Editorial

Youth and Politics in Changing Societies

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In order to reflect on and produce knowledge about the current relationship between youth and politics, one must first recognize that the dimension and definition of these concepts is in constant evolution and cannot be dissociated from the very challenges of social construction that forge the each analyst's position.

On the one hand, politics as a conflictive sphere for the construction of society includes a debate on how to understand and define this concept, as well as its limits, associations, forms and possibilities. As suggested by Norbert Lechner (2006), social scientists may use a concept of politics, linking it to a given conception of society and assuming a particular definition, but these cannot achieve universality or objectivity as they are connected to modes and senses of action in tension and conflict. In sum, thinking about and defining the nature of politics is part of the

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political action, making it necessarily conflictive and elusive to absolute consensus.

On the other hand, as proposed by Bourdieu (1990), youth has always been a term that is both structured by society and in itself structures society, establishing the spheres, characteristics, distinctions and limits on whom it includes. It is a term that covers the plurality of ways and conditions from which the new generations are incorporated into the existing orders and participate in their production and transformation. Moreover, as added by Margulis and Urresti (1996), it is a complex and pluralistic concept, where factual dimensions associated with biological and vital characteristics are related in a mutual determination to the sociohistorical realm, making age a cultural construction, and not a natural or essential one.

Twentieth-century Latin America witnessed a number of social movements and militancies anchored upon youth identities that interpreted social reality and intervened therein politically. From the anti-oligarchy cry that founded the Confederation of Chilean Students (FECH, 1906) and the Cordoba student reform movement (1918), to the blood-tainted student movements of the 60s in Tlatelolco, youth activism was largely student activism. During the 1980s, economic and political crises diverted analysts' attention to territories where community youth organizations demonstrated that student movements were not the only way of politicizing from a position of youth experiences, forms and practices. The 90s saw the diagnosis of postmodern fragmentation and the crisis of the grand narrative; particular visibility acquired by youth cultures and styles within the framework of globalization and new information technologies; the ideological and political crises of the left; the predominance of a neoliberal state subsidiary to the market and its consequential processes of administrative modernization. All of these led the social sciences to leave behind their traditional focus on the classic 20th-century actors, like the workers and students. Such was the case until, after a series of events —from the long UNAM strike in Mexico

in 1999, to the height of the student movement in Chile in 2011 —, youth and student actors, with their particular conditions anchored upon neoliberalism, shook up the complex realities of our countries, producing new perspectives, practices and meanings regarding the relationship between politics and youth.

Although the recent past saw an abundance of analyses that tended to look at the relationship between youth and politics as an exaggerated metaphor for the diagnosed conditions of social disengagement from public issues, these analyses have been revised in light of reiterated cycles of social youth movements in conflict with the State or large economic powers. This is added to the fact that certain militant emergences, with the significant weight of younger generations, have altered the traditional conformations and confrontations within different party systems. Ultimately, recent conjectures say that politics, in relation to young people, goes beyond the notions of "apathy," "disengagement" or "politicity" as a mere expression of the discontent by determined youth cultures or styles, and that the conditions are in place to analyze young people's political participation, activism and militancy, taking a look at the forms and discourses of politicization and the relationship between young actors, States and political systems.

For this reason, the present dossier section invites readers to take a look at the ways in which the relationship between youth and politics is being produced, while at the same time defining these categories in relation to the social realm. It is also an invitation to bring the perspectives of studies on social movements, protest and activism together with the study of militancies, political parties and the organization of politics in society.

We believe that in order to understand the nature of these types of contemporary issues during analysis, it is useful to distinguish between "politics," understood as a formally instituted field, with specific procedures, roles, issues and logics (parties, party system, electoral participation), and "the political," which

would refer to the normal way in which subjects assume the construction of the social and public reality. From this perspective, the fact that "politics" is continually redefined by issues, conflicts and dimensions emanating from "the political" prevents its separation from the sociocultural realm, thus becoming a space of the elite (Garretón 1994, 2004, 2007). Moreover, the way in which society begins to propose the issues and problems to be treated collectively in terms of public decisions, that is, the way certain topics become part of the political, would constitute what we know as the politicization processes of the social realm (UNDP, 2015).

