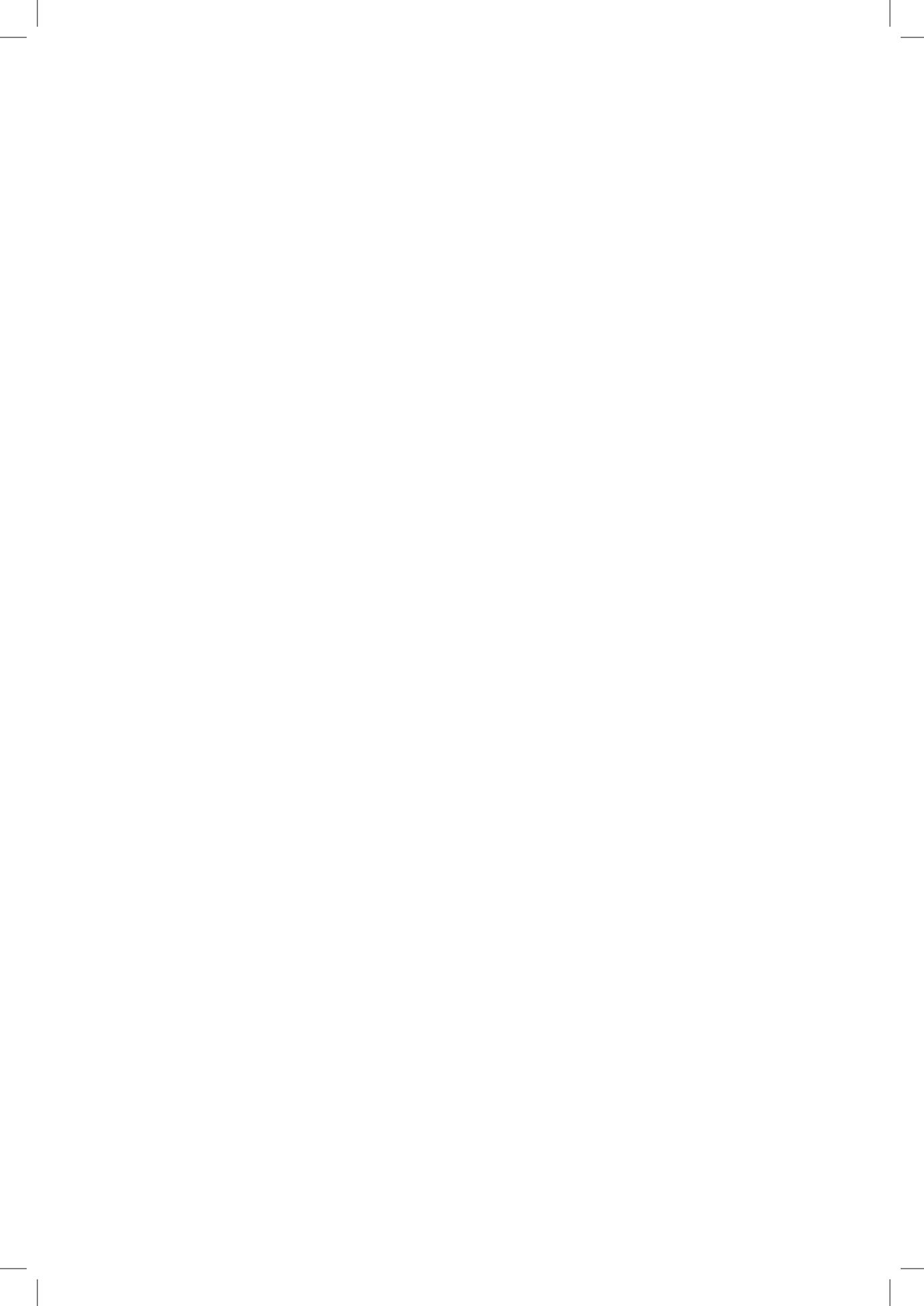


HANDBOOK ON YOUTH ACTIVISM



Handbook on Youth Activism

Edited by

Jerusha Conner

Professor of Education, Department of Education and Counseling, Villanova University, USA



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Contributors

Danielle N. Aguilar is a PhD student in the Educational Foundations, Policy and Practice program at the University of Colorado Boulder. She received her M.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration from the University of Vermont and a B.A. in Feminist Studies with a minor in Black Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Danielle employs PAR and critical theories to work towards liberation, and creating meaningful change that centers the lived experiences of groups most impacted by social injustices.

M. Ainomugisha is an MA student at New York University in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication where they study transnational mediation of migrant labor and global visual cultures. They are a photographer, filmmaker, and core organizer with various collectives including To the Bush, Abolitionist Collective, Ubuntu Reading Group, and the End Museveni Dictatorship (EMD) mutual aid fund.

Kayla M. Anderson is a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University in the Department of Human and Organizational development. Her research interests focus on the intersection of the built, natural, and social environments where she is interested in utilizing community power and empowerment theory to understand how and why groups organize and mobilize to address inequities within the built and natural environments. Kayla is one of the adult facilitators of the Nashville Youth Design Team.

Nicolás Angelcos is an Assistant Professor in the Sociology Department at the University of Chile, Chile. His research interests primarily lie in the fields of political sociology, urban studies, and Latin American studies. He has published in various journals, including *Social Movement Studies*, *Latin American Research Review*, and *Latin American Perspectives*. Recently, he co-edited the book *Vivir con Dignidad: Transformaciones Sociales y Políticas de los Sectores Populares en Chile* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2023) with Miguel Pérez.

Brendon Barnes is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. He writes on psychology, climate change, environmental health, and justice. His research is based on the following assumptions: toxic physical environments have adverse impacts on wellbeing; environmental impacts disproportionately affect poor and marginalized people; and interventions are inherently political. His work deepens our understandings of behaviour in environmental studies, strengthens critical methodologies to study environmental injustice, and reveals the ways in which environmental activism is undermined and enhanced.

Judith Bessant is Professor in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University in Melbourne Australia. She publishes in the areas of sociology, youth studies, politics, policy and history and works as an advisor to governments and to non-government organizations. Judith was awarded the Order of Australia (Dept Prime Minister and Cabinet & Governor General) in 2017.

Gavin Brown is Visiting Professor in Political Geography at The University of Sheffield, UK. He is the author, with Helen Yaffe, of *Youth Activism and Solidarity: The Non-stop*

Picket Against Apartheid (2017). His research interests span the history of international anti-apartheid campaigning, the production of geopolitical knowledge by South African anti-apartheid activists, and the lives, politics, and health of LGBTQ+ people internationally.

Maria Bruselius-Jensen is Associate Professor at the Center for Youth Research at the University of Aalborg, Denmark. Her research interest is in youth sociology generally and specifically on young people's access to participation and their societal engagement. She has recently co-edited the book *Young People's Participation: Revisiting Youth and Inequality* (2020).

Chloé Buire is Permanent Researcher at the laboratory Les Afriques dans le Monde, French national Centre for Scientific Research. Her research is at the crossroads of urban geography and political anthropology and focuses on the construction of urban identities in Southern African cities. She has published on the State–citizens interface in Cape Town (South Africa) and Luanda (Angola). Her book *Citadins-Citoyens au Cap: Espace et Justice Après l'Apartheid* (2019) is available online in open access.

Daniela Chironi is an Assistant Professor in Political Science at the Scuola Normale Superiore, in Italy. Her research and published articles focus on the connections between social movements and political parties, the electoral consequences of economic inequality, and protest, with specific reference to feminism, environmentalism, and the political participation of young people. She is among the authors of the recent book *Resisting the Backlash: Street Protest in Italy* (Routledge, 2022).

Brian D. Christens is Professor of Human and Organizational Development at Vanderbilt University. He studies organizations' efforts to change systems and benefit their communities, and sociopolitical development processes among participants in these organizations.

Alison K. Cohen is an Assistant Professor of Epidemiology & Biostatistics at the University of California San Francisco in the USA. Her community-driven, policy-relevant research, often conducted in partnership with community members and practitioners, seeks to document civic, health, and educational inequities, and identify and evaluate interventions that could reduce such inequities.

Jerusha Conner is Professor of Education at Villanova University, in Pennsylvania, USA. Her research focuses on youth activism and organizing, student engagement, and student voice. She is the author of more than 60 journal articles and book chapters, four edited collections (*The Bloomsbury Handbook of Student Voice in Higher Education*, 2023; *Political Activism in Post-secondary Contexts*, 2022; *Contemporary Youth Activism*, 2016; and *Student Voice in American Education Policy*, 2015), and *The New Student Activists* (2020).

Patricio Cuevas-Parra is Honorary Fellow at the Moray House School of Education and Sport (MHSES), part of Childhood and Youth Studies, and Director for Child Participation and Rights with World Vision International. His main research interests are: children and young people's participation in public policy and decision-making; child-led research, methodologies and impact; children and young people's perspectives on violence; and children and young people's identities and inequalities.

Bharat Raj Dhakal is Assistant Professor at School of Development and Social Engineering, Pokhara University, Nepal. He completed a Master of Arts in English from the Central

Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. His research interests focus on ethnic literature, ecocriticism, and communication.

Donatella della Porta is Professor of Political Science at the Scuola Normale Superiore, in Italy, where she leads the Center on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS). Her research focuses on social movements, political violence, terrorism, corruption, the police and protest policing. She is the author or editor of 90 books, 150 journal articles and 150 contributions in edited volumes. Her more recent books are *Labour Conflicts in the Digital Age* (2022) and *Contentious Politics in Emerging Critical Junctures* (2022).

Uyiosa Elegon is an Edo facilitator and strategist residing on the homeland of the Karankawa, Coahuiltecan, Atakapa-Ishak, and the Sana people of Texas's Gulf Coast region (now referred to as Houston, Texas). He is a co-founder of Shift Press, a media organization that helps young people move power through story sharing and journalism education. Uyiosa has worked on several electoral and issue-based campaigns, produced West African cultural events, and facilitated various youth civic education programs across the US.

Svetlana Erpyleva is a sociologist, a researcher with Public Sociology Laboratory, Centre for Independent Social Research (Russia), and a Humboldt fellow at the Research Centre for East European Studies, University of Bremen. Her research interests focus on protest movements and collective action, political involvement, political socialization, youth and children's political participation in Russia and abroad. Her articles have been published in *Journal of Youth Studies*, *Current Sociology*, *Qualitative Psychology*, and the *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*.

Oladimeji Fatoki is a student in the MA in Education program at Villanova University, Pennsylvania, USA. He has recently been selected as a 2023 Opus Prize Ambassador. His research interests focus on civic engagement, youth organizing and activism, and educational equity in the twenty-first century. His thesis is currently focused on finding the best approach to garner support among youth and generate improved civic interest and engagement.

Jesica Siham Fernández is an Assistant Professor at Santa Clara University in the Ethnic Studies Department. Informed by critical race and ethnic studies, she engages participatory action research (PAR) to support Latinx, youth, and student activists in their sociopolitical citizenship and wellbeing. Her scholarship is grounded in a decolonial feminist praxis and abolitionist vision toward supporting transformative justice and environmental thriving. She is the author of *Growing Up Latinx: Coming of Age in a Time of Contested Citizenship* (2021).

Constance Flanagan is Professor and Associate Dean Emerita in the School of Human Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Current projects on civic science are a new phase in her scholarship on ways that young people develop connections, identities, and commitments to the common good.

Erin Gallay is a graduate student at the University of Michigan in the School for Environment and Sustainability. Her research interests focus on the educational experiences that foster young people's identification with and action for the environmental and community commons. Her most recent publication is *Civic Science: Addressing Racial Inequalities in Environmental and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Education* (2022).

Amanda Galczyk is a recent graduate of Villanova University in Pennsylvania, USA where she earned her MA in Education with a concentration in Higher Education Leadership. Her research interests focus on the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of higher education in the United States. Her recent thesis analyzes the anti-Indigenous violence inherent to US higher education and, in the process, challenges the legitimacy of the meritocratic ideal.

Alexis E. Hunter is a PhD student at the University of Colorado-Boulder in the Educational Foundations, Policy & Practice program. Her work is at the intersections of youth activism, technology, and healing as she explores how racially marginalized youth leverage technological advances for justice. Her current work leverages critical race theories and the ancestral traditions of healing justice to honor the ingenious everyday practices communities of color engage in to disrupt dominant narratives that oversimplify digital contexts as only sites for entertainment.

Abraham Jones is a first generation African American PhD candidate. He grew up in South Central Los Angeles during the 1990s and early 2000s. Abraham completed his BA in Community Studies at UC Santa Cruz and his Master's in Human Rights Education at USF. Abraham has worked with several nonprofits and schools serving youth. His research interests focus on Youth Activism, Critical Race Theory and Community-based participatory action research.

Joseph KaiKai is a freshman at Tennessee Technical College. He was a member of the Nashville Youth Design Team from 2020–2023.

Ben Kirshner is a Professor of Learning Sciences and Human Development at the University of Colorado Boulder. He works collaboratively with educators, community organizers, and students to design and study learning environments that support youth development, activism, and civic participation. In addition to his book, *Youth Activism in an Era of Education Inequality*, Ben has published in refereed journals that include *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *Applied Developmental Science* and the *Journal of Community Psychology*.

Yog Raj Lamichhane is Assistant Professor at School of Business, Pokhara University, Nepal. He completed a Master of Arts in English from the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Nepal and he is currently a PhD scholar at the same university. His earlier publications are concentrated on communication, culture and rhetoric.

Lucía Miranda Leibe is Professor at the Social Sciences and Youth Research Center (CISJU), which is part of the Faculty of Social and Legal Sciences at the Catholic University, Silva Henríquez (UCSH). Her research interests focus on the Social Feminist Student Movement, political parties, and substantive/descriptive gender representation. She has published on the ‘Feminist Spring’ in Chile. Her latest paper is titled “*Chile’s Feminist Spring: Impasse and Continuity of Women’s Demands for a Life Free of Sexism*” (2023).

Kanokrat Lertchoosakul is Assistant Professor of Political Science in the Department of Government, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. Her research interests focus on social movement, youth activism, and democratization. She has published on leftist, right-wing, grassroots, and youth movements. Her books include *The Rise of the Octobrists in Contemporary Thailand* (2016), *From Hand Clap to Whistle: Development*

and *Dynamics of the Anti-Thaksin Movement* (2020) (in Thai) and *Cold War, In-between and White Ribbons* (2021) (in Thai).

Eeva Luhtakallio is Professor of Sociology at the University of Helsinki. Her work focuses on democracy and citizenship as mundane practices, currently in particular young people's engagements in visual politics and activism. Her publications include *Practicing Democracy* (2012), as well as recent articles 'Fame democracy? Social media and visuality-based transformation of the public sphere' (with Taina Meriluoto, 2023), 'Snap-along ethnography' (with Taina Meriluoto, 2022) and 'Group formation, styles, and grammars of commonality in local activism' (2019).

Maurice Rafael Magaña is Associate Professor of Mexican American Studies and Social, Cultural, and Critical Theory at the University of Arizona. He is the author of *Cartographies of Youth Resistance: Hip-Hop, Punk, and Urban Autonomy in Mexico* published in 2020 and awarded the 2021 Anthony Leeds Prize by the Critical Urban Anthropology Association. His work has also been published in *American Anthropologist*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, among others.

Carla Malafaia is Principal Researcher at the University of Porto in the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. She is involved in the Project 'Imagi(ni)ng Democracy: European youth becoming citizens by visual participation'. Her research interests include youth political engagement, visual modes of participation, community intervention and democracy. She has published on activism, social media, and educational and political inequalities in such journals as *Social Movement Studies*, *Current Sociology*, *Ethnography and Education* and *YOUNG*.

Sara McAlister is a Principal Research Associate with the NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. Her research interests include how youth organizing and activism shape young people's academic and civic trajectories and how schools can learn from the culturally sustaining and critical pedagogies of community-based youth development settings. She is an author of *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools: Strategies and Successes* (2009).

Taina Meriluoto is a postdoctoral researcher in Sociology at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She works on (visual) politicization, democratic theory and practice, and focuses especially on the interrelations between the self and political action. Her recent publications include *Snap-along Ethnography: Studying Visual Politicization in the Social Media Age* (2022), 'Fame democracy? Social media and visuality-based transformation of the public sphere' (2023), 'The self in selfies: Conceptualizing the selfie-coordination of marginalized youth with sociology of engagement' (2023) with Eeva Luhtakallio and *Making a Deal with the Devil? Portuguese and Finnish Activists' Everyday Negotiations on the Value of Social Media* (2022) with Carla Malafaia.

Chiara Milan is Assistant Professor in Political Sociology at the Scuola Normale Superiore, in Italy. Her research focuses on social movements, civic activism, nationalism, citizenship, ethnicity, migration and youth activism, with particular focus on Southeastern Europe. She has published on refugee solidarity movements and the mobilization of youth of migrant descent for access to citizenship rights in Italy. Her most recent book is *Social Mobilization Beyond*

Ethnicity: Grassroots Movements and Civic Activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Routledge 2020).

Kathryn Y. Morgan is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Sewanee: The University of the South. Her research explores civic and sociopolitical identity development among young people as they take part in efforts to build collective power and promote community wellbeing. Kathryn is one of the adult facilitators of the Nashville Youth Design Team.

Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire is an Assistant Professor at California State University, Dominguez Hills. His research focuses on African indigenous nationalism, the Black Radical Tradition, literary activism, and twenty-first century immigrant African literature. He is a founder-member of the Ubuntu Reading Group.

Olena Nikolayenko is Professor in the Department of Political Science at Fordham University. Her research interests include comparative democratization, contentious politics, women's activism, and youth, with a regional focus on Eastern Europe. She is the author of two books, *Citizens in the Making in Post-Soviet States* (2011) and *Youth Movements and Elections in Eastern Europe* (2017). Her current research focuses on women's activism in Belarus and Ukraine.

Nicolás Ortiz is a researcher at the Social Sciences and Youth Research Center (CISJU), Universidad Católica Cardenal Silva Henríquez. His research interests focus on memory, political subjectivity and social movements in post-dictatorship Chile. He has published on collective identity and the student movement in democratic Chile.

Marlene Palomar is a Doctoral Student at the University of Colorado Boulder in the Department of Education. She focuses her research at the converging points of healing, learning, education, and design, delving into the realms of social justice, power dynamics, and cultural influences in the context of learning. More specifically, her work investigates the creation of learning environments with a primary focus on fostering healing experiences. She has published research related to how the recent calls to ban critical race theory (CRT) have impacted the personal and professional lives of Faculty of Color in Colorado.

Sarah Pickard is Professor of British Politics and Society at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris. Her research focuses on the interaction between youth policy, youth civic and political engagement, and youth protest. She has published widely on young people's political participation, especially on young environmental activists and Do-It-Ourselves (DIO) politics. Her monograph *Politics, Protest and Young People* (2019) explores youth engagement from a holistic perspective. Sarah is a convenor of the Political Studies Association (PSA) Young People's Politics specialist group.

Ilaria Pitti is Associate Professor in Youth Studies and Gender Studies at the University of Bologna, Italy. Her research interests focus on unconventional forms of youth participation and youth cultures with an emphasis on intergenerational and gender dynamics. Her recent publications include the articles *More Than 'Crumbs': Emotional Entanglements and Situated Ethical Strategies in Qualitative Research* (2022) and the edited collection *Young People's Participation in Europe: Revisiting Youth and Inequalities* (2021).

Alisa Pykett is an Action Researcher and Evaluator with the Population Health Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her work is centred around how and why people become

involved in their communities, learn together, and take action to create conditions for all to thrive. Her interests include critical civic development and the pedagogies, processes, and settings that foster it, especially in cohort-based civic leadership programmes and place-based learning.

Rinaldi Ridwan is a PhD Candidate at UNSW Sydney. His research interests focus on sexuality education, adolescent sexuality, sexual health, and health communication. His notable publication is '*Being Young and LGBT, what could be Worse? Analysis of Youth LGBT Activism in Indonesia: Challenges and Ways Forward*' (2018).

Dolores Rocca Rivarola is a Researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) and at the Gino Germani Research Institute (IIGG-UBA), where she is part of the Group of Studies in Politics and Youth (GePoJu). She holds a PhD in Social Sciences from the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) and a degree in Political Science (UBA). Her research interests, and topics she has published on, are political activism in Argentina and Brazil, youth participation, electoral campaigns, and qualitative research.

Juan Pablo Rodríguez is an assistant professor and researcher at the Social Sciences and Youth Research Center (CISJU), Universidad Católica Cardenal Silva Henríquez. His research interests include political sociology, social movements, and social and political theory. He has published on the politics of neoliberalism in Latin America with a focus on Chile, as well as on social movements in post-dictatorship Chile. He is the author of *Resisting Neoliberal Capitalism in Chile: The Possibility of Social Critique* (2020).

Putri Widi Saraswati (they/she) is an Indonesian independent consultant, researcher, and activist who co-founded RAISE Global Health, a global health advisory specializing in Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), intersectional gender justice, and global health equity. Their fields of interest include SRHR, intersectional feminism, and global health decolonization. Their most recent publication is a policy brief entitled *Saving More Lives on Time: Strategic Policy Implementation and Financial Inclusion for Safe Abortion in Indonesia during COVID-19 and Beyond* (2022).

Lema Shaltaf is a freshman at Belmont University. She was a member of the Nashville Youth Design Team from 2020–2023.

Tiera Tanksley is an Assistant Professor of Critical Race Theory in Education. Broadly, Tiera's research examines anti-Blackness as 'the default setting' of digital technology and examines the socioemotional and academic consequences of algorithmic racism in the lives and schooling experiences of Black youth. Her work simultaneously recognizes Black youth as digital activists and civic agitators, and examines the complex ways they subvert, resist and rewrite racially biased technologies to produce more just technologies.

E. Kay M. Tisdall is Professor of Childhood Policy, and part of Childhood and Youth Studies (MHSES), University of Edinburgh. She undertakes collaborative research on such areas as family law, inclusive pedagogy for young children, young people's mental health, and children's participation and activism. She is involved in a number of projects, with teams in countries ranging from Brazil, Canada, Eswatini, India, Palestine, to South Africa, as well as working with the Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland.

Rodrigo Torres is Full Professor and Researcher at the Social Sciences and Youth Research Center (CISJU), Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez. A PhD in Political Science, his research interests focus on youth culture and political participation in Chile. His work has been published in journals such as *Latin American Perspectives*, *Social Science Information* and the *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*.

Jurhamuti José Velázquez Morales is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo (UMSNH) in Morelia, Mexico and head of the Department of the Center for Research and Teaching of Languages at the Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán. He holds a master's degree in bilingual intercultural education from the Universidad Mayor de San Simón, Bolivia and a bachelor's degree in psychology from UMSNH. His work has been published in *Global Studies of Childhood*.

Christopher M. Wegemer is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Department of Social Welfare at the University of California, Los Angeles. His research uses longitudinal social network analysis and civic storytelling to examine the development of critical consciousness, with particular attention to motivation and agency. He holds degrees in Education, Global Studies, Electrical Engineering, and Applied Physics.

Laura Wray-Lake is a Professor of Social Welfare at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her programme of research focuses on youth civic engagement from developmental, cultural, and contextual perspectives. With over 90 research articles and chapters, a monograph (Wray-Lake and Abrams, 2020), and a forthcoming book (Cambridge University Press), her research demonstrates that adolescents and young adults hold abundant potential to act as positive change agents and address society's problems on local, national, and global scales.

Anthony Gerard Wright is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Childhood Studies at Rutgers University, Camden. His research focuses on how young people embody and respond to conditions of illness and violence. He has conducted ethnographic research among paediatric cancer patients and caregivers in the United States, and he is currently working on collaborative research with scholars and activists in Mexico. His work has been published in *Medical Anthropology*, *Global Studies of Childhood*, and *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*.

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Introduction: youth activism in a context of global uncertainty and biographical precarity

Jerusha Conner, Uyiosa Elegon and Alison K. Cohen

When two young members of the Just Stop Oil coalition, Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland, threw tomato soup on Vincent van Gogh's *Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers* painting in the London National Gallery in October 2022 to draw attention to the need to end fossil fuel dependence, they ignited a firestorm.¹ Critics on the left and right impugned their tactic as performative, immature, and counterproductive. But creating controversy was the point. As Plummer explained on social media, "What we're doing is getting the conversation going so we can ask the questions that matter" (Free Seed Films, 2022). The question Plummer and Holland hoped to inject into public consciousness was why people do not feel the same levels of horror and outrage when witnessing the destruction of the planet and its people as when seeing a beautiful work of art defaced (Quiroz, 2022).

Whether through dramatic direct actions, individual acts of resistance, community organizing, power-building, and/or mass protests in the streets, youth activists are sparking important conversations about what is right and what must change in their institutions, nation-states, and the world in order to secure a just and viable future for themselves and others. These conversations are not simply academic. How they are taken up, debated, and ultimately decided is highly consequential, and no one has a greater stake in them than young people, who have many more years left to live than their adult counterparts. Remembering this timeframe is one key to understanding what drives so many young people to take action to try to effect change in what they feel is an untenable status quo. As Phoebe Plummer told a reporter, "I'm doing this so that one day I can look at my niece or nephew in the eye and say, 'I fought for your future'" (Quiroz, 2022).

As we write this introduction, the future feels less assured and more precarious for many young people – especially those from more marginalized backgrounds – around the world. They are growing up in an era marked by ever more frequent and more extreme climate shocks and more catastrophic climate changes; a global pandemic that has decreased global life expectancy, served as a mass disabling event, upended schooling, and sent shockwaves through the global economy; a major land war in Europe, a civil war in Sudan, and the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan; widening inequality; an increase in hate crimes directed against minoritized populations as well as police or state-sanctioned violence; and a dramatic rise in authoritarianism around the world (Rhodes, 2022). While the threats are more imminent and graver for some young people than others, the majority of youth activists today seem to be grappling with existential questions. Will the planet be inhabitable when I'm an adult? How can I live in a society that invalidates my identity or strips me of basic rights to bodily autonomy? If I speak up, will I be beaten, disappeared, or killed?

For many years, a common paradigm used to explain youth activism has been biographical availability – the idea that youth have the time and capacity to engage in disruptive activity because they do not yet have jobs, family to care for, bills to pay, or other adult responsibilities

that may dissuade them from the risky work of activism (McAdam, 1986). This understanding of youth, however, was both classist (overlooking the many youth who work to support their families and who devote time to caring for their siblings or parents) and adultist (framing adult concerns about their jobs as weightier than youth concerns about school and work and neglecting the fact that just as adults could be fired for engaging in activism, students could be expelled or retaliated against by teachers or administrators for the same). Rather than biographical availability, biographical precarity offers a more compelling explanation for youth activism today. Rather than having nothing to lose if they engage in activism, many youth activists feel they have everything to lose if they do not. Their very futures are at stake.

Youth activism is shaped by a number of factors, including the specific (geo)political economic context in which the young people are situated and the various dimensions of their identity that are either oppressed or privileged within that context. Therefore, answers to the question, “What does it mean to be a youth activist today?” will be as varied as the young people asked. Some youth engaged in the work of social change will say they have not yet done enough to have earned the title of activist. They believe activism requires a certain level of dedication or influence that they aspire to but have not yet developed. By contrast, others will say they prefer the term “organizer” to “activist”, because activism can be accomplished alone, while organizing requires sustained collective action. For these youth, activism implies an impoverished form of change work. Meanwhile, other youth enact activism as a matter of survival. Given the material risks they face, a young transgender person living in a heteronormative society may feel their very existence is a form of activism.

Just as the youth described above do not provide easy answers to the deceptively simple question of what it means to be a youth activist today, so too, this Handbook does not present a clear consensus on either the experiences or effects of youth activism. Instead, it offers different angles of vision and reflections on the topic, ultimately rendering a kaleidoscope of youth activism. The objects inside the kaleidoscope can be thought of as “the who, what, where, when, why, and how” of youth activism. Each of these objects looks different in relation to the others, depending on who is holding and twisting the kaleidoscope; however, the basic component parts (objects, mirrors, lenses, and light) remain constant. In this introduction, we explicate those component parts as they are featured in this Handbook. Our explication of the objects surfaces some of the core issues in the field and raises implications for future research. Meanwhile, our discussion of the mirrors (the six parts of the Handbook) and light (the scholarship it contains) serves to preview the chapters to come and to highlight their contributions to our understanding of youth activism.

THE BASICS OF YOUTH ACTIVISM: OBJECTS IN THE KALEIDOSCOPE

Who are Youth Activists?

As Nancy Lesko (2012) observes, youth is a social construction, delimited differently in different historical and geographical contexts. The age ranges covered in this Handbook run from 12 to 35. Several authors cite national policies that set certain parameters around youth. For example, according to Ukraine’s Law on Key Principles of Youth Policy, youth are individuals aged between 14 and 35 (Chapter 5). In Indonesian law, youth are considered to be between

the ages of 16 and 30 (Chapter 15). Other authors defer to the United Nations frameworks, which define youth as people between the ages of 15 and 24 and children as those under the age of 18 (Chapter 4).

Regardless of where the lower and upper bounds are set, youth in many societies exist in a liminal space between dependent child and independent adult. Depending on their life circumstances, of course, many youth are already self-sufficient, and many also care for others; however, societies around the world tend to view youth as not fully formed and structure their roles, rights, and responsibilities relative to adults differently (Pickard, 2019).

For these reasons, youth in many societies experience systems that are set up in favor of adults and concomitant adult practices that consistently underestimate them (Fletcher, 2015). Adults might disparage and dismiss youth as naïve, inexperienced, or unable to think for themselves; they might attempt to control youth they perceive as rebellious or misguided, or they might try to protect youth from potential missteps and dangers. In all cases, adults believe they know better than youth. The omnipresence of this relational paradigm, known as adultism, is a defining experience for many youth (Bertrand et al., 2020).

For youth activists, adultism can manifest in various ways, including adults trying to co-opt their campaigns, adults discouraging youth from engaging in protest for fear for their safety (Chapter 4), adults discounting youth activists as puppets or pawns of adults with particular agendas (Chapter 3), and adults trying to convince youth that their concerns are exaggerated or invalid. This last example, commonly referred to as gaslighting, is a particularly pernicious tactic that adults use to discredit youth's critiques and attendant demands.

The counterpart to adultism is romanticization: viewing youth through such a glorified lens that their developmental needs to be supported and guided are neglected. Their expertise is celebrated to such an extent that it is as if they have nothing yet to learn. Catering to the public's appetite for hope, the media is quick to offer up celebrity youth activists (e.g., Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, Emma Gonzalez) or a narrative of the "savior Generation" for adult consumption. Such romanticization, as it commodifies youth activists and their stories of trauma, places immense pressure on them not only to solve the problems that adults have been unable and unwilling to address (Conner et al., 2023b), but also never to make a misstep, less a stumble or "cringy" statement goes viral (Tarr, 2021).

Although adultism permeates all youth-adult interactions, it is contestable, and one way to mitigate the dangers of romanticization is for youth and adults to work together. Increasingly, youth activists are joining adults in productive intergenerational movements and organizing campaigns. Indeed, there is growing awareness that the kinds of changes youth activists seek will require solidarity and coalition building across age groups. So, while youth may take the lead in certain movements or change efforts, their participation is not limited to those that are youth-led, just as the movements they lead are not always confined to youth participants. Bruselius-Jensen (Chapter 16) describes how youth activists in Denmark view collaboration with adults as "a pragmatic way to have support to work toward their political aims", yet if these intergenerational relationships are not rooted in "reciprocal recognition, respect, and equality", the youth activists work on re-educating the adults, disengage from adult-facilitated processes, or expel adults from their organizations. Effective intergenerational campaigns require work, including vigilant attention to power dynamics and the possibility that existing status hierarchies based on age or other identity markers will be reproduced (see also Chapter 22).

One particular category of youth that has played a key role in driving change, historically and in the current moment, is that of students. It is important to acknowledge that not all youth are students, and not all students are youth. Nonetheless, when those youth who are students leverage this particular identity, it is usually for at least one of four reasons. First, asserting their identities as students enables them to demand change in educational systems or institutions meant to serve them. They are framing themselves as core stakeholders. For example, the “March of the Penguins” in Chile in 2006, the largest student mobilization in three decades, derived its name from the students wearing their black and white school uniforms as they protested the slow pace of educational reform under the new Bachelet administration (Cummings, 2015). Second, students may use their campuses as ground zero from which to launch broader social movements. The 2014 Umbrella Revolution for democratic reforms in Hong Kong exemplifies this phenomenon; it started when students organized a week-long boycott of classes. Their boycott soon inspired workers to join them in large-scale, sustained protests in the streets (Macfarlane, 2016). Third, youth may strategically lean into their identity as students in movements not associated with education in order to add a valence of “good and deserving” to their positionality, countering efforts to dismiss or suppress them as bad trouble-makers. Students in Bangladesh demanding greater road safety, for example, protested in their school uniforms and backpacks to present themselves as responsible, hard-working students who deserved greater protections (Mirza et al., 2022). Fourth, when coupled with tactics like school walkouts, occupations, and teach-ins, the purposeful positioning of themselves as students enables youth to illuminate their power to disrupt the status quo and subvert either the curriculum or normal business of schooling, which presumes students will stay in school, deferring to adults. Fridays for Future, which began with a pledge by youth to skip school on Fridays until certain climate goals were met, is emblematic of this rationale.

Finally, although age may be the most salient identity marker for youth activists, distinguishing them from adult activists, youth activists today are acutely aware of the multidimensionality of identity. Whether they are engaged in identity-based activism (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Palestinian rights, Women’s rights) or issue-based activism (e.g., gun violence, democracy, mental health), they talk frequently about intersectionality and the ways in which people with multi-marginalized identities experience compounded and disproportionate effects of social, environmental, and political² problems, including within the movements they join (Chapter 14). The attention youth activists pay to intersectionality inspires multi-issue organizing. It also informs their efforts to redress not just adultism but also racism, sexism, ableism, heteronormative discourse, classism, and other forms of oppression from within their movements.

What is Youth Activism?

The authors in this Handbook were not bound by one common definition of activism. Accordingly, they employ different frameworks and theorizing around activism. Chloé Buire (Chapter 11), for example, draws on Isin’s (2009) notion that activists “actualize a rupture in the given” (p. 380). Olena Nikolayenko (Chapter 5) cites Sherrod’s (2006) definition of activism as “action for social change”, which includes “protest events and actions, advocacy for causes, and information dissemination to raise consciousness” (p. 1). At root, most authors in this Handbook seem to agree that activism involves taking action with the goal of effect-

ing change in the status quo and that part of the change entails unsettling traditional power imbalances.

Across the literature, definitions of activism tend to address the *how* and the *why* of activism simultaneously. Because activism entails action, the how of activism (discussed further below) is integral to its conceptualization. Similarly, the why of activism (also discussed further below), the goal of creating “social change” or “a rupture”, is key. The what of activism, if it is included, is usually referred to in definitions as “a cause” or “issue”. For example, Martin (2007) argues: “Activism is action on the behalf of a cause, action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine” (p. 19). A Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of activism cited by some scholars (e.g., Frey and Carragee, 2007) asserts that activism is “a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue”. As elucidated further below, both of these definitions are outdated in their accounts of the how, as direct action is but one method of activism and routine behaviors are increasingly seen as valid forms of everyday and lifestyle activism (de Moor, 2017; Pickard, 2019).

We can problematize the what in both definitions as well. While many of the issues activists vaunt into public discourse are controversial and challenge the maintenance of “the given”, the two-sidedness that the dictionary definition implies is worth unsettling. There is no morally defensible counterargument to ending sexual violence. The scientific consensus on climate change is clear. For so many of the causes that youth activists champion, the “other side” is oppression and state-sanctioned violence. “Both sideism” presents a false equivalency (Robinson, 2020). Our critique of “both sideism” is not intended to minimize the very real tensions at the heart of key public debates (e.g., trade-offs between safety and liberty, for example (Stone, 2001)), but to challenge the implication that the argument and counterargument are comparable in their validity and moral credibility.

Before addressing the what in Martin’s definition, it’s worth pausing for a moment to acknowledge that activism is not tethered to one particular ideology. There are progressive youth activists, just as there are conservative youth activists (Binder and Kidder, 2022). This Handbook does not feature dedicated analyses or accounts of conservative youth activism; it is mentioned only briefly in Lamichhane and Dhakal’s (Chapter 6) review of youth activism in Afghanistan. Further research is needed to understand the political socialization of conservative youth activists and appraise their impact. This Handbook, however, plants its flag within the more progressive, social justice-oriented camp of youth activism because on the whole, younger members of societies around the world tend to be more progressive and also tend to value democracy more strongly (Gonyea and Hudson, 2020; Welzel, 2021). There is also a growing confluence among the issues the youth activists are embracing and sense of solidarity emerging across causes. This point returns us to the shortcoming in Martin’s (2007) definitional focus on activism as “action on the behalf of a cause” (p. 19), as today’s youth are typically advancing several causes simultaneously.

Increasingly, contemporary youth activists work on multiple causes (Chapter 7), which they see as inextricably bound. While we can still speak of specific issue area activists (e.g., racial justice activists; reproductive rights activists; pro-democracy activists), the siloing of causes has become outmoded, and intersectional youth organizing and activism are on the rise (e.g., Becker, 2023; Conner et al., 2023c; Terriquez and Milkman, 2021). Climate justice activists, for example, attend not just to climate change, but to its connection to immigrant and refugees’ rights, indigenous peoples’ rights, economic (green) justice, women’s rights, access

to healthcare, racism, and LGBTQ rights. While the interconnectedness of issues offers one explanation for the rise of multi-issue activism (Andersen and Jennings, 2010), the desire to stand in solidarity with and uplift other marginalized groups is another powerful motivator. Of course, as Gavin Brown's chapter on the anti-apartheid activism of queer youth in Britain during the 1980s reminds us (Chapter 13), these critical solidarities across cause and country are not new. However, facilitated by the internet and social media, today, they are growing in their prominence and normative nature.

Where Youth Activism Happens

There are three key stages on which youth activism plays out today: the specific local context; the transnational, global stage; and the online realm, which often serves to mediate or connect the former two.

Most of the chapters in this Handbook are situated at the local or national level. They highlight the salience of place-based activism (Chapter 2) in responding to specific local needs, even when those needs are symptomatic of larger structural issues. Place-based activism might be situated in an institution (Chapter 9), a city (Chapters 2 and 22), or a country (Chapters 5, 7, 20 and 25), but the histories and dynamics of the place contour the activism that arises (and is suppressed) within it. Some chapters, for example, address how youth activists have responded to the impact of neoliberalism in their country or institutions. Both an ideology and policy doctrine, neoliberalism privileges free markets, government retrenchment from the public sphere, and rugged individualism and self-reliance (Harvey, 2007). In this Handbook, we see neoliberalism in Chile (Chapters 7 and 8), across Europe (Chapter 1), and in the US (Chapters 9 and 22). Other authors focus on youth activism operating within the confines of an authoritarian state (Chapters 20, 24, 25) or in the fragile space of an emerging democracy (Chapter 5 and 23).

Another dimension of the local context that is worth illuminating is whether the activists are working from inside or outside the system or institution that they are trying to change. Although their access to positional power may be limited within education systems to student representative bodies, youth are the ultimate school insiders. Without them, the school or university would not exist. By contrast, youth are typically excluded from formal government structures by rules that preclude them from voting or serving in a representative capacity. Nonetheless, some youth activists are finding their way into electoral politics. In Chile in 2022, a former student activist leader, Gabriel Boric, was elected president and installed two other former student leaders in his cabinet (Chapter 7). Maxwell Frost, the first Member of Generation Z elected to the US Congress, got his start as a gun violence activist. More research is needed on how youth activists who go into government navigate the transition from outside to inside and whether and how they continue to work with their activist colleagues on the outside.

Transnational activism occurs when a movement transcends a single country and mobilizes people around the world. It can involve people standing in solidarity with those in one country to uplift and amplify a local struggle (see Chapters 13 and 24), or it can unify people from different countries around a shared set of demands for global leaders (e.g., United Nations Convention on Climate Change meetings). Ridwan and Saraswati (Chapter 15), for example, explain how transnational activism led to the emergence of the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) movement in Indonesia, and helped sustain and strengthen it, as local

SRHR groups benefited from funding, technical assistance, and support from organizations in other countries.

The online world is instrumental in facilitating transnational activism (Chapters 8 and 24), and it is a key site of youth activist culture. As Luhtakallio and colleagues (Chapter 10) observe, because the cultural tools youth activists use to produce and document their work are global (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat), their work is “inherently transnational”. Just as geographic boundaries no longer constrain youth activism, the boundaries between “in real life” and online worlds have blurred. The COVID-19 pandemic helped clarify the affordances and limitations of digital activism. While certain spaces became more accessible and youth from around the world were able to convene, learn from one another, and strategize on online platforms, the online realm could not contain the outrage in response to (the viral video of George Floyd’s murder, for example. It has become nearly impossible to study youth activism today without paying heed to their online activism, and while some scholars focus solely on the impact of digital engagement on youth activists (e.g., Chapter 19), others have developed innovative techniques for interrogating their online and the offline behaviors as well as the interplay between them (Chapters 8 and 10). As digital technologies continue to evolve, future research will need to keep pace, documenting how youth activists drive and leverage these developments and account for their impact.

When Youth Activism Happens

Some of the chapters in this Handbook take a long view, tracing changes in youth activism in a specific context over time (e.g., Chapters 5, 6 and 7). One chapter offers a historical case study (Chapter 13). The remaining chapters address contemporary youth activism, a phenomenon that has been on the ascendance globally for the last decade and a half, with the onset of the Arab Spring in 2010 (Schwartz, 2011), the Chilean student movement in 2011, and the Occupy Movement in 2011, which spanned 82 countries and, like the Arab Spring, was fueled largely by young people (Reimer, 2012).

Throughout the 2010s and into the 2020s, social media has played a critical role in the rise and spread of these movements. Whether they are using Signal, WhatsApp, TikTok, or other digital technologies, youth, who are often early adopters (Boulian and Theocharis, 2020), have been particularly adept at harnessing social media to mobilize their peers and build their movements. Social media has become ubiquitous, and though some nations block or surveil usage to suppress activism, there is little doubt that we are living in an era defined and mediated by digital technologies.

Other defining features of the current moment include the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, the Ukraine–Russia war, the lingering effects of neoliberalism and austerity in many countries (Chapter 1), and widening inequality. The global prevalence of endemic youth unemployment (Fergusson and Yeates, 2021) is also a salient characteristic of the present day.

Although contemporary youth activism is responsive to and impacted by the exigencies of the current moment, youth activists today are also mindful of the historical legacies they are furthering. Whether or not these prior movements were successful, they softened the ground and planted seeds that would shape the landscape of their countries and regions for years to come, as Kanokrat Lertchoosakul (Chapter 25) argues. Many youth activists today look to their predecessors for lessons as well as inspiration. Making connections not just to earlier struggles but also to the youth who were at their fore can also be a powerful means of healing

from oppression, as Palomar and colleagues (Chapter 18) assert. In this way, youth activism can be about continuity as well as change (see Chapter 16).

Why Youth Activists Act

The *raison d'être* of activism is creating change. Whether they are seeking to raise awareness about an issue or calling for regime change, activists strive to challenge the current course or alter an existing (or planned) state of affairs.

Two additional motives help define activism, differentiating it from other forms of engagement: concern for others and a perceived lack of other recourse. First, concern for others helps distinguish activism from self-advocacy. Self-advocacy involves championing one's own needs; activism can certainly be informed by and responsive to one's individual needs, but it is typically undertaken for the benefit of one's self *and* others, not simply for one's self. Rodríguez and colleagues (Chapter 7) explain that while personal experiences with social problems can catalyze youth to take action, activism becomes about a cause bigger than the self. They observe "in the biographies of young activists, it is not only individual concerns that appear, but also stories of families, friendships, and members of different communities that young people feel a part of and, in some cases, a duty to help." Focusing on young Danish activists, Bruselius-Jensen (Chapter 16) finds that the desire to redeem their personal privilege to benefit others is a common motivator for the youth activists in this Nordic society. These youth are less motivated by their own needs than by those of others.

Secondly, youth are often driven to activism because they feel that they do not have any other avenues to make their concerns heard (Klemenčič, 2024). In some, though certainly not all societies, formal, institutionally-approved mechanisms for channeling youth voice and student voice exist. These mechanisms include satisfaction surveys as well as youth advisory boards, youth councils, and student representative bodies. When these outlets do not exist or when they appear unwilling or incapable of elevating the concerns of youth and effectuating change, young people resort to activism. Activism, therefore, often entails action that is uninvited and unsanctioned by those in positions of power; such activism occurs outside the auspices of formal power structures, and it is intended to build and flex the power of those who have been marginalized or otherwise excluded from decision-making spaces. As discussed below, this is not to say that all activism is necessarily contentious. Pykett and colleagues' chapter (Chapter 2) offers a case study of school-supported activism, and Klemenčič (2024) observes that non-violent student activism has become "recognized as a legitimate form of student political behaviour and can be even embraced as a form of civic learning for students". Nonetheless, many youth are motivated to turn to activism when they feel they have no other recourse for having their grievances or concerns redressed.

Beyond these three motives at the heart of youth activism (a desire to effect change; a commitment to benefiting others, as well as oneself; and a need to go beyond the existing, available means for having their voices heard), youth have wide-ranging reasons for engaging in activism. None of the chapters in this Handbook focuses exclusively on the motivations of youth activists; however, the factors that propel youth to activism are threaded throughout many chapters. In addition to their connection to the causes they take up and their sense of a moral obligation to act, these factors include peer influence, friendship, belonging, and fun (Chapters 6, 7 and 16); a desire to tell their story and develop their identity (Chapters 6 and 9); and the need to cope with or heal from trauma (Chapters 9, 18 and 19). While a fair amount

of existing research examines the motivations of contemporary youth activists (de Moor et al., 2020; Hart and Gullan, 2010; Kowasch et al., 2021; Paschou and Mogollón, 2022; Wahlström et al., 2019), future research could consider how their motives might vary according to the causes they embrace and their intersectional identities as well as over time.

How Youth Activists Practice their Activism

As several authors in this Handbook point out, youth activism has undergone significant changes in recent years. It can no longer be understood as simple rabble rousing: protests, riots, demonstrations. It is not limited to contentious politics, electoral work, or political change, though that work continues to remain vital. And the new developments are not simply a function of the ubiquity of social media, which has accelerated the spread of activists' analyses and practices and resulted in a great deal of innovation (Chapters 10 and 24). This Handbook features cases of youth activism as research and advocacy (Chapters 2, 9 and 22), as art and cultural production (Chapters 8, 11 and 18), and as the creation and maintenance of community organizations, such as a kindergarten, bike repair shop, and a pizzeria (Chapter 12). Increasingly, everyday lifestyle activism is recognized as a valid and vital form of youth activism (de Moor, 2017; Giacoman et al., 2021). Lifestyle activism includes conscious buying and boycotting, decisions to walk or bike rather than drive, going vegan or vegetarian, recycling, reducing waste, and practicing other forms of sustainability. Mutual aid and direct service provision, which were an important part of the Black Power movement in the US in 1969, have also re-emerged as valued forms of activism today, no longer sidelined as a type of charity work or community service distinct from activism (Chapters 5, 12, 21 and 24). While youth activists certainly continue to draw on longstanding tactical repertoires used by prior generations, including protests, sit-ins, and teach-ins, they are also innovating and expanding new forms and types of activism. This Handbook showcases their versatility and creativity.

Across the Handbook, different patterns emerge, revealing different dynamics among the core elements of youth activism and accentuating different facets of each element, but together, these analyses demonstrate the complexity, range, and power of youth activism.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

Youth activism is a potent force in social and political change around the world, and it has engaged many young people, especially during the past 15 years. As such, it is a phenomenon that deserves rigorous scholarly treatment. While a rich body of literature has grown up around student activism, student movements, student politics, and student voice (Bessant et al., 2021; Brooks, 2016; Cheuk et al., 2022; Conner et al., 2023a; Klemenčič and Park, 2018), young people are participating in struggles and leading movements that transcend their campuses as well as their identities and concerns as students. This Handbook seeks to illuminate the variety of ways in which youth in different communities and countries are (and have been) championing change across a range of issues.

In its scope, the Handbook seeks broad coverage of the subject matter: theoretically, methodologically, topically, and geographically. Countries represented include Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Bangladesh, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Uganda, Ukraine, and the United States of America.

Issue areas vary from pedestrian safety, to child marriage, to racial justice, to regime change. The Handbook features a range of scholars, including several youth activist co-authors, approaches, disciplines, and interpretations.

The Handbook is organized into six parts. The first part explores conceptual resources and theoretical frameworks that can be used to orient the study of youth activism. The second part foregrounds context and examines youth activism situated in specific countries and regions. In the third part, methodological innovations in the study of youth activism are highlighted. The fourth part considers the behind-the-scenes work and everyday labor of youth activism, while the fifth part takes a collective look at the impact of youth activism on youth, and the sixth part focuses on youths' efforts to change their institutions and societies.

The first part opens with a chapter by Daniela Chironi, Donatella della Porta, and Chiara Milan, which offers a robust overview of the research on youth activism, bridging literature from youth studies and social movements, and presents a broad framework for the study of youth activism. The chapter explores differences among generational cohorts, various explanations for youth engagement in collective action, the political and social context for protests, and the repertoires of action and organizational forms used by youth activists. Chironi and colleagues note the particular urgency Generation Z and millennial youth activists feel around addressing the climate crisis, a point that is further elaborated in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 2, by Alisa Pykett, Erin Gallay, and Constance Flanagan, introduces the place-based Civic Science on Environmental issues (CSE) model as a means of promoting environmental activism among youth of color in urban settings. Bearing some similarities to youth participatory action research, CSE engages youth in identifying an environmental issue of concern in their community, studying it, proposing and implementing solutions, and sharing the work. The authors argue that although CSE may limit youth activism to a sanctioned range of activities, it builds students' capacity for civic participation and highlights the key role educational institutions can play in developing young people's civic competencies, leadership, and activist sensibilities.

In Chapter 3, Judith Bessant and Sarah Pickard propose a thought experiment, leveraging the concept of recognition, both as an idea and a practice. They ask what would happen if youth activists, particularly those engaged in environmental activism about the climate crisis, were not dismissed as puppets of adults or too young to understand, but instead recognized as legitimate policy actors with valid concerns, ideas, and rights. They contend that such recognition could lead to policy change towards more equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of climate change. Furthermore, it would help pave the way for a new democratic space in which young people have a voice in the decisions that affect them.

The rights of youth to have a say in the decisions that shape their lives are further explored in Chapter 4. Using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to ground their argument for the need to view youth activism through a human rights lens, Kay Tisdall and Patricio Cuevas-Parra offer examples from their research with children activists in Brazil, Bangladesh, and Ghana to illuminate the key ingredients that led these children to have demonstrable impacts in their communities. The authors also reflect on power relations between adults and child activists and how adult concerns about children's safety can be reconciled with support for children's activism.

Part II of the Handbook moves from the theoretical to the situated. In this part, the authors reflect on how youth activism has unfolded in specific contexts over specific periods of time. The part begins with Olena Nikolayenko's review of youth activism in Ukraine since the 2004

Orange Revolution, in which hundreds of youth activists participated in electoral activism, pushing for democratic change. In addition to free and fair elections, Chapter 5 discusses Ukrainian youth activism in relation to pro-European foreign policy and national security. Nikolayenko's account of youth activism during the (at the time of this writing) ongoing Russia–Ukraine war highlights how youth "act as agents of change to safeguard democracy" in this moment of crisis.

Chapter 6, by Yog Raj Lamichhane and Bharat Raj Dhakal, reviews the literature since 2000 on youth activism in South Asia, identifying common themes across studies as well as country-specific nuances and trends.

Part II concludes with Juan Pablo Rodríguez, Lucía Miranda Leibe, Rodrigo Torres, Nicolás Ortiz, and Nicolás Angelcos's chapter on youth activism in Chile. In Chapter 7, the authors illuminate how the path towards neoliberalism has shaped the changing content and form of youth activists' practice, including their uptake of cultural organizing. Rather than remaining confined to issues of education, youth activists have become increasingly involved in environmental, feminist, and urban poor movements. In addition, the authors note trends related to the salience of youth activists' individual biographies, territories, and flexible politics in animating contemporary youth activism in Chile.

In contrast to much of the research on youth activism that takes a quantitative bent, the four chapters that make up Part III address new qualitative and mixed methods ways of studying youth activism. The chapters emphasize the importance of research *with*, not *on*, youth activists and the power of research not just to inform, but to transform. In Chapter 8, Maurice Rafael Magaña, Anthony Gerard Wright, and Jurhamuti José Velázquez Morales reflect on their critical, collaborative multimodal ethnographies of youth activism in Mexico and the US as means of destabilizing the dominant gaze and redressing the exploitative "problematic inheritances" of traditional anthropology. The authors make plain that multimodal ethnography is not simply a matter of adding more technologies, like photography, video, and social media posts, into the anthropologists' toolkit, but engaging critically with the ethical and political economic dimensions of these tools and their usage, lest the extractive and colonialist modes of traditional anthropological research be reproduced.

Moving from multimodality to the specific technology of photovoice as a form of participatory action research, Jesica Fernández, the Sociopolitical Citizenship PAR Collective, and Danielle Aguilar describe the *By Us, For Us* exhibit in Chapter 9. This photovoice project contained 21 photographs and accompanying narratives that conveyed the experiences of women of color university student activists on campus. Fernández and colleagues document how by contributing to this exhibition and its call to improve the campus's racial climate by telling stories of struggle and strength, participants enhanced their own sociopolitical consciousness and wellbeing.

Where Fernández and her colleagues asked youth activists to produce photonarratives for a specific purpose, Eeva Luhtakallio, Taina Meriluoto, and Carla Malafaia ask youth activists about the images they are producing on their own for their social media channels, using a novel method they call "snap-along ethnography". As described in Chapter 10, this method enables the researchers to integrate youths' online and offline lives and draws attention to young people's visual political action as an important new front in youth activism. Additionally, drawing on examples from their research with youth in Finland, France, Germany and Portugal, the authors explain how supervised machine learning and data mining can be used in concert with

snap-along ethnographies to further illuminate youth activists' online visual political culture and politicization.

Part III concludes with a chapter by Chloé Buire, which recounts her work co-producing films with youth engaged in social change work in Cape Town, South Africa, in the post-apartheid era and in Luanda, Angola, following post-war reconstruction. In Chapter 11, Buire reflects on the methodological and epistemological challenges and affordances of participatory visual research with youth activists, as this method creates opportunities for intersubjectivity, power shifting, and the production of complex narratives that can serve to raise consciousness and create change in a broader public. Arguing that the labor of activism is "first and foremost about the ability to claim a space to think and act for oneself, while reflecting on one's position in a broader social situation", Buire offers an effective transition to Part IV of the Handbook.

The fourth section of the Handbook pulls back the curtain to expose the everyday, often invisible labor of youth activism. The first chapter in this part, Chapter 12, by Ilaria Pitti focuses on the Italian youth social movement organization Lucha and its "differentiated yet integrated" strategy of action. Pitti categorizes the "vast repertory of action" Lucha pursues into three clusters – protest politics, institutionalized struggle, and direct social action – and explores the "storekeeping efforts" that go into maintaining three such different lines of work. Her identification of four mechanisms of differentiation or integration helps reveal the complexity of the internal negotiations youth activists make to maintain effective, coherent public-facing work.

In Chapter 13, Gavin Brown draws on interviews with participants collected 30 years after their engagement in the non-stop picket in front of the South African embassy in London to protest against South African apartheid. Brown elucidates how the four-year picket, which was led predominantly by queer young men, contributed not just to transnational anti-racist solidarities, but also to radical LGBTQ projects in London at the time and fostered a queer ethos among participants. He argues that the picket created a "*queer commons*", which shifted the "norms and expectations of appropriate behaviour in (British) public spaces". The picket became a site for youth activists to experiment with their sexuality and find support for their identities as they developed their political consciousness.

The theme of intersectionality introduced in Chapter 13 is further developed in Chapter 14, as Brendon Barnes explores what happens when young black women environmental activists allege racism against liberal media or climate organizations for erasing them and marginalizing their work. Focusing on three recent cases, Barnes finds that the accuser must take on the additional labor of not only proving the racism allegation but also responding to subsequent efforts to undermine them further. Moreover, the apologies the activists receive are ultimately incomplete and unsatisfying. Revealing the extra work young black women activists assume, Barnes raises important considerations about the nature of apology and repair, especially in the context of climate reparations and climate racism.

Chapter 15, by two youth activists, Rinaldi Ridwan and Putri Widi Saraswati, offers insight into the work of sexual and reproductive health and rights activists in Indonesia. The chapter examines how youth activists have established and led work in this area and the various factors that enable and constrain their ability to sustain these important efforts in a country with changing political dynamics.

Part IV closes with Chapter 16, in which Maria Bruselius-Jensen analyzes interviews with 85 youth activists in Denmark to draw conclusions about the normative ideals that motivate their engagement, shape how they negotiate an inclusive space, and guide how and why they

partner with adults. Uncovering their everyday micro-social interactions, she finds that Danish youth are aware of their privilege and believe they must redeem it for others, that they see inclusion as paramount, but sometimes struggle to enact it, and that they are pragmatic in their approach to intergenerational work, while insisting on respect and reciprocity.

Part V shifts the focus from what youth activists do to how they are impacted by this work. The part begins with Chapter 17, in which Sara McAlister explores how participating in youth activism affects young organizers' engagement in school. Through interviews with 68 US-based youth organizers, McAlister finds that the social-emotional skills and critical consciousness these youth develop through their activism transfer to the school context. In addition to skills and knowledge, activism helps them to develop new educational goals and new identities as leaders within their schools.

Chapters 18 and 19 explore the implications of youth activism for young people's mental health. Echoing themes introduced in Chapter 9, the authors of these chapters discuss how activism can entail stress and trauma as well as hope and healing. In Chapter 18, Marlene Palomar, Abraham Jones, and Ben Kirshner identify three ways in which activism can harm youth mental health: through exposure to state-sanctioned violence, through toxic or challenging internal organizational dynamics, and by asking youth to offer their trauma for public consumption. The authors also describe how youth activism can promote radical healing by offering connections to ancestral traditions and to collectives defined by a shared purpose. In Chapter 19, Tiera Tanksley and Alexis Hunter likewise explore the ways in which activists heal from the harms their activism entails, focusing exclusively on 25 US-based black youth activists' online experiences. Tanksley and Hunter argue that black youths' exposure to racially traumatizing content online causes a range of mental health consequences, including feelings of hopelessness, exhaustion, and depression, but that youth activists use culturally situated strategies to survive this digital racism. These strategies include disconnecting from the internet and finding humor and safe spaces online in which to heal.

Chapter 20 closes out Part V. This chapter by Svetlana Erpyleva examines the political socialization of youth activists in the context of an authoritarian regime, thereby filling an important gap in the socialization literature. Marshaling data from interviews with 37 anti-regime Russian youth activists, Erpyleva reveals how digital technologies, peers, and school (and not family) acted as socializing agents because of the politicized context in which they were situated. Erpyleva further underscores the importance of events, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014, tendencies (such as the rise of meme culture) and tools, like YouTube, in politicizing these youth.

Moving from questions of how activism impacts youth to how it affects their institutions and society, Part VI explores the successes youth activists have achieved as well as the barriers they have encountered in calling for change. Chapter 21, by Oladimeji Fatoki, Amanda Galczyk, Christopher M. Wegemer, Laura Wray-Lake, and Jerusha Conner, analyzes the responses of 401 US youth activists to the question asking them what has been their biggest win as an activist. The authors identify a wide range of win types, various issues areas in which these wins occur, and relationships between these categories and activists' identities and sense of their own effectiveness. The authors argue that "changing hearts and minds" is an important, though often undervalued, contribution of youth activism.

In Chapter 22, authors Kathryn Morgan, Kayla M. Anderson, Joseph KaiKai, Lema Shalaf, and Brian D. Christens model intergenerational scholarship with their account of how a youth-led participatory design project to improve a US city enabled youth participants to

build community power. Applying a multi-dimensional framework for community power, the authors show how the design team youth participants worked to promote more equitable urban planning as well as more equitable approaches to public participation that include the voices of youth.

Moving from youth activists' impact on a city in Chapter 22 to their role in national electoral contexts in Chapter 23, Dolores Rocca Rivarola considers how the leading presidential candidates' campaigns in Argentina and Brazil in two different time periods used images of youth activists in their TV spots. Rocca Rivarola finds although youth activists were more represented and appealed to in the 2010s than in the 1980s, candidates who wanted to emphasize their connection to their base were more likely to feature youth activists in their campaign spots than those who wished to portray themselves as untethered to a party apparatus, having instead spontaneous, non-partisan followers. Rocca Rivarola's analysis highlights the importance and strategic value of youth activists as political actors in these countries.

The electoral organizing of youth activists in Uganda in 2021 as they attempted to unseat a dictator is the subject of Chapter 24, written by one current and one former youth activist who worked to support the efforts from afar. M. Aïnomugisha and Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire detail their popular education and mutual aid initiatives to create online networks of support within the diaspora for the on-the-ground Ugandan youth activists. The authors reflect on the potential and limits of such digital activism, while in Uganda a social media blackout was instituted, and protestors were subjected to a military crackdown and massacre that quashed the nascent uprising for democracy. Though the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, Aïnomugisha and Mwesigire offer valuable lessons about how to leverage digital technology during times of crisis in solidarity with frontline youth activists.

The part and Handbook close with Chapter 25, written by Kanokrat Lertchoosakul. Though this chapter also offers an account of a long-standing yet unsuccessful effort by youth activists to bring about regime change, this time in Thailand, Lertchoosakul argues that through varied creative, decentralized means and persistence, youth activists have catalyzed institutional, social, and political change in a repressive state, mainstreaming liberalism and inspiring a new generation of political leaders. Written well in advance of the election on 14 May 2023, in which the youth activist fueled Move Forward party emerged as a surprise winner, Lertchoosakul's chapter has proven quite prescient, showing how the seeds of liberalism and radical change that youth activists plant and nurture can eventually bear fruit.

CONCLUSION

This Handbook is grounded in an understanding that generational change propels social and political change (Ryder, 1985). Though this phenomenon is harder to see in authoritarian regimes than in liberal democracies, even in repressive states an undercurrent of youth activism can remain strong, fed by wellsprings of radical hope and social media channels that connect, inspire, and inform youth. Around the world, both on and offline, youth are at the cutting-edge of cultural innovation, creating new modes of interaction and new ways of seeing, representing, and making the world. While it may be a minority of youth who identify as activists, looking closely at the youth activist subculture can help us recognize and understand these important shifts as they are happening.

In 1912 in an essay called “Youth”, Randolph Bourne wrote that youth “is ever laying the foundations for the future.” He continued:

Youth puts the remorseless questions to everything that is old and established, — Why? What is this thing good for? And when it gets the mumbled, evasive answers of the defenders, it applies its own fresh, clean spirit of reason to institutions, customs, and ideas, and finding them stupid, inane, or poisonous, turns instinctively to overthrow them and build in their place the things with which its visions teem.

The visions of youth activists today continue to brim with radical imagination and fierce urgency. As but one example, when asked why she risked her life to join the protests for women’s rights in the wake of the murder of Jina Masha Amini by the “morality police”, an Iranian school girl responded: “It’s for freedom. It’s for have a better future. It’s for have a better days” (Fadel, 2022). Though by no means comprehensive, this Handbook attempts to do justice to youth activists’ visions for this “better future”.

NOTES

1. Although the frame was damaged, the painting itself was behind glass and not affected.
2. We use the word “political” to refer to “the creation and management of power” (Elegon, forthcoming), including, but not limited to, governmental structures.

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PART I

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

1. The political participation of young people in times of crisis: a framework for analysis

Daniela Chironi, Donatella della Porta and Chiara Milan

In academic and public debates, times of economic, social, and political crisis have been associated with a decline in political participation and civic engagement (della Porta, 2013; 2014; Kerbo, 1982). In addition to the long-term effects of the financial and economic crisis started in 2008, since 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted not only the economy but also all aspects of everyday life. At the same time, climate change and global warming have created unprecedented environmental threats. In a similar context, scholarly expectations would predict political participation to diminish sharply and an entire generation to disengage from politics. In a liquid society (Bauman, 1997), the erosion of collective identities and the challenges to solidarity processes, coupled with the perception of a closure of political opportunities and a decline in informal networks and resources available (money, power, and status), typical consequences of crises, are in fact usually interpreted as factors that jeopardise political participation. As all these conditions have severely affected young people, analyses have spread to point at a disenchanted, frustrated, apathetic young cohort (see Cammaerts et al., 2014; Earl et al., 2017).

Challenging these expectations, research on contemporary social movements has noted that young people are not apathetic, disengaged, anti-political, or detached from political participation (Amnå and Ekman, 2013; della Porta, 2019a; della Porta et al., 2022a). Although they are suffering high levels of unemployment, precarisation, cuts in social services, changes in consumption patterns, and a grim outlook for their future, as results of the intertwining between different types of crises; those material grievances are coupled with idealistic aspirations, fueling mobilisation (della Porta et al., 2022a, Ch. 2 and 3; 2022b). From the Arab Spring to the Indignados movement, from the anti-austerity protests to the recent mobilisations for climate justice, gender equality, and labour rights, a new generation has engaged in contentious politics, advocating for a more just and inclusive society. Especially in those countries that have been hit hardest by the financial crisis, a substantial number of young citizens have reacted to adverse conditions with increased political and social mobilisation, choosing predominantly intermittent, non-institutionalised, horizontal forms of political participation, performed across hybrid public spaces, from the Web to the town squares as well as self-managed spaces (della Porta, 2014; Milan, 2019). In addition, especially some types of social movements and protest campaigns – such as the Global Justice Movement beginning in the 2000s, the anti-austerity protests, which followed the 2008 financial crisis, and recent anti-racist, environmentalist, and gender-based mobilisations – are over-proportionally populated by young people (Andretta and Sommier, 2009; Andretta and della Porta, 2015; della Porta, 2013; della Porta, 2019a; della Porta et al., 2022a, Ch. 3).

Furthermore, since the early 2020s, movements like Fridays For Future and Extinction Rebellion have mobilised a large number of young activists in protest against climate change (de Moor et al., 2020; Zamponi et al., 2022). Similarly, young cohorts have been found to

be the core groups in territorial struggles in Italy (della Porta and Piazza, 2007; Piazza and Fazzetta, 2018) and in Germany (Kaufer and Lein, 2018, p. 4; Ruser, 2020, p. 812). In the case of climate strikes launched in 2018 by the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, high school students form the bulk of the protests (de Moor et al., 2020; Sommer et al., 2019; Wahlström et al., 2019). Grassroots environmental groups that were not initiated by young people, including the UK-founded Extinction Rebellion, have increasingly addressed and involved younger cohorts of activists (Richardson, 2020). According to Hagedorn and colleagues (2019, pp. 139–40), the massive grassroots mobilisation of the youth climate movement shows that young people feel an urgent need to protest in the defence of climate and other foundations of human well-being.

In the same years, in a context characterised by (right-wing) political backlash, a new wave of feminist and LGBTQI+ activism has brought to the streets both women and young people in the struggle for gender rights (Chironi, 2019; della Porta et al., 2022a, Ch. 3). Finally, young people have been found to be particularly sensitive to racial discrimination, with “Generation Z” becoming a significant presence in the Black Lives Matter movement both in the US and in Europe, especially since the police murder of George Floyd in 2020 (Milkman, 2017; Milman et al., 2021). Exploiting the potential represented by the internet and network communication technologies (Cohen et al., 2012; Loader et al., 2014; Sloam, 2014; Xenos et al., 2014), young people have often challenged mainstream perspectives and citizens’ roles as defined by political and social elites. While not completely disengaging from institutional politics, young activists are developing alternative forms of political participation, which enhance their engagement in public life and form part of a strategy for social change. Far from being apathetic or passive, many young people appear to hold an interest in politics, even if they perceive the inadequacy of the existing institutions, as mainstream political parties and governments tend to overlook the issues deemed the most relevant for the current youth generation (della Porta et al., 2022a; Loader, 2007; Loader et al., 2014). Because of growing mistrust in traditional politics, a substantial proportion of young people seem to have increasingly distanced themselves from conventional forms of action and intermediary institutions, at the same time moving toward a wide variety of alternative participatory practices. These tend to embrace distinct forms of organisation, action, and framing focused on contrasting unpopular economic and labour policies, and promoting economic redistribution, enhanced social rights for disadvantaged social groups, and environmental protection.

Building upon the most updated literature in the fields of social movement studies (e.g., della Porta, 2015; della Porta and Mattoni, 2014; della Porta et al., 2018; della Porta et al., 2022a; Romanos, 2013; 2014; 2016; Yoruk, 2014), this chapter provides an analytical framework for the analysis of young people’s participation, which helps address several interrelated research questions:

- What leads a significant number of young people in times of crisis to engage in collective initiatives, rather than to remain passive?
- What are the forms of social commitment that critical young people choose to use, especially in a context of crisis? Which meanings are attached to these forms of social engagement?
- To what extent do age and generation influence the level of engagement of demonstrators in collective action? How do they shape the identity and views of protesters?

To address these questions, we provide a broad overview of current scientific knowledge, bridging youth studies and social movement studies. The chapter is organised as follows. We first look at explanations of youths' high propensity to participate in protests as effects of biographical availability, and we address explanations in terms of cohorts and generations. We then look at the political and social context for protests, looking at the organisational forms as well as at the repertoires of collective action. We conclude with a reflection upon the main implications of these developments for social movement scholarship and youth studies.

BIOGRAPHICAL AVAILABILITY AND THE MICRO-DYNAMICS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The participation of young people in contemporary progressive movements is a relevant phenomenon in both political and theoretical terms. Even though young people tend to be overrepresented in unconventional politics, social movement studies have rarely considered age and related issues as central analytical dimensions. Conversely, youth studies have mostly focused on institutional and conventional politics, only rarely addressing social movements' forms of engagement (see Collin and Hilder, 2022; Mayes and Hartup, 2021; Montero and Bessant, 2019; Pickard and Bessant, 2018). The few scientific exceptions are important sources of inspiration for the analysis of the specificities and characteristics of the participation of young people in social movements.

Research on political participation has addressed the role of the *youth*, considered in general to be less inclined to conventional action and more likely, instead, to use protest and other forms of unconventional action. The related social science literature has long suggested that political participation increases with social centrality as higher levels of participation are observed, *ceteris paribus*, for the better educated, middle class, men, middle-aged cohort, married people, city residents, ethnic majority, and citizens involved in voluntary associations (Milbrath and Goel, 1977). A higher social status implies in fact more material resources (but also free time) to invest in political participation, as well as a higher sense of personal achievement.

This understanding of politics as an activity for the elites, mostly seen in the analysis of conventional forms of participation, has been challenged by social movement studies, which have focused instead on protest as a resource of the powerless (Lipsky, 1965). Since the onset of this field of studies, scholars have noted that social movements are alternative means of political participation for sectors of the population, such as students, women, and ethnic minorities, that tend to be less involved in conventional forms of participation (della Porta and Diani, 2020, Ch. 2). In general, social movement studies have stressed that those who protest present some different characteristics than those who use conventional forms of political participation: if the middle classes do vote more, workers strike more often; and if those in middle age are more present in party-related activities, students often occupy their schools and universities, and protest in various forms (della Porta, 2015). Protesting also requires in fact some conditions of biographical availability that tend to be higher among young people (McAdam, 1986; 1989).

Time availability and limited family and work-related responsibilities are considered relevant resources for protest politics. Researchers noted that some conditions that affect biographical availability can have an impact on the steps that precede the actual choice to participate. In particular, positive motivations towards protest seem to decline for married people

and full-time or part-time employees (Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006). Given their high presence in different types of movements, the propensity of students to participate in unconventional forms has been particularly addressed in this perspective. Klemenčič (2014) noted that “‘studentship,’ i.e., the state of being a student, can be highly conducive to ‘acting collectively in a public sphere’ to express interests, ideas, make demands on some authority, or hold that authority accountable” (p. 399). The neoliberal reforms in tertiary education as well as condition of work precarity can undermine the participation potential by reducing the availability of time as well as the presence of spaces of aggregation (della Porta et al., 2020; della Porta et al., 2022b).

Cohorts and Generations in Social Movements

Demographic analysis has pointed at the effect of the age distribution of the population on contentious politics with particular attention to the size of the youth *cohort*. As Goldstone (2015) summarised:

An age cohort is simply a group of people of roughly the same age, who were born in a particular period. In the United States, it has become common to refer to those born between 1945 and 1960 as the “Baby Boomers,” those born from 1960 to 1980 as “Generation X,” and those born from 1980 to 1996 as “Millennials.” (p. 148)

Those born from 1997 onwards are commonly referred to as “Generation Z”. However, cohorts do not always form systematic groups. Their significance depends on whether a cohort experienced a major shift in its size, education, or experience relative to other cohorts. In fact, the socialisation of new generations is considered less challenging “when the numbers of people in society are stable or changing slowly enough for growth in the economy and institutions to accommodate the change” (Goldstone, 2015, p. 150). Even if the size of the young cohort might be relevant at times, protests are not always carried out by young activists. While the Arab Spring has developed in an environment characterised by a very large presence of young people, no particular increase in the percentage of young people was found in Southern Europe or in the US coeval mobilisations (Goldstone, 2015, p. 150). Nonetheless, scholars have pointed to the pivotal role played by young people in the waves of anti-austerity protests at the beginning of the 2010s. In Southern Europe, student movements and youth activism have been described as the “early risers” in the anti-austerity cycle of protest (Lima and Artiles, 2013; Zamponi and González, 2017). Looking at demographic characteristics of the protesters, therefore, it is important to consider some other sociographic dimensions, such as the percentage of unemployment (with, for example, more than 50 per cent unemployment among young people in Southern Europe) or ethnic distribution (with, for example, non-white proportion rapidly increasing in the young cohorts in the US). Furthermore, scholars pointed out that socio-demographic characteristics, such as age and gender, have an impact on participation in extra-institutional political activities as well as on the visions they express (della Porta et al., 2022a, Ch. 3).

As evidence going from the 1968 protests to contemporary environmental movements indicates, cohorts acquire more of a transformative impact on collective action when they experience one or more important events that influence the norms, values, and behaviours in their future lives. In Mannheim’s (1952) conceptualisation, we are referring to a political *generation*, that is, “a particular kind of identity of location, embracing related ‘age groups’

embedded in a historical-social process” (p. 292). Thus, beside the young age of their activists, youth movements reflect specific generational characteristics. The 1968ers were described as a generation that has come of age in a moment of affluence and reduction of inequalities, endowed with “post-materialist” values (Inglehardt, 1977) and broad political interests (Downton and Wehr, 1997), as the young activists criticised their parents for their unfulfilled promises (Giugni, 2004). Relevant to political participation in the 1960s was not only an increase in the number of young people, but also a growing self-definition as youth, visible in the consumption habit with a stress on generational diversity, with different language, values, spaces (Passerini, 1991, p. 120), as well as an orientation towards progressive politics.

Also, emotional characteristics usually connected to the youth have been mentioned as facilitating commitment for various causes. Specifically, young people have been presented as highly emotional, rebellious, devoted to an ethic of absolute ends, irreverent, and radical (Lipset, 1976). The generational character of the 1968ers has often been stressed (della Porta, 2018; Morin et al., 1968), as social movements of the 1960s have been described as a rebellion by the youth (de Luna, 2009). Analyses of the youth pointed then at a moral rebellion against the loss of credibility of the previous generations, expressed through demystification, irreverence, and transgression (Ortoleva, 1988).

Analysis of the political participation of the Millennials has indicated that common traits derive from the experience of living in times of multiple crises and emergencies, leading to a perception of “urgency”. Some preliminary evidence indicates that young people belonging to both Millennials and “Generation Z” are particularly sensitive to issues that have become increasingly salient in recent years, including the conditions of women and migrants, as well as the state of the environment and climate change (Bertuzzi, 2019; Chironi, 2019; Portos, 2019). While in the post-2008 global economic downturn young people had prioritised economic concerns, employment opportunities, and access to education, in recent years there has been an increase in their awareness of the catastrophic consequences of climate change (Corner et al., 2015; McAdam, 2017). Scholars have linked the receptivity of young people to their specific vulnerability and exposure to the longer-term social and economic effects of environmental shocks and climate change, at both a global and a local level (O’Brien et al., 2018). What is more, young activists have framed climate change as a major problem of generational justice, which sees children bear the brunt of climate change and environmental pollution caused by older generations (UNICEF, 2010).

Generational dynamics of convergence, but also tensions, have been identified also in contemporary feminist and LGBTQI+ movements. Young environmental activists are found to be angrier than older activists, but also more enthusiastic about promoting radical changes (von Zabern and Tulloch, 2021). Similarly, LGBTQI+ movements witness the full involvement of male activists and transgender people, while young feminists show greater openness towards issues such as sex work and surrogate motherhood (Chironi, 2019).

THE CONTEXTUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FOR THE MOBILISATION OF THE YOUTH

Cohorts and generations are important concepts for studying the participation of young people, especially with regard to non-conventional forms of action. Complementing these notions, social movement studies provide analytical tools for analysing the specific contexts

tual conditions that might affect their political participation and the characteristics that their mobilisations assume. Looking at the contextual conditions for protests, research has pointed at the relevance of the *political opportunity structure* approach, paying systematic attention to the existing political system, state practices towards opposition, elite alliances, and prevailing socio-economic conditions (della Porta and Diani, 2020, Ch. 8). Recent contributions have aimed to bring reflection on capitalist developments back into social movement studies (della Porta, 2015) by investigating the specific effects of economic and market policies on young people's visions and actions.

The contemporary crisis of neoliberalism, which is accompanied by a political crisis, has transformed the social settings to various degrees and in various ways, creating new grievances, reshaping opportunities and restraints on mobilisation, and triggering or exacerbating social and political conflicts. This pertains to policies associated with the economic crisis, such as austerity measures eroding social and political institutions or the breakdown of labour markets, particularly for young people, but also to less obvious outcomes, such as the redirection of flows of migration, shifting power balances among different social groups, as well as the conservative backlash that has undermined acquired social and civil rights and prevents new ones from being obtained (see della Porta et al., 2022a). Young people in particular have emerged as one of the groups most heavily affected by the 2008 global financial crisis (Grasso, 2016; Pickard and Bessant, 2018).

Both the economic and concurrent legitimacy crises have altered the political participation of young people. These crises created or exacerbated grievances among certain parts of the young population and reshaped political opportunities in various ways, including discouragement or repression of alternative forms of action seen as challenges by political authorities. Looking at their social characteristics, Millennials have been defined as a precarious generation, composed of people who, according to Standing (2011):

have minimal trust relations with capitalism or the state, making it quite different from the salariat. And it has none of the social contract relationship of the proletariat, whereby labour securities were provided in exchange for subordination and contingent loyalty, the unwritten deal underpinning welfare state. (p. 9)

As Standing (2011) noted, the precariat is not limited to holding insecure employment, but it reflects in a status in which there are no career perspectives and few, if any, entitlements to state or enterprise benefits that usually are available to previous generations belonging to the salariat and to the industrial proletariat. The existential condition of the Millennials is in fact characterised by a sum of insecurity on the labour market, on the job (as regulations on hiring and dismissals give little protection to workers), in the work (with weak provisions for accident and illness as well as reduced unions' rights), in income (with very low pay), having effects in terms of accumulation of anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation (Standing, 2011, pp. 10ff.). The uncertainties linked to climate change, the current energy crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the consequences of conservative policies linked to the political backlash, have further exacerbated young people's state of anxiety and political discontent (della Porta et al., 2022a; Zamponi et al., 2022).

Changes in the relations between the state and the market, operated through neoliberal policies, have clearly affected youth conditions. Neoliberal policies associated with the economic crisis have hit the most fragile social sectors of the European population, including the youth, particularly hard (Crouch, 2011; della Porta, 2016a; 2016b; Streeck, 2014; 2016). Students'

free and autonomous time is drastically reduced in neoliberal universities where space and opportunities for aggregation are reduced, while the student body becomes increasingly heterogeneous in terms of social background, age, country of origin, conditions as paying versus non-paying students, and full-time versus part-time students (della Porta et al., 2020; Smeltzer and Hearn, 2015, p. 353).

Students tend to be less oriented to live in student residences and there is an increasing number of student workers. So, the diversities within the student body make it more difficult “to cultivate a collective student identity which helps student governments flourish and to uncover shared grievances and shared emotions which fuel student movements” (Klemenčič, 2014, p. 399). The very condition of precarity has been mentioned as further reducing the opportunities to express one’s own voice.

As the extent of marketisation of higher education and the youth condition in general vary broadly across countries (della Porta et al., 2020), the specific conditions of the youth, their propensity for and forms of commitment might be expected to vary as well. A common trait has however been singled out: biographical difficulties do not automatically entail resignation; rather, dynamics linked to neoliberal capitalism have been regarded as pre-conditions for the formation of materialist grievances. These have acted as triggers of youth participation in the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US, in the Arab Spring in Northern Africa, in the anti-austerity protests/Indignados in Europe, and in recent mobilisations in several African and Middle East countries (della Porta et al., 2019b; 2022a, Ch. 2; Honwana, 2019; Kiwan, 2020). According to some interpretations, contemporary anti-racist and pro-gender rights protests are to be understood within the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, more precisely in the context of a renewed “primitive accumulation” of resources and living labour. From this point of view, movements such as Black Lives Matter can be regarded as “a site of struggle against racialized and gendered dispossession of basic resources, education, health care, housing, economic justice, and violence” and have “a powerful potential to develop into an anti-capitalist struggle” (Mullings, 2020, p. 250).

THE ACTION REPERTOIRES IN THE ACTIVISM OF THE YOUTH

To have an impact on mobilisation, opportunities and resources must be assessed through cognitive, but also emotional, mechanisms. Largely focused on the intersection between the meso- and micro-level, *framing* theory shifted attention towards the cognitive appreciation of how opportunities, identities, and action repertoires are framed. According to this approach, framing helps individuals to interpret the world based on their social position and their previous experiences. Movement scholars have also stressed the importance of collective identity, including the means for its expression in terms of cultural practices, rituals, symbols, and emotions (Goodwin et al., 2001; Melucci, 1996). These are important to understand young people’s preferences for those forms of action that provide room for self-expression, spontaneity, creativity, and sometimes joy and even madness.

As periods of crisis are often associated with the closing down of opportunities – which may motivate young people to seek non-conventional channels to re-address their aims and goals – we can expect young people to privilege prefigurative forms of politics (della Porta, 2015). Moreover, the cultural capacities for collective mobilisation are affected by the impact of social media on young people’s modes of feeling, judging, and thinking. According to

empirical studies, social media have in fact 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). Virtual collective identification fostered online may be partial and ambiguous, but also easier, since the anonymity associated with social media minimises the impact of differences with others. At the same time, new media lower the transaction costs of mobilisation, and as a result, the role played by formal organisations and professional activists in strategic framing diminishes (Polletta et al., 2013).

Considering young people not as a mere subset of the general population but rather as a specific group with its own particular life-worlds and concerns, and its own definitions of politics and “the Political”, we can also expect specific forms of political engagement. Successive generations face new challenges that previous generations have not experienced (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Thus, as O’Toole et al. (2003) argue, “the political issues and arenas familiar to other, older, generations as foci and sites of political activity may well have little relevance to young people” (p. 48). In fact, while “around the turn of the century, a range of scholars began to worry that youth political engagement was at an unhealthy low,” others noted that “youth engagement was not declining, just changing form” (Earl et al., 2017, p. 1). An observation that also seems applicable outside of the US is that “it is not that youth are disengaged, but rather that they do not engage in the same way that ‘dutiful’ generations have” (Earl et al., 2017, p. 1; see also Sander and Putnam, 2010; Shea and Harris, 2006; Zukin et al., 2006).

Research on political participation has not only proven that it is inaccurate to describe young people as apathetic, but also highlighted that they adopt a variety of forms of action that go well beyond street protest, innovating on the previous repertoire of action. As democracies are faced with a crisis of political representation (Mair, 2013), opportunities for young people to influence institutional politics by enrolling in traditional representative organisations are limited. What is more, their social world is characterised by great uncertainty, acceleration, and fragmentation (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Leccardi, 2005). In this context, both direct social actions and lifestyle choices provide an alternative means to engage in politics (Bosi and Zamponi, 2020; Micheletti and Stolle, 2010). According to de Moor (2017), the term “lifestyle politics” refers to “the politicisation of everyday life choices, including ethically, morally or politically inspired decisions about, for example, consumption, transportation or modes of living” (p. 181). Politicisation derives from the realisation that one’s everyday behaviour has global implications and political considerations should therefore affect one’s lifestyle. This encompasses a wide range of activities: some are individually performed, such as adopting a vegetarian or a vegan diet; others are part of a collective strategy, such as joining a campaign to boycott specific products or becoming members of alternative food networks (Pickard, 2019). In particular, lifestyle politics have been analysed as being especially relevant in the context of environmentalism (Henn et al., 2018; Schlosberg and Coles, 2016) and increasingly important among younger cohorts (Alteri et al., 2017; Micheletti and McFarland, 2012; Stolle et al., 2005).

Research has addressed the Millennials as a generation that faces a very different type of life expectations and/or conditions than previous generations, and it is more seriously threatened by the current crises and emergencies (see Dalton, 2017, Ch. 5). As recalled above, the main features of the “Millennials generation” are being precarious at the social level, lonely at the cultural level, threatened in its interactions with the state, and betrayed by the institutional Left (della Porta, 2019b). These feelings of alienation, atomisation, and resignation are mirrored to some extent by the level and type of political engagement evident in this cohort. Young

people often participate as individuals, consuming in a politically-conscious fashion (Bertuzzi, 2019; Morelli and Vitale, 2020), engaging in actions and practices that promote an alternative economy (Forno and Graziano, 2014; Monticelli and Bassoli, 2017), or getting involved in solidarity actions and self-managed practices (Bosi and Zamponi, 2019), and in protest activities. While mostly deserting political parties, they can sometimes contact institutions or politicians (Down and Wilson, 2017; Keating, 2014), and look more favourably to NGOs, especially if they are youth-based, such as the Youth Climate Movement NGO, which has branches in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Zamponi et al., 2022). In Italy, for instance, distrust in institutional politics seems to be particularly widespread among women and younger cohorts who engaged in extra-institutional politics in the period 2017–2018 as compared with men and older cohorts (Chironi, 2020; della Porta et al., 2022a, Ch. 3). At the political level, over the past decade no political party has appeared to give a voice to youth discontent.

Other scholars have pointed to youth engagement in alternative forms of resilience that have spread throughout Southern Europe, inspired by mutual aid and cooperative values (Kousis, 2017). Aside from attempting to directly cover the basic needs related to everyday life, such as food, shelter, and health, young people active in the aftermath of the Great Recession have increasingly engaged in the re-appropriation of free time and of spaces devoted to socialisation and recreational activities (Bosi and Zamponi, 2019; Milan, 2019; Milan and Milan, 2021), which are ever more threatened by commodification.

CONCLUSIONS

Discussions about young people's supposed passivity have treated passivity as a unidimensional phenomenon and young people as a homogeneous group. In this chapter we have shown instead that youth engagement with politics is multi-faceted and nuanced, and that there is no single uniform path to political participation. Social movement studies largely disconfirm the paradigm of the “disaffected citizens” that depicted younger generations as being mostly apolitical, indifferent, and apathetic towards politics. This pessimistic vision is in fact mainly based on studies of party politics and electoral turnout and is contrasted instead by research on alternative forms of political participation reviewed in this chapter. Specifically, we have pointed at age as a factor influencing forms and content expressed in contentious politics. Furthermore, we have distinguished between cohorts and generations, stressing how the latter are embedded in an historical-social process. In fact, we have shown that the ways in which youth participate politically are linked to their backgrounds and life circumstances, as well as to socio-economic and educational factors. Then, we have focused on the biographical and contextual conditions that explain the high propensity of young people to participate in protests, such as time availability, limited family and work-related responsibilities, as well as political opportunities and constraints. Finally, we have delved into the characteristics that their mobilisation takes, pointing at the different ways in which the youth have engaged in political activities, adopting forms of action that go well beyond street protest, such as direct social action and lifestyle choices.

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2. Developmental foundations of environmental activism

Alisa A. Pykett, Erin Gallay and Constance Flanagan

Our chapter focuses on a community partnership model of place-based education with potential for nurturing the environmental awareness, commitments, and activism of younger generations. Based on almost nine years of documenting this model enacted by classes of primarily Black and Latinx students in urban communities, we discuss core elements that we argue are the personal, social, and political foundations that can set youth on a path toward environmental activism. The principles underlying the core elements include a focus on local place and identification with the local community; nurturing young people's awareness of the natural systems in the urban ecology and the impact of those systems on their communities' health; the power of youth to speak up, educate and lead in the public realm; the value of exposure to community-based organizations (CBOs) and opportunities to work alongside community members; and the importance of collective action to generate solutions, build solidarity, and engender feelings of efficacy and hope.

We contend that engaging in place-based civic science on environmental issues (CSE) affords opportunities for a wide range of civic involvement, including activism. Insofar as adolescence is a time when youth are deciding who they are, what groups they belong to, and what pathways they might take in life, engaging in CSE enables them to explore what they can do about the natural environment in their local place and how they can join with others to impact change. In all projects youth engage in some local action(s), although not necessarily activism. Nonetheless, the CSE model we discuss does raise issues of social and environmental injustices, as many of the environmental issues identified in the students' communities are rooted in injustice, for example, location of waste incinerators, public water infrastructure. Whether or not students' projects proactively focus on justice issues, the assumption underlying *all* projects is that people have a right to healthy and beautiful environments. But that right is one the youth themselves help to realize. Given the racial inequities, silencing, and violence that young people of color often face, the CSE model centers on having students' voices heard and honored in schools and communities. Youth are accompanied and nurtured by teachers and adults from CBOs who are committed to egalitarian (and not top-down) approaches to learning, youth agency, and leadership.

In this chapter, we first describe the CSE model and then situate it in literature on socio-political/civic development, environmental action, and environmental identity. We dive into key aspects of the model that provide developmental affordances for a wide range of environmental and civic involvement. We conclude with more explicit connections of the model as a foundation for youth activism and its implications for practice.

OVERVIEW OF THE CSE MODEL

This CSE model grew out of the work of a regional coalition of formal and non-formal educators in Southeast Michigan communities dedicated to place-based education (PBE) called the Southeast Michigan Stewardship (SEMIS) Coalition. For more than a decade the coalition has organized a community of practice dedicated to PBE (Gruenewald, 2003). SEMIS facilitates partnerships between teachers and community partners (CPs) from local government, non-profits, and the private sector, convenes an annual series of professional development (PD) for K-12 teachers and CPs, and organizes an annual forum in which classes of students present their work to one another. Analyses of the SEMIS PD revealed a core set of shared principles among the coalition members: a commitment to the value of local place as a source of students' knowledge, the structural and historical roots underlying environmental problems, and interrogation of power asymmetries based on race, class, gender, and/or age (Lupinacci, 2013).

We have been in a research-practice partnership with SEMIS for almost nine years and have used multiple methods to document the work – in classrooms, community settings, student forums, and PD sessions. Based on this documentation we refer to the work as civic science, by which we mean science co-owned, driven, and conducted by community members (including youth) on issues of importance to their communities. The “civic” in civic science emphasizes the democratic and participatory nature of this expanded approach to science for the public good. Civic science is related to other citizen science efforts but centers community members’ knowledge, voice, and power (Dillon et al., 2016). In contrast to citizen science projects where residents collect data but scientific “experts” lead all other aspects of the project, in civic science, residents and experts collectively identify issues, collect and interpret data, and act based on findings (English et al., 2018).

In the CSE model, students and their teachers collaborate as a team with adults from CBOs (aka CPs in the coalition). Together, they identify and define environmental problems impacting their communities, gather and analyze data related to the issue, apply what they have learned by taking action to address the problem, and present their work to others. In this inquiry-based and experiential framework, the community is seen as part of the classroom, as a place to which students belong, from which they learn, and as an entity to which they can contribute. The projects discussed in this chapter take place during regular subject classes in school (e.g., science, social studies) and connect to class content and curricular requirements, with some projects more student-directed (i.e., students determine everything from the issue addressed to the solutions implemented) than others (i.e., teachers determine issues or classes participate in existing CP actions).

Core elements of the model include a focus on local place and the specific community context, partnership with CBOs, students working in teams to practice co-owning the work and pursuing shared goals with peers who bring different knowledge and perspectives to the project, and presenting their work publicly – in formal conferences and summits with other students and/or to elected officials, school administrators, and other community members. Although the environmental issues addressed by each class vary, each project follows a process of investigating issues, inquiry into community environmental challenges, and collectively designing and implementing solutions. And because the majority of projects we have studied take place in urban settings, inquiry and learning focus on the intersection of

the natural and built environment. In some cases, specific attention is paid to the connection between issues of environmental and social justice.

We will share a few examples to help animate the projects and student engagement. Examples of environmental focus areas include storm water runoff, energy savings from trees, urban flooding, rain gardens, air pollution from a waste incinerator, and water pollution. In a project addressing urban flooding and water pollution, students studied water flow down storm drains, learned about pollutants reaching local waterways via runoff, tested the water quality of their local river, toured community rain gardens as a green infrastructure solution, designed and installed a rain garden at their school to help prevent pollution from reaching local waterways, and presented their work in a formal program symposium to teach other SEMIS Coalition members (students, teachers, CPs) about rain gardens. Another project focused on air quality in the neighborhood surrounding a school caused by a city trash incinerator, connecting the location of the incinerator and local rates of asthma to environmental racism. Students in this project learned about air pollution and particulate matter, made their own air filters, conducted air quality monitoring, researched the effects of air pollution on human health, surveyed residents about their concerns, and joined grassroots advocacy efforts to shut down the incinerator.

Documentation of student learning in this CSE model has shown that students build awareness of natural resources that support life and the processes whereby humans can sustain those resources through collective action (Flanagan et al., 2019; Gallay et al., 2021b). Students experience gains in environmental sensitivity, environmentally responsible behaviors, and community attachment (Gallay et al., 2016). Analyses of students' reflections on what they learned in projects suggest that they recognize the utility of their learning for contributing to their communities, view that learning as connected to their community and culture, and indicate confidence in their civic and scientific skills, including their capacities for community activism (e.g., protesting, contacting officials), develop self and group efficacy, and express a belief in their right and responsibility to have their voice heard (Gallay et al., 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2022).

To date, most of the projects have been direct action projects in which students mitigate or prevent an environmental problem, for example, installing rain gardens to mitigate flooding. We are currently building on this model by focusing on the role of local government policy and urban infrastructure in mitigating (or exacerbating) environmental problems, and the role of CBOs in motivating civic action and policy. The aims of this expanded focus are to demystify local government (who is involved and how decisions are made) and increase students' understanding of policies that impact their environment and ways they might impact those decisions. A focus on local government and CBOs, as opposed to national policy, provides concrete practice in venues where there is more potential for local residents, including students, to have a say and impact policy.

SOCIOPOLITICAL/CIVIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The CSE work we have been documenting draws from the evolving field of youth sociopolitical/civic development.¹ A unifying theme of the new scholarship is youth as civic actors who bring unique historical and social perspectives to political issues. This focus on the agency and

insights of youth themselves contrasts with models from earlier eras. For example, political socialization models emphasized the intergenerational transmission of political attitudes and behaviors from parents to children (Flanagan, 2013).

Developmental settings and the opportunities they afford for youth to build their political skills and identities also figure prominently in contemporary scholarship. Settings such as schools, CBOs, and religious and cultural groups have been referred to as mini-polities where young people explore and help to define what it means to be a member of a political community where people can exercise the rights and assume the responsibilities of membership (Flanagan, 2013). Studies have examined the affordances of these mini-polities and the relationships therein for nurturing civic dispositions (social trust, identification of one's fate with the common good), skills (analyzing political issues, perspective-taking, communication), and for fostering civic engagement in adulthood. National US longitudinal research documents the importance of engagement in CBOs and service as well as engagement in group forms of public performance in adolescence as predictors of voting, volunteering, and leadership in community affairs in young adulthood (McFarland and Thomas, 2006). Longitudinal work also shows that the social capital youth amass predicts political actions including voting and political efficacy (Mahatmya and Lohman, 2012), although there may be cultural differences in the forms of social capital associated with civic engagement (Wray-Lake, 2019). For example, Ginwright (2007) documented the critical social capital that supports young Black activists nurtured through intergenerational ties, especially between youth and elders in the community who participated in Civil Rights struggles. Finally, national longitudinal studies have shown that students' sense of institutional connectedness in high school (i.e., their sense of belonging and identification with their school) predicts various forms of political and community engagement in young adulthood (Duke et al., 2008). However, opportunities to engage in such practices vary along racial/ethnic and social class lines (Kahne et al., 2006).

But civic engagement in adolescence is not only studied for its pay-off in adulthood. Research has also looked at the contributions youth make to their communities during adolescence and the affordances of programs that support them in that process. For example, the critical indicators of effective community youth organizations are youths' reports that the adults and peers in the organization make them feel that they matter, that they have a voice and are respected (Eccles and Gootman, 2002). Likewise, young people's sense of incorporation (solidarity with fellow community members and identification with community institutions) is positively associated with assuming social responsibility in the broader community (Flanagan et al., 2015).

Although much of the literature has emphasized the practices in mini-polities that promote social stability, attention also has been paid to the potential of youth's civic action to challenge the status quo. Ginwright and colleagues shifted the focus to youth as agents of change and CBOs as settings that build capacity for critical thinking and action on issues of social justice (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2007; Ginwright and James, 2002). Building on the work of Paulo Freire, others have examined the development of critical consciousness – comprised of critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action – for young people engaged in justice-focused youth settings, such as youth organizing (Watts et al., 2011). Critical consciousness develops when young people engage in critical analysis of the world around them, explore how different systems impact themselves and others, develop strategies to address the issues, and take action.

Opportunities to act on issues that are relevant to young people are a core ingredient of effective civic development programs (Ballard et al., 2016). According to the National Action

Civics Collaborative, elements of what have been dubbed *action civics* programs include youths' collective action, voice/agency, and reflection (Gingold, 2013). In these approaches, adults are involved as partners and allies who work with young people to build skills and navigate systems, but the young people are the agents of change. Taking action is a key component for building capacity for continued civic and political participation; reflection alone is not enough (Diemer et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2011).

Many approaches that include a youth-led issue identification, research, action cycle fall under the action civics umbrella and have been associated with positive student outcomes. An evaluation of the Generation Citizen model, a form of action civics that draws from empowerment and critical consciousness theories in which students identify community or school issues relevant to their lives, conduct research on the issue and strategies to address, and take action, found that students experienced positive gains in civic self-efficacy and action civics knowledge, such as the root causes of issues (Ballard et al., 2016). Youth participatory action research (YPAR), an approach in which youth are trained as researchers and then lead research and advocacy efforts on issues important to them, has also been associated with gains in civic-related outcomes in urban high schools, such as sociopolitical skills, motivation to influence their schools and communities, and engagement in action (Ozer and Douglas, 2013).

Youth organizing reframes issues that may be experienced as personal into social justice issues that require political solutions, and involves youth identifying issues that concern them (e.g., educational reform, immigrant rights, demands to end police brutality), and taking action to redress the injustices. Actions typically focus on change at the local level, but local struggles raise broader political questions. Many studies have examined the processes and outcomes of youth organizing, including the political engagements of former youth organizers in young adulthood (Terriquez, 2015); civic identities of high school students organizing for school reform (Kirshner, 2009); and sociopolitical development of youth organizers (Christens and Dolan, 2011). Through action and relationships formed in organizing, youth develop a sense of empowerment and establish identities as community leaders (Christens and Kirshner, 2011; Kirshner, 2015). Similar to youth organizing, YPAR, and justice-focused youth development, a core element in the CSE projects we have studied is an emphasis on youth agency and action to improve their communities.

Participation Across the Civic Landscape

A key part of sociopolitical development is building an understanding of the broader civic landscape – where and how people work to address injustices and make it possible for everyone in communities to flourish and thrive. However, as young people's engagement with entities in the civic landscape is often based on windows of opportunity (i.e., an invite from a friend), their exposure to the full spectrum of participation options in the civic landscape may be limited (Flanagan, 2013). The civic landscape includes the constellation of nonprofit and grassroots organizations, voluntary associations, movement spaces, and government processes where people participate in community life and, to varying extents, shape and transform the environments around them. Civic entities have different purposes, from groups with a shared interest, to grassroots identity groups, to political groups working for social justice.

Youth get exposed to different issues in their community and different approaches to address them by learning about and joining groups of people working on those issues. We also want to note, evidenced by the examples throughout the world and shared in this book,

that youth form and lead their own groups – they are not actors-in-waiting as they develop. Exposure to and opportunities to practice in different CBOs, governmental entities, and decision-making bodies can expand young people's knowledge of the broader civic landscape and build their civic capacity. The skills learned in one approach are often transferable to others. For example, participation in the less radical entities in the civic landscape can build capacity that is transferable to more activist spaces and vice versa, such as communication, collective decision-making, analysis, and collective action. Studies have also found that the civic leadership skills, knowledge, and identities youth build in one movement space (e.g., youth in the LGBTQ+ movement) emboldened those same youth to take a stand in another movement space (e.g., youth in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals movement) (Terriquez, 2015). Whether youth go on to engage in activism or other forms of civic participation, we think understanding the dynamics of the civic landscape is a key capacity for civic actors (and thus a core element of the CSE model) so that they can better understand how to effect change and decide how they want to participate. For our work, the focus is on the civic landscape of inquiry and action for environmental issues.

Youth and Environmental Action

Youth activism on environmental issues has a long history in the United States and is still going strong, from college students organizing teach-ins for the first Earth Day to the Indigenous teenagers who led the movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock. And this youth-led movement is only growing, as young activists demand action on the climate catastrophe that threatens their future.

The urgency of environmental issues is perhaps felt more by Black, Indigenous, and Latinx youth in the US, as it is their communities – their families and neighbors – who bear disproportionate environmental burdens (Taylor, 2014), a fact that is exacerbated in low-income communities but holds for communities of color regardless of income level. Environmental racism may be felt even more so for youth of color in low-income communities as polluting manufacturing sites are typically located in these communities, which are also more likely to experience urban heat islands and flooding and to suffer from associated health problems such as asthma and diabetes (Environmental Protection Agency, 2021; Taylor, 2014). This poses threats to young people's health and very survival both through historical systemic issues, such as disinvestment and the location of health hazards, and in immediate ways that exacerbate health concerns, for example, asthma brought on by air pollution (Bullard et al., 2011).

There is a long history of people of color, including youth, in the US leading environmental activism, particularly through environmental justice work, which emerged in the US as a response to environmental racism (Bullard and Johnson, 2000; Bullard et al., 2011). This work continues today as Indigenous groups and other people of color continue to fight for environmental justice in local communities and sovereign tribal lands (Copeny, 2018; Ducre, 2018). According to work on contemporary youth environmental activism (Quiroz-Martinez et al., 2005), youth of color in particular are motivated to engage in environmental action because of an awareness of the intersections of class and racial inequities in environmental and human health. Echoing scholars of environmental justice who credit the field with redefining environmentalism as connected to culture and justice (Bullard et al., 2011), youth have championed the idea of intersectional environmentalism, changing the way we view both what qualifies as "the environment" and who is considered an environmental activist (Oglesby, 2021).

Yet this intersection has not been at the forefront, until recently, of the mainstream environmental movement and environmental education. Nor has an intersectional focus figured in environmental psychology where pro-environmental behaviors have been linked to the development of an “environmental identity”, that is, an individual’s sense of connection or emotional attachment to the nonhuman natural world that affects the way that they value, respect, and act toward that world (Clayton, 2003). Measures of pro-environmental behavior also have been narrowly construed based on behaviors typical for middle-class and White environmentalists, such as personal conservation behaviors or donating money or time to conservation organizations. Likewise, the experiences associated with the formation of this identity, such as early experiences and time spent in nature when young, mirror the idea of nature as a wilderness, away from human “civilization”, rather than the experience of nature and natural systems in an urban context.

While youth who live in urban contexts can enjoy and connect to nature apart from the city, urban ecologies also provide opportunities for connection to the natural environment. It is critical that young people understand the interdependence of humans and the natural environment in the communities where they live. CSE projects provide pathways to environmental identities based on the intersections of environmental, economic, racial, and health issues in their communities, for example, youth forging environmental identities by working to address affordable food access through urban farming. Further, through their actions in CSE projects students learn skills needed for civic environmental action at the intersections of issues.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE CSE MODEL

In the next section, we hold up key aspects of the CSE model that provide developmental affordances for a wide range of environmental civic involvement and action, including activism. The CSE model, described in detail with examples and student reflections elsewhere (Flanagan et al., 2021), is *place-based* and *school-based*, involves *collective action in public spaces in partnership with CBOs*, and incorporates awareness of the role of *local government* in decisions that impact environmental issues.

Place-based

The model focuses on the local community or *place*. Participating in the CSE place-based projects provides an opportunity to shape and be shaped by the local ecology (Gruenewald, 2003). Students identify local environmental issues, work with local organizations to research those issues, and then act locally. All projects highlight the local ecology as part of students’ communities. In contrast to a view of nature as a pristine landscape apart from the city, these projects emphasize the interdependent relationships of humans and natural and built systems in the city (or local community) as well as the civic potential of local residents (including youth) to improve the ecologies where they reside. Consequently, the questions that drive investigations as well as the solutions that students imagine are based on the health and safety issues that affect everyday life in their community.

Local environmental issues are easily accessible for all young people to observe and monitor. Students can see the natural world around them in their communities, can observe how the health of people connects to the health of their environment, and can easily observe

and collect data about the local environment, physically interacting with it. They also can have a direct impact on the local environment because it is proximal, in the young people's own spaces (as opposed to affecting a rain forest or coral reef thousands of miles away). It is also the local level where students can have contact with CBOs dedicated to improving environmental and health conditions, where they can pressure government officials, and where their policy recommendations might be heard.

By focusing on local place and engaging with community members, students develop local social capital, an essential element for advocating for political change. They learn to trust their own local knowledge and observations and see the relevance of their knowledge and experiences for solving political problems. In these CSE projects, youth receive feedback about their local community contributions from their teachers and CPs but also from other community members who see their (public) work, for example, a flag raised on school grounds warning neighbors about daily air quality or a bioswale in a public park. This feedback should have positive impacts on their sense of political efficacy and their identities as valued civic actors.

School-based

All of the CSE projects we have studied take place within K-12 schools and are integrated into regular content areas. In contrast to programs organized during out-of-school time, students do not select into these projects. Indeed, many do not enter the projects with a prior interest in environmental issues. Consequently, the in-school nature of these projects expands the range of youth exposed to environmental issues, including injustices, as well as to other people and groups working to address those injustices, and what action youth might take.

The teachers on the other hand *do* choose to participate in the CSE model. As members of the SEMIS coalition discussed earlier, they are committed to this model of student learning and have an interest in environmental issues, youth voice, and more egalitarian (versus top-down) learning approaches. Participating teachers also engage in PD, build relationships with CBOs, and support project-based work. As such, teachers in this model serve as allies to the students as they work to identify, understand, and take action to address environmental issues in their school or community. In fact, the teachers (as well as CPs) who do select into these projects are strongly committed to sharing their authority with the young people and to encouraging youth's insights and voice. Students do advocate for change with school officials (for example, with the administration or groundskeepers to change the landscape to mitigate flooding). In some projects students also have presented their work to policymakers. Such interactions afford youth opportunities to understand power as well as how they can have a voice in decisions that affect their community.

However, these projects differ from forms of youth activism working outside of the system to confront school officials directly, such as youth organizing efforts around policing in schools or student-led school walkouts. To be sure, in these more confrontational forms of action, there also are supportive teachers, but some adults in schools view these approaches as adversarial. Taines's (2014) interviews with administrators, teachers, and students about their perspectives on externally initiated youth activism in their urban schools reveal both the pushback and support students face when engaging in unsanctioned activism efforts, from facing suspensions and being viewed as disrespectful to being viewed as leaders and "rebels ... in a good way, a positive way" (p. 168). However, in the CSE projects discussed here, rela-

tionships with adults (teachers, administrators, CPs) are not confrontational. Adults support youths' insights and voice throughout, including their observations about social injustices.

That said, school-based models have certain limitations in which they operate. These models are often restricted to school hours or even class periods. While supportive and committed, teachers also contend with the school system limits and other pressures of teaching. Ozer and colleagues' (2013) studies on YPAR in urban high schools found that students faced the most constraints, such as external expectations from the school, perceived political barriers, and logistical challenges, during the issue selection and action phases of YPAR. Strategies such as teacher's framing and student decision-making power on multiple aspects of the project helped mitigate the constraints, creating an experience of "bounded empowerment" for students (p. 19). As CSE is part of the school curriculum, we also recognize that the scope of youth advocacy and action is limited to a sanctioned range. For example, teachers and CPs in this model would not, as part of this curriculum, help students plan a more disruptive action that may result in student suspensions. However, the model still provides an opportunity for students to experiment with forms of advocacy with the support of teachers and CPs. This "sanctioned advocacy" approach provides scaffolded learning where students build capacity foundational to many forms of civic participation, including activism – teamwork, identifying local actors and decision-makers, analysis, using data and stories to compel and convince people, making community connections.

Youth spend a lot of time in schools and, while there are exceptions, schools are often not platforms for youth agency and voice, especially for youth of color (Langhout, 2005; Mitra, 2018). Many youth of color have experienced harm in schools due to racism. This reality of the school experience for many young people is why these types of place-based learning and action projects are especially important *in* schools in addition to the impactful work happening in out-of-school settings and shared throughout this book. This model holds potential for creating a positive experience in schools where the students feel supported by teachers and CPs to bring their own knowledge and experiences of their community into the work, voice their ideas for their communities, and apply what they learn to contribute to those communities. These experiences can help young people feel more connected to both school and community, fostering a sense of belonging and mattering (Aronson and Laughter, 2016). This connection to the broader community relates to the next aspect of the model – actions in public spaces.

Actions in Public Spaces

While the model is school-based, students take action beyond the walls of school in the public spaces of their communities; for example, some students survey residents, others share information with residents as they advocate to address pollution caused by a city waste incinerator, and still other students share their ideas with local government officials. In our view and supported by national longitudinal studies (McFarland and Thomas, 2006), such opportunities to act in the public realm and the feedback or public regard that youth accrue from engaging in the public arena are important foundations for later civic action, including activism.

The emphasis on the *public* quality of these activities echoes Arendt's discussion of the public realm – where one's activities gain meaning because they are seen and heard by everyone. We have used the term *environmental commons* to capture the environmental aspects of the public realm, referring to (a) the natural resources on which life depends (water, land, air) and (b) the public spaces (schools, town halls, internet) where people determine together how

to care for those resources and for the communities they inhabit (Bowers, 2006). We invoke the “commons” term to emphasize people’s rights to resources as well as their responsibilities to steward those resources. Drawing from Arendt (1958), one can see the mechanisms whereby the CSE projects nurture a commitment to the environmental commons in student participants. For example, activity in the public realm helps people realize their stake in the larger community and motivates their actions to benefit the common good of fellow community members. Arendt also held that, due to the inclusive nature of the public realm (where, in principle, everyone can be present and engage), participating in that realm holds potential for expanding ideas about who belongs in one’s community and therefore for whom (and whose issues) one is responsible. Further, whereas in their private lives, people will make choices that benefit them, in the public realm people are exposed to a wide range of alternative ideas, values, and beliefs and together must wrangle with one another to decide what’s best for their community and how to live together. Finally, action in the public realm also carries lessons about the importance of collective action to achieve change. With respect to tackling the environmental issues they will face as adults, the youth in the CSE projects are becoming aware that they are part of a movement with a larger purpose, and that, with respect to meeting environmental challenges, they are not alone.

Collective Action

In this CSE model, youth engage in collective action – by working in peer teams and by working with adults from CBOs and local government. Working in teams is important so that students can practice co-owning the work and pursuing a shared goal with peers with different knowledge and perspectives. This emphasis on a team approach differs from the individual conservation behaviors often emphasized by environmental organizations. In the context of climate change, its global reach, and magnitude, individuals can feel overwhelmed and report a low sense of personal efficacy (Kerr and Kaufman-Gilliland, 1997). Emphasizing collective action and the power of the group to effect change is a more effective strategy (Roser-Renouf et al., 2014) and can be more beneficial for mental health (Gallay et al., 2022). When young people identify with the group and its shared goal, they can be hopeful that their actions will achieve change.

As reinforcement that each class’s project is part of a larger environmental effort or coalition, the SEMIS Coalition holds an annual forum in which groups of students and teachers from different schools and their CPs meet at the end of the year to share their work. When prompted to reflect in the closing, several students have shared the inspiration and hope they experienced in hearing about other youth also working to address environmental issues in their communities. Developmentally, teenagers are still figuring out the groups with whom they identify, values they want to center, and the purposes that drive them. By raising awareness of environmental issues and providing opportunities for youth to work with peers and other residents committed to community and environmental issues, youth can imagine those pursuits for their own lives, incorporate civic agency and action into their identities, and possibly engage in environmental civic action in the future. According to social movement theorists, to mobilize a broad and dedicated environmental movement, we need constituents who identify with the large goals of environmentalism (Han and Barnett-Loro, 2018). Given the pressing challenges of the climate crisis and the undue burden borne by young people of color in low-income communities, they are *key* constituents and potential civic actors for environmental justice who

have the right to author decisions impacting the health of their ecologies and communities. With this in mind, efforts should be made to connect young people with organizations where they can meet fellow residents from other generations committed to community environmental work.

Engaging Community-Based Organizations and Local Government

The CSE model intentionally engages CBOs in the local environmental projects and, in the current implementation, includes opportunities to map out and interact with local government decision-makers around environmental issues. Exposing students to CBOs and local government structures and officials helps build their awareness of the civic landscape for environmental issues in their communities – a key capacity for taking strategic civic action. CBOs, often held up as schools of democracy, bring community residents together around a shared goal. CBOs provide a pathway to developing social capital – the web of networks, norms, and trusting relationships that enable people to address community issues through collective action. Insofar as youth are not as knowledgeable or connected to civic life as adults are, scholars have pointed to the need for intergenerational civic connections (Ballard et al., 2016; Zeldin et al., 2013), and studies of community service and activism indicate that these connections to CBOs build youth's social capital, intergenerational harmony, and expand their community connections (Flanagan et al., 2015; Ginwright and Cammarota, 2007; Kirshner, 2015). By working on local environmental issues with CBOs in CSE projects, students can deepen connections to other community members and organizations, thus expanding their networks to include fellow community members dedicated to taking action for the environment.

Exposing students to decision-makers and decision-making bodies in local government can help demystify what government is and how it works, as the role of government and the relationship between the people and the government are not always clear and are skewed by what people see in national politics in the media. The CSE model highlights that local government works for the residents of a community and should be grounded in the needs of those residents, including the students. Students in the model build capacity to tell their story, to use data and their experiences to advocate for environmental issues that are important for them, and to hold people in power accountable. By including connections to both local government and CBOs, we expect students to understand better how residents impact local environmental policy and practices and how residents mobilize to both work with and pressure local government to improve the community's environment and health.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we presented a CSE model that fosters youths' awareness of nature in their primarily urban ecologies and its impact on human well-being and that develops the foundations for many forms of civic participation and action, including activism. While we recognize constraints in a school-based model in forms of "sanctioned advocacy", we also hold up the model's potential for exposing a wide range of students to environmental issues in their own communities, the intersections with environmental justice, strategies people in their community take to address those issues, and opportunities for young people to engage with other community members in collective action on environmental issues relevant to their

families and neighbors. We hold up the potential for the CSE model to nurture and affirm the power of youth to speak up, educate, and lead in their communities and form identities as valued civic actors. We know that only some of the students participating in these projects will become environmental activists. However, we also know that *all* students participating in the projects will be significantly impacted by the ongoing climate crisis and that ensuring the environmental health of their communities will require civic science capacities. In order to solve the problems we face in the twenty-first century, the integration of environmental science with civic action is essential preparation for younger generations (Hart and Youniss, 2018). Beyond a standard class unit on the structure of the federal government, the CSE model provides students with practice in democratic participation and civic science, building an understanding of the civic landscape around environmental issues and providing opportunities to act with others, thus helping to prepare the next generation of leaders to take on current and future environmental challenges, especially those at the intersection of the environment and racial justice in the environmental commons.

As the institution with which almost all young people engage, school settings need to play a key role in developing civic competencies and leadership. Arthurs (2018) argues for leveraging compulsory schooling by situating youth organizing in schools to reach the widest range of students. The emerging findings on the positive impact on students' civic and psychological outcomes from the CSE model and other action civics projects within schools, such as Generation Citizen and YPAR, help make the case for finding additional opportunities to incorporate these models into schools. The urgency around the climate crises, the ongoing impact it will have on young people throughout their lives, and the intersection with racial justice make the environment a critical domain for these models.

Given the responsibilities, competing demands, and politics that teachers and students must navigate in schools, the CSE model and the broader action civics field would benefit from additional research on the barriers that teachers, students, and CPs face in implementing models like CSE in different school contexts and the strategies they use to mitigate them in order to inform future practice. Additional research is also needed on the longer-term impact on participants' civic and environmental identities and behaviors and the immediate and longer-term impact on the involved teachers' and the schools' approaches to teaching and learning. Finally, we draw on Taines's (2014) suggestion that viewing the more sanctioned forms of student involvement within schools and the external, youth-led activist efforts on a continuum instead of as oppositional efforts would help all those interested realize the shared goal of increasing youth voice and leadership and the positive outcomes that result. Future research can help us better understand the knowledge, beliefs, and competencies developed through specific forms of youth environmental action across the continuum to help connect and scaffold efforts to build and support the civic capacity of young people.

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NOTE

1. Although some scholars distinguish “civic” from “political” or “sociopolitical”, we use the terms interchangeably.

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3. The disruptive power of recognition and young environmental activists

Judith Bessant and Sarah Pickard

At the age of nine, Severn Cullis-Suzuki (born 1979) created the Environmental Children's Organisation (ECO) in Canada (Cullis-Suzuki et al., 2007). Three years on, in 1992, she went on to speak with other young environmental activists at the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Pickard et al., 2022). Just over a decade later, Xiuhtezcatl Roske-Martinez (born 2000) gave a TED talk declaring: "We are not going to sit idly by, while the governments and the presidents make all the decisions for us. Because we are not the future, we are the present and we are here now" (TEDx Youth, 2014). The year after, in 2015, aged 14, he spoke to the United Nations Assembly, arguing the State had a duty to protect young people, and the public in general, against climate change, as described in his book *We Rise* (Martinez, 2017). Subsequently, such actions have been replicated by young people many times across multiple jurisdictions.

Today, many people know of the more high-profile young environmental activists, such as Greta Thunberg (born 2003) who began striking from her school each Friday in 2018 when aged 15. Holding a sign that read *Skolstrejk för klimatet* ("School strike for climate"), she sat outside Sweden's Parliament building demanding that the government act urgently to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Shortly afterwards, 17-year-old student Sara Montpetit responded in Quebec by launching *Pour le Futur Montréal* ("For the Future Montreal") with other students (Dupuis-Déri, 2021). Then, in 2019, 23-year-old Vanessa Nakate (born 1996) became Uganda's first "Strike for Climate" activist when she began a silent and solitary protest outside the Parliament building in Kampala. Soon after, she established the "Youth for Future Africa", dedicated to reducing the impact of climate change, as well as promoting sustainable economic development and poverty eradication. (See Chapter 14 in this book for more on Vanessa Nakate's activism.)

Thus, for decades, young people from around the world have been engaged in justice-oriented climate activism (O'Brien et al., 2018). In the Global North and the Global South, young environmental activists have been urging their political leaders and other powerholders to do more about the climate crisis.

This youth-led activism, in turn, is part of a longer history of student protest action that goes back at least to the nineteenth century (Bessant, 2021; Bessant et al., 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; Cunningham and Lavalette, 2016). As Ginwright and Cammarota (2006) note, "youth activism has always played a central role in the democratic process and continues to forge new ground for social change" (p. xiii). Indeed, many major social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the anti-war, feminist, gay rights, and free speech movements, drew their leadership and support in large part from young people (Hosang, 2006, p. 6).

Since mid-2018, social movements have mobilised millions of young people across the globe (Ortiz et al., 2022). While climate activism is not new, the youth-led Fridays For Future (FFF) movement rapidly gained traction in unprecedented ways. The dramatic expansion of

youth climate action was particularly evident in the speed of the movement's growth (Hakala, 2020). This evolution can be attributed to a variety of factors, including generational shifts in values, access to education, and globalisation. Furthermore, new digital technologies and strategies have enabled young people to inform, mobilise, and recruit (Pickard, 2022), as well as organise complex coalitions (e.g., Fisher and Nasrin, 2021, pp. 119–21).

While the worldwide youth-led environmental movement won support among many adults (Elsen and Ord, 2021), not all older people have been supportive or approving of young people's activism. Critics, including leaders of governments, heads of state, and journalists, have attacked and criticised the youth-led environmental movement and many of its young leaders (Pickard et al., 2022). Thunberg received considerably more international media, public and political attention than any of her young climate activist predecessors. Former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, for example, accused her of creating unwarranted anxiety among children who he claimed should remain in school and leave politics to the politicians. During Thunberg's 2019 address to the United Nations in New York City, her face expressing righteous anger, she charged world leaders with an indefensible moral failure: "You are failing us ... The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say, we will never forgive you." (Thunberg, 2019). Rather than addressing the points raised by Thunberg, former US President Donald Trump dismissed her as "a happy girl looking forward to a bright future".

As for media representations, journalists also attacked Thunberg in 2019 (when she was not yet 18 years old), describing her as "mentally ill" (journalist Michael Knowles on Fox News, as cited in Chiu, 2019), a "hysterical teenager" (journalist Chris Kenny on Sky News, 2019) and a "weirdo" (journalist Brendan O'Neill in Spiked, 2019). Another journalist in a Montreal newspaper, *Le Devoir*, complained about "Saint Greta", before going on to condemn the "irrational nature of this quasi-religious craze", while at the same time invoking a "dictatorship of the emotions" (Rioux, 2019). Regarding Fridays For Future more widely, one study of German media showed newspapers relied on ageist media tropes, including "pupils", "absentees", and "dreamers", in order to de-legitimise the Fridays For Future movement and young protestors (Bergmann and Ossewaarde, 2020). The conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) and the left-leaning *Die Tageszeitung* drew on a paternalist discourse, in which the central narrative was that the young climate activists as "pupils" are ignorant with much to learn and they ought to be in school (Bergmann and Ossewaarde, 2020).

Around the globe, critics joined the chorus claiming that students participating in school strikes are just "playing truant", thereby questioning the authenticity and legitimacy of their action. Some detractors, like the former Australian government's Federal Resources Minister Matt Canavan, also claimed the students needed to go to school and get an education about geology and how to build mines instead of wasting their time on issues they did not, could not, and should not understand (Hinchliffe, 2018). After all, learning to drill for oil and gas, according to Canavan, "is one of the most remarkable science exploits in the world", while protesting only teaches students "how to join the dole queue" (as cited in Hinchliffe, 2018). From his perspective, the core business of schools is to prepare students for employment, to teach them to appreciate the economic value of business and the natural resources sector, and not to indoctrinate them (Hinchliffe, 2018). All these criticisms and misrepresentations served to undermine, devalue, and denigrate young people, their concerns about climate change, and their protest actions.

These responses to young environmental activists are part of a politics of climate change in which elites, media outlets, and others use their daunting cultural capital to represent young people negatively in a bid to defend the status quo and to justify their own inertia. It is a strategy that helps to “reinforce the exclusive hegemony of the established environmental governance regime over outsiders and dissidents such as the youth climate movement” (Bergmann and Ossewaarde, 2020, p. 270). Many established leaders, embedded in their own modern industrial habitus, are keen to deny climate change by relying on ageist tropes. This can be seen, for example, in the adultist claim that student protest is inappropriate behaviour “for their age”, and that debates about such matters are the business of “grown ups” who “know what is best”. They are accounts that highlight a deeper and insidious pattern of age-based prejudice involving serious misrecognition of young people.

In what follows, we draw on a theory of recognition to inquire into questions about young people, power, politics, and social change. Specifically, we explore the *disruptive* capacity of recognition. We do this by engaging in a “thought experiment” (Brown and Fehige, 2019), which involves imagining a situation in which the *idea* and *practice* of recognition are described to see what the consequences of such recognition might be when applied to young people, especially those involved in environmental activism about the climate crisis.

Our thought experiment involves asking what recognising young people as autonomous agents would entail politically and practically. Amongst other things, we argue this would first require established political leaders and others to recognise young people as free and equal to other persons, and second, for that recognition to then inform how these powerholders act, and, in particular, how they act towards young people (Iser, 2019). If powerholders acknowledge young people’s capacity and right to determine what and how they think, as well as act, and if they acknowledge that young people are of equal value to other citizens, it would be truly disruptive. Such a development would disrupt the prevailing, taken-for-granted representations of “youth”, as well as relations between young political actors and people in established positions of authority. It would cause a major disruption to the dominant ways young people are represented, with significant implications for legislation, politics, policy, social institutions, and everyday life. It would also require a radical reappraisal of certain fields of scientific knowledge and professional practice.

We develop our thought experiment about the recognition of young people by asking the following questions:

- a. What is recognition and misrecognition?
- b. What would recognising young people as capable political agents entail?
- c. What would flow from that recognition?
- d. What would the recognition of young people mean for the prevailing socio-political arrangements in liberal democracies?
- e. What would such recognition mean for young people and their political participation?
- f. What would follow on from the recognition of young people, in terms of their concern about the environment?

In what follows, we first outline what we mean by recognition and misrecognition, by drawing on the work of Taylor (1992), Fraser (1994), and Honneth (1996; 2014). Next, we consider what the world might look like if young people under the voting age were recognised as capable of “proper” political action. What would flow from that recognition? Would it, for example, influence how young people are represented by political elites and others? Would it

affect young people's status, their access to various capitals, or their ability to affect decision making and make change?

Our rationale for making a case for recognising the dignity and equal worth of young people helps expose the ways so many of our social relations are permeated by age-based prejudices, which have become naturalised and thus go unseen. Recognising the equal worth of young people will reveal why those who are depicted in negative ways or unrecognised are regularly treated in ways that cause them (and others) harm, and how the experience of being young can be less than it otherwise would be had they enjoyed the opportunity to flourish. We refer to the consequences of not having access to a full range of human goods and rights, including the opportunity to access basic material and cultural goods such as nutrition, adequate housing, and incomes, let alone being able to participate in decisions that affect them. Ours is an exercise that has benefits not only because it illuminates the harms of misrecognition, but also because it provides us with the intellectual and emotional resources for working out how we can do better. In these ways, it promotes the prospects for justice in general and for intergenerational justice in particular.

THEORISING RECOGNITION AND MISRECOGNITION

A struggle for recognition is an attempt to transform the ways a person or group is recognised in the eyes of others, which can in turn sometimes inform how a person or group sees themselves. It is an intersubjective process that is important for identity formation and for enhancing quality of life. Towards the end of the twentieth century, philosophers, such as Charles Taylor (1992), Nancy Fraser (1994), and Axel Honneth (1996), developed the concept of recognition and how recognition relates to justice. Their work built, in part, on Hegel's conceptualisation of the master-slave relationship, in ways that highlight the interdependent, but asymmetric power relationship between those with considerable power and those with little power. Such a relationship revolves around power and is characterised by domination and submission. Moreover, both parties (master and slave) can affirm or corrupt the humanity of themselves and each other because recognition involves affirming the identity of the self in the eyes of the other (Honneth, 1996).

Recognition refers to "intersubjective relations" through which we "reach various new ways of relating positively" to ourselves and others (Honneth, 1996, pp. 172–3). Recognition in this sense refers not just to our interpersonal relations, but also to our relations with social institutions. Through a Bourdieusian lens, the struggle for recognition is also a struggle about who gets to name whom and what takes place within various social fields that are hierarchically nested in the context of antagonisms between different groups (Bourdieu, 1977).

For Taylor (1992), a "politics of recognition" involves paying attention to the ways exclusionary practices and *misrecognition* create various harms. Misrecognition damages and distorts the identities of certain "kinds" of individuals and minority groups. Misrecognition also erodes their resilience and relations with others in society. Those misrecognitions can also be fully or partially internalised into one's *habitus* – causing resignation, acceptance of "one's proper place" as subordinate, not fully human, and so on. This internalisation, in turn, can solicit political-moral emotions, like frustration, anger, and outrage. Clearly, a range of these political-moral emotions can be observed today with the rise of many social movements initiated and led by young people around the world (Pickard, 2021; Pickard and Bessant, 2018).

Misrecognition carried out by powerholders is common when it comes to young people and politics. Misrecognition of young people functions to dismiss and undermine their efforts to express themselves, to have a voice that is valued, and to influence or be effective in shaping decisions about issues they consider important (e.g., climate change policy, gun regulation, war, austerity policies, education policies) (Conner, 2016). Misrecognition is also used by politicians and other powerholders in order to justify ignoring the voices of young people and issues of concern to them. Conversely, as we explain below, a theory of recognition offers a remedy to overcome these obstacles to young people's participation in politics that includes helping to ensure their voices are heard with effect.

It is important to pay attention to the recognition of young people because it also helps explain how the absence of recognition causes harm. As Honneth (1996) and Taylor (1994) argued, an absence of recognition provides insight into why women, children and young people, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities or people of colour, and so on, have suffered as a result of being treated badly, unequally, and unjustly for so long (see also Taylor, 1992).

Misrecognition and a lack of recognition can also thwart or even destroy a person's successful relationships with themselves and others, while subverting their prospects for social resilience (Honneth, 1996). Those who are depicted in adverse ways, through misrecognition, can find it harder to understand and identify themselves politically, and to take on the various projects they may have valued had they been recognised as being fully human. They can feel illegitimate or delegitimised, unworthy of a place at the political table.

This is not to say young people automatically and uncritically take on or assume misrecognition as legitimate and accurate accounts of who they are. There is plenty of evidence that points to the ways many young people have "purged themselves" of such deprecating images or have overcome them in a very deliberate way. Moreover, such age-based denigration has spurred young activists to become even more engaged in order to make their voices heard.

Powerholders misrepresent young people by using deprecating accounts of them that focus on references to their age and "immaturity", which are supposed to make them susceptible to being duped and "indoctrinated by manipulative adults". Further misrepresentations include claims they are "too dumb" or ignorant of the issues in question and government procedures to be recognised as legitimate political agents. All this can be seen in recent debates about lowering the voting age to 16 (Bessant, 2020; Pickard, 2019, 2020) and in school students' climate change campaigns. Other popular tropes in misrepresentations of young people based on huge generalisations have referred to their supposed inherent nature, their impulsiveness, and their "at risk" or "dangerous" character, as well as to claims they lack the experience, knowledge, and intellectual capacity needed to be recognised as "proper" political actors (Bessant and Lohmeyer, 2021, pp. 37–54).

This multitude of misrecognition gains traction when misrecognition are repeated and affirmed uncritically, which exacerbate deep-seated age-based prejudices and fears about public safety and the threat of disorder. Thus, misrecognition can work in similar ways to "moral panics" and "deviancy amplification", due to mainstream media reporting (Cohen, 1972) and now social media sharing. Those accounts involving the misrecognition of young people are powerful because they draw on and develop "what everyone already knows", that is, the long-standing age-based stereotypes of "youth" as "precious brats" and "delinquent troublemakers" who threaten the social order. Hence, for a young person's own well-being and

for the benefit of society, it is (mistakenly) stated that young people should never be recognised as credible participants in the public sphere, including climate and environmental action.

All these aspects of recognition and misrecognition of young people highlight the dialogical relational character of recognition, as well as why many young people themselves may accept these representations, while others strenuously resist them. As Taylor pointed out, our identities are not created in isolation from others. They are the result of dialogical relations through which we acquire an understanding of ourselves via “reciprocal recognition among equals” (1994, p. 50).

As part of that reciprocal relationship, many young people (similar to Hegel’s slave) contest and reject harmful misrecognition made by powerholders (similar to Hegel’s master), such as those identified above. We see evidence of such struggles when young people take part in public affairs in ways that demonstrate their political knowledge and understanding of the issues in question, when they reveal their ability to articulate their concerns, to inform, to mobilise others in large numbers, and to lead political action. In doing so, those young people directly challenge the authors of degrading claims, such as those suggesting that they are inherently incapable of knowing what is happening and of being responsible for their own political actions.

In making these observations, we are mindful of the asymmetric power that characterises relations between those in formal positions of authority (and who often misrecognise young people) and young people themselves. Those power differences can make deciding to “answer back” or opting to resist such misrecognition of young people difficult. It can also make struggles to create new ways of representing themselves hard. Misrecognition also help consolidate taken-for-granted and socially ingrained habits of mind that make resistance to those accounts and struggles for recognition arduous. We now turn to consider how things could be different.

THE THOUGHT EXPERIMENT: RECOGNISING YOUNG PEOPLE AS POLITICAL AGENTS

In what follows, we consider what “granting” recognition of young people as capable of “proper” political action and as legitimate political agents would look like. We ask, what would be involved in recognising young people in ways that are just and fair? We refer to a recognition of young people as full human beings who are capable of moral judgement and legitimate political action. This would require recognition that is not grounded in existing harmful myths, stereotypes, received wisdoms, social imaginaries, and symbolic networks, which misrecognise young people in ways mentioned above. All this is important for redressing the subordinate position of young people within the field of politics (and elsewhere).

Recognition necessarily requires that those who occupy formal positions of power and others identify and acknowledge young people as having valuable features (just like their own). Such recognition would mean understanding that young people are deserving of recognition because they, like those in established positions of power, seek:

- a. The same human rights (e.g., freedom of expression, association and movement).
- b. The same human goods (e.g., a healthy life, opportunities to form sustaining relations (Nussbaum, 2000)).

- c. The capabilities–resources needed to provide these goods (e.g., adequate income, housing, nutrition and water, education (e.g., Sen, 2009)).

If we extend things further, by drawing on the insight Iser (2019) offers, we can appreciate what recognition could mean when applied to young people and politics:

if you recognize another person with regard to a certain feature, as an autonomous agent, for example, you do not only admit that she has this feature, but you embrace a positive attitude towards her for having this feature. Such recognition implies that you bear obligations to treat her in a certain way, that is, you recognize a specific normative status of the other person, e.g., as a free and equal person.

Doing what Iser suggests would entail acknowledging young people as legitimate contributors to their communities and to the field of politics. Following Iser's suggestion would involve recognising that all young people – including those not old enough to vote – are valid and valuable citizens, capable of taking actions (Wall, 2021).

Recognition as Action

Recognition is more than an abstract idea, and it is more than just a mind-shift; it requires doing something and taking action. Recognition as action would entail, for example, not only acknowledging and redressing the significant inequalities that characterise intergenerational relations, but also the ways they are compounded by the means in which they intersect with ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, and so on. Recognition, in the case of young people, would involve acting toward them in ways that result in a more just allotment of resources and social goods.

What would be the consequences of recognising young people in terms of action?

- a. The identification and disruptions of the prevailing norms, assumptions, values, and interests of the State regarding young people.
- b. The establishment of the right for young people to vote and to stand for office, the right to take part in decision-making and to participate in social institutions of which they are part (e.g., educational establishments).
- c. The enhancement and support for young people's ability to participate in politics effectively on a relatively equal footing with the rest of the population (i.e., their elders). This would have implications for their access to various capitals and to material resources, as well as, in turn, their ability to enjoy various forms of inequality.
- d. A change about dominant discriminatory cultural understandings and the norms to make young people recognisable (that would involve embedding the practice of listening carefully to what young people say about who they are and how they recognise themselves).

Outcomes that could flow from these shifts can be seen in the ways recognition sometimes encourages certain policy developments and enhances young people's capacity to be politically effective. In what follows, we consider those possibilities.

We could start to get a sense of what such a development would mean by casting our eyes to the struggle for recognition by women and Indigenous people. In doing so, we see how recognition would enhance possibilities for youth enfranchisement and for helping to overcome obstacles that currently block young people's formal political representation. It would also

aid the realisation of various economic rights, such as equal pay for work of equal value and many others.

Following on, these struggles bring into question whether such recognition can mitigate specific injustices, for example, climate change, gun regulation, university fee hikes, rising student debt, exclusion from the housing market, and intergenerational inequity. As recognition has slowly led to the progress regarding the rights of other “minorities”, we suggest that it can similarly lead to improvements in practices like decision making within government and social institutions, in ways that are inclusive of young people and that recognise their interests, including their futures and issues of particular concern to them. In this way, recognition can be a first step toward redressing injustices like environmental injustice toward more equitable distributions of the benefits and burdens of climate change. This would include a more equitable allocation of the responsibilities to mitigate climate change. That is, recognition can enable young people to make claims for their future in ways that are similar to how women have been able to make inheritance and property claims and Aboriginal groups have made native title claims.

Formal recognition of women and Indigenous people revealed that conceiving of democracy as more than the prerogative of older white men involved people ceding power and various legal and social reforms, in a bid to overcome sexism, racism, and colonialism. Yet on these fronts, we suggest that while there have been some developments in the “right direction”, it is still too early to tell whether they translate into women and Indigenous people being recognised in ways that result in a just allotment of resources and social goods. Recognition that could lead to the inclusion of young people in decision-making bodies in ways that were not just as tokenistic, quota-filling, or box-ticking exercises raises questions about how cultural changes take place. Certainly, if the policies and measures young representatives put forward in the public sphere are taken seriously and enacted, then we are talking about wide-ranging social change. For that to happen, more would be needed than just official announcements declaring recognitions. Such edicts would need to be the beginning of a long change process that would need to be accompanied by relevant law and policy reform, as well as changes to deeply ingrained institutionalised social practices. Such interventions would need to be designed to change popular attitudes and practices in which age-based prejudices are truly embedded.

What would recognition mean for young people and their political participation? And what might some of the experiential consequences of recognition be for them? We can wonder whether we would see the expression of new feelings and political emotions. For example, a possible consequence of recognition would be that some young people feel “democracy” does exist after all, which would translate into some of them seeing good reasons for hope and believing that it is worth being confident about and placing trust in political elites. Amongst other things, such renewed faith or confidence could lead to higher turnout rates at elections and young people themselves standing as candidates. Thus, many young people would recognise themselves as role models and as leaders encouraging greater participation from other young people.

With all this in mind, can we say recognition might encourage more young people to become politically engaged in formal and informal settings? That is, are there possibilities that recognition could shift some young people from feeling despondent and desperate about formal or institutional politics to feeling satisfied and even a sense of optimism? Young people could have more trust in the political process and politicians. This trust might in turn lead to

fewer protest actions and contestations, keeping in mind young people tend to demonstrate more than older generations and do Do-It-Ourselves (DIO) politics more than circumnavigates electoral politics (Pickard, 2019, 2022).

Recognition would certainly disrupt traditional age-based relations, clearing the way for new kinds of power relations. This is because considering young people as worthy beings, as well as recognising them as free and equal, makes it difficult to then require that they assume subordinate positions as inferior to the “adults in the room”, as “juniors” or “minors”. In turn, this would justify changes that see young people assuming important authoritative positions within hierarchical formations and would secure the conditions in which they come to enjoy equal status in relation to their elders (Pilkington and Acik, 2021). The implications of the recognition of young people are detailed in the next section.

Implications of Recognition for Young People and Climate Action

If we apply the recognition thought experiment to young people’s environmental activism, certain changes are likely in respect to the prevailing institutional arrangements, political practices, and the outcomes from formal decision-making processes. We can imagine young people as full citizens included in decision-making forums. We can imagine the claims and demands expressed by young people being translated into more environment- and youth-friendly policies, like free and green public transport and subsidies.

Recognising young people in the ways described above could mean it would be less likely they would be constrained to occupy subordinate positions in relation to older and more powerful decision makers. It would also entail that they would not be treated as “natural” experts on youth matters, a popular view that discursively reduces their participation, at best, to being invited to take part in consultative processes, which are also frequently only tokenistic (Kwon, 2019, pp. 926–94). It would also be less likely they would be understood simply as “citizens in the making” who still need to acquire the appropriate and legitimate knowledge and skills of an adult before they can be taken seriously. This way of seeing works to deny young people’s agency and is used to justify restricting their participation to simulation workshops, which are said to prepare them for adulthood when they can then “legitimately” participate in “real politics”. Recognition would entail a greater likelihood that young voices would be appreciated, welcomed, and even used to implement policy change at the local, state, national, and international levels. It is less likely their involvement in the public sphere would be informed by paternalist attitudes that so often find expression in a range of strategies that obstruct their effective participation.

In these ways, recognition of young people would improve the chances that their ideas about climate change action are taken into account now. Recognition of young people as climate change activists and the legitimacy of their actions would disrupt the prevailing arrangements. It would require far-reaching changes to the habitus of formal decision-makers and would necessarily challenge the popular view that young people are developmentally not prepared for the world of politics. It would mean that recent calls by millions of young people demanding that political elites appreciate the moral obligations they have to accept their responsibility to inform themselves about the science of climate change and to take appropriate action in the interest of all their constituents would be heeded. Recognition would reinforce the idea that young people are entitled to access the public sphere and to enjoy greater authority as political subjects with full rights and responsibilities.

The recognition of young people would entail governments taking more seriously their responsibility to exercise a duty of care to protect current and future generations from existing and future harm generated by climate change. This would have implications, for example, regarding government decisions to grant or extend licences to mining and other fossil fuel industries. It would have implications for the law and legal system, possibly seeing the extensions of actions already in place where the courts order petrol production companies to reduce carbon emissions and develop sustainable policies. It would mean reform of various national environment protection and biodiversