonances between these student movements in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

The analysis of the slogans offered here compares two different protest claims, a “pro-educational” repertoire denouncing the consequences of the commercialization of knowledge in the neoliberal educational systems in Chile and Quebec, and a “pro-democracy” repertoire mobilizing students as the vanguard protector of democracy in the case of Hong Kong. These directories refer to two of the main “worlds” of post-2008 student anger, one associated with neoliberal configurations, and the other with authoritarian contexts. However, these two “worlds of anger” come together around the same basic argument, claiming at the same time the need to reimagine the point of education, a commitment to genuine intergenerational justice and the need to promote authentic democratic progress. Among these three demands, we need to emphasise generational injustice, granting that the other questions of democracy, and to a lesser extent, the educational issue, have been identified as common elements in post-2008 movements (Allen and Reich 2013, Glasius and Pleyers 2013, Castells 2015, Ancelovici et al. 2016), the theme of intergenerational (in)justice proved to be central in this analysis of student movements and has not been given the recognition it deserves. This suggests the value of further research into this issue and the need to establish if this is a new concern for students or recent graduates today.

To further advance the hypothesis of the global nature of these student protests, such an investigation could be extended by two comparative openings, one geographical and the other temporal. On the one hand, it would be necessary to compare this fundamental discourse with that of the “movement of the places”, in which the students played a central role, while being joined by other young people and other generations. Such a comparison with more systemic and multigenerational movements, taking place for example in Europe, would make it possible to distinguish what belongs to a specifically student rhetoric, and what pertains to more generational or global themes. On the other hand, the recent strikes for action on global warming have been characterized by the theme of intergenerational injustice, in its social and environmental dimensions: it would be interesting to compare the rhetorical foundations of the student protests post-2008 with the more recent climate movements, to shed light on how these student rhetoric have evolved over the past decade.

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