The distinction between the political and politics is useful for analysis as long as we understand that there is no absolute, rigid or static separation between the dynamics associated with the collective action of social movements and the sphere in which more or less instituted militancies dispute how the State shall be run, among other things, because militancies, no matter how formalized, emerge from dynamics rooted in social subjects inserted in the political. Just look at all of the Latin American experiences where sectorial activisms inserted within social movements have been confused, interwoven or have evolved towards political militancies with relative insertion within the party systems. This has changed the political sphere, but also politics, such that social scientists must pay special attention to the interrelations between these dimensions.

In line with the above, the papers in the present dossier circulate around two large, yet connected spheres: one tied to the contentious collective action of youth activists in the process of politicization and the other of politicized youth actors who, constituted within traditional or emerging organic political militancies, act from within the left-right spectrum with more or less presence in the institutionalized political system. Considering the recent processes of youth politicization in Latin America, we will review the relevant problems and issues found in each of these two dimensions, followed by a presentation of the articles

in this edition, highlighting the way these address the debates mentioned below.

1. Mobilization from the political. Protest, politicization and State from the perspective of collective youth action

During 2011 and on a global level, there was a series of protests known as "city square movements" or the "newest social movements." The first protests started in Tunisia against the authoritarian government of Ben Ali, and these protests were joined by others in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Almost in parallel, movements arose across western countries in response to the economic, political and social crisis. These newest social movements (Juris et al., 2012) were described as different from the "new social movements" once discussed by sociologists such as Alain Touraine (2006), which were configured around identities going beyond the capital-labor conflict and the classical labor movement, and which took on diverse causes such as those of the environmental, feminist and student movements. According to some analysts, although the newest social movements shared the cultural breadth of the "new movements," one of their key distinctive features was the preponderant role of new technologies and online platforms. On the other hand, these forms of activism also differed from the classical militancies ascribed or related to formal institutions (Pudal, 2011). Some analysts believe that these experiences were marked by a notable presence of "another activism" (Pleyers, 2010), the so-called "alter-activism," characterized by shared values focused on the individual, his or her options and lifestyle, creative actions, the use of internet and the need to change the world starting from one's own daily practices.

One of the most significant cases of the "newest" movements in the West were those that arose in Spain with the so-called "15-M" or "Indignados" Movement that implemented sit-ins at the

Puerta del Sol in Madrid, and which were repeatedly cleared out and implemented once again. The adjective "indignados" (in English, indignant or outraged) used by these Spanish movements was taken from the book *Indignaos!* by Stéphane Hessel (2011), a text which also looks to reflect on the need to generate a change in mentality away from indifference and towards active discontent. City square movements also occurred in New York, with Occupy Wall Street; at Gezi Square of Istanbul, and at Syntagma Square in Athens, all bearing similar characteristics. The particularity of these movements, highlighted by authors such as Castells (2012), is that they are all horizontal, with no political organizations leading the protests or permanent and undisputed leaders at their charge.

In the case of Latin America, we can see many elements similar to those of the city square movements, but also particularities that distinguish them from the rest. For example, this cycle of Latin American protests has the particularity of being eminently student-led, for example, the Chilean student movements of 2011, the MANE in Colombia or the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico. In these cases, we can see differences such as the presence of charismatic leaders and organizational structures inherent to universities, particularly in Chile and Colombia, while at the same time observing similarities in the type of activism and the important role of the internet in their organization, which is key, for example, in the case of Mexico. In this sense, research on these movements focuses on the internet and especially online platforms like *Facebook* and *Twitter*. For example, we can see publications that perform comparative analyses between the different cases with respect to the use of internet and social networking (Galindo, 2016), or specific analyses of *Twitter* that reveal its institutionalization as a type of communications media (García et al., 2014), to name a few.

Beyond the analysis of the frameworks for collective action, such as repertoires (Aguilera, 2012; Fernández, 2013), the creativity of the protests is an important line to account for the ways collective action commands attention in the public space.

On the one hand, sit-ins carried out by a younger generation are instances that help create spaces of experience (Pleyers, 2016) and generated shared lessons among the different participants; but also flash mobs, dances, kissathons, or races for education, which bring together otherwise strangers around a common goal (Ponce and Miranda, 2016), such as free, quality and non-profit education, as demanded by Chilean students; or protection of free public higher education, in the case of Colombia.

Finally, in 2018 we saw a new wave of youth-led movements, this time under a feminist agenda. These movements were primarily framed within Spain and Latin America, with green bandana demonstrations in Argentina for free and safe abortion; the Chilean feminist movement that arose mostly from within institutions of higher education demanding non-sexist education and an end to sexual harassment; protests against "la Manada" in Spain, and the #EleNao movement against Bolsonaro in Brazil (Larrondo and Ponce, 2019).

Ultimately, the social realm has been politicized, and it is there where identities have been constituted from the diversity of youth spaces, where class, territory, the student condition, youth cultures, gender, sexuality and ethnicity act as dimensions from which youth politicity is articulated. In this sense, we can see that no youth dimension is restrictive in terms of this diversity of places of identity, as seen in the protagonist role of student activists, which continues to express the grievances and demands appealing to inequalities reproduced within the education system and expressed in the relationship between students and the State, the market and society as a whole.

2. Towards politics. Generations, youth militancies and the political system in modern day

In the area of youth studies, for a long time we have read about the diagnosis of declining militant political participation.

Social disengagement with institutional politics, expressed in the drop in electoral participation and in political parties of the masses, saw a reiterated example among newer generations, as a metaphor for the evolution of the political away from politics. In this context, there was a trend in social analyses to highlight the political and politicity of youth protest and movements, though not the specifically political-militant groups more or less inserted in party systems. However, during the last few years, those same processes around the continent have led social scientists to observe the evolution of youth politicization that have also brought about new cycles of party system renewal, which have also intervened in national political spheres.

Argentina and Chile have been two of the countries where certain contexts have led studies on youth politicization and social movements to also analyze the emerging militancies expressed in these movements (Vommaro, 2015; Vásquez, Vommaro, Núñez and Blanco, 2017; Muñoz and Durán, 2019). These have shown particular interest in processes such as the youth-led emergence of the left, right and center that, on the one hand, take political traditions and re-signify them and, on the other, innovate in terms of the forms, meanings and logics of political action. For Latin America, it has also been particularly interesting to take a look at the process in Spain, where the representation crisis of traditional parties, within the framework of the economic disaster, paved the way for new militancies that identified with the readings, outrage and disengagement expressed by youth-led social movements, as in the case of the relationship between the Podemos political party and the 15-M Movement.

The emergence of different types of militancies that aspire to gain institutionally-expressed power, but also to become a power players constructed from social movements, is nothing new in light of the long history of movements in the 20th century. However, this is new within the framework of a neoliberalist system that had been relatively successful in modernizing politics and depoliticizing the social realm, as an essential condition for

achieving relative consensus in the acceptance of the economic model. In Chile in 2011, this was the clear expression of the student movement, which not only assumed itself to be political, but also accused institutionalized politics of not doing its job to represent politically the different interests expressed by civil society. Condemning a lack of divisiveness within the party system, the movement spoke of a deficient democracy, trapped among the outdated consensus of the elite and instilled as an area for the administration of preconceptions, though not as a channel for transformative demands from society. Along this line, it is not surprising that a large part of the student militancies later converged within national processes that saw the emergence of new political parties, which spoke of changing politics from within the institutions themselves. This task, according to its own concepts, would have to gain parliamentary representation, start by leading local governments and generate proposals in order to dispute the national government, all without losing touch with the power of social movements.

In the heat of these types of transformation, studies on youth, politics and militancy constitute priority areas from which we may analyze the conflictive construction of the public sphere based on a societal and socio-generational focus. From this position, we can develop perspectives that first look at youth movements but are directed towards the phenomena that transcend them, and are related to contemporary transformations in the connection between State, economy and society. Politics is changing, it always has been, and it is still fundamental to observe the newer generations to understand how these changes are processed and articulated.

3. The articles in the *section dossier*

This dossier begins with the article entitled "Movimientos juveniles en Brasil y México, coordenadas para un análisis de subjetivación y desmovilización social" [in English, "Youth

movements in Brazil and Mexico, coordinates for an analysis of subjectivation and social demobilization"], by Héctor Andrade. This text analyzes the subjectivation and social demobilization of the youth activists in the #YoSoy132, Passe Livre, #Todos-SomosPolitécnico and Ayotzinapa movements, highlighting the relationship between subjectivation, communications media and its ties to the State. Using a qualitative methodology based on interviews, the author proposes a reading of the social demobilization generated from the State through different devices, such as repression, vigilance and violence.

This is followed by the paper, "Continuidades y rupturas de la protesta universitaria en el Chile de la posdictadura (1990-2014)" [in English, "Continuities and ruptures of university protest in Chilean post-dictatorship (1990-2014)"], developed by Cristóbal Villalobos and Camila Ortiz. This descriptive and quantitative research study looks to analyze protest events in order to understand the cycles and trends in student movements in post-dictatorship Chile, between 1990 and 2014. Based on their analysis, the authors seek to deconstruct some of the theses posited by different researchers focused on the student movement, including the demobilization of the 90s and the rising divisiveness during the first decade of the 21st century, a change in the tactics and demands of the student movement, and an increase in the intensity of conflict during recent decades.

Authors Mariana Lerchundi and María del Rocío Alonso present their article "Violencia institucional y participación política juvenil: la experiencia de la Marcha de la Gorra (Córdoba)" [in English, "Institutional violence and Youth political participation: the experience of the "Marcha de la Gorra" (Córdoba)"] based on a study of the stigmatization and lack of recognition of young people in the cities of Río Cuarto and Cordoba, Argentina, within the framework of the "Marcha de la Gorra" movements. This qualitative research based on in-depth interviews and virtual ethnographies, looks to understand the significations and subjectivities of highly stigmatized youth.

Researcher Juan Fernández also contributes with his "Politización estudiantil y rol de la toma en las movilizaciones de 2011 en Chile" [in English, "Student politicization and role of the toma in the mobilizations of 2011 in Chile"], which uses a qualitative methodology based on focus groups with activists from different universities and high schools. The author seeks to analyze the relationship between *tomas* [in English, school takeovers] and the politicization of non-leader activists in the 2011 student movement. One of the main findings of this article is the appropriation and resignification of politics by young people, as well as the preponderant role of takeovers as a space for autonomy and political learning.

On the topic of youth militancies and their connection to institutional politics, we have the text by Marion Di Méo titled: "De la calle al parlamento: trayectorias y repertorios de una generación de estudiantes. Chile, 2006-2017" [in English, "From the streets to the parliament: trajectories and repertoires of a student generation. Chile, 2006-2017"]. The author analyzes the connection between the movements of 2006 and 2011, sharing the thesis of generational continuity through the experiences and perceptions of its actors, first as high school students and then as university students. The paper offers an in-depth study of the repertoires of collective action and its strategic adaptability, with a specific look at the evolution of some leaderships towards institutional politics.

Another perspective on the generational approach, but within a historical framework that reviews the trajectories of leftist youth militancies during the dictatorship, is that presented in the article by Carmen Gemita Oyarzo "Nuestras luchas de ayer: voces militantes y narrativas generacionales sobre la derrota y los desafíos actuales de la izquierda chilena (1990-2018)" [in English, "Our struggles of yesterday: militant voices and generational narratives about the defeats and the current challenges of the chilean left (1990-2018)"]. Based on a deconstruction of the concept of "generation" in terms of the construction of identity, that is,

generational identify, Oyarzo performs a qualitative analysis of how the narratives of former militants configure shared notions of meaning, in relation to the shared history and readings of the present day.

Also focused on analyzing the Chilean left, the second to last text in this dossier is written by Aaron Briceño and entitled "El movimiento universitario de Valparaíso y el surgimiento de una nueva izquierda en Chile" [in English, "The Valparaíso university movement and the emergence of a new left in Chile"]. This article analyzes the university student movement in Valparaiso from 2006 to 2016, focusing on the student left and how it is inserted within the articulation processes for a new left in Chile, within the formal structures of democratic representation.

This dossier section ends with a text by Rodrigo Torres and Juan Carlos Sánchez entitled "Educación, movilizaciones de estudiantes y conflicto político en Chile y Colombia: algunas reflexiones desde una perspectiva comparada" [in English, "Education, student movements and political conflict in Chile and Colombia: some reflections from a comparative perspective"]. Based on an analysis of the political debate, with a focus on the structure of political opportunities developed in each case, the authors compare the recent student movements in Chile and Colombia, highlighting the similarities in the political processes and the evolution of the repertoire of action by these mobilized young people.

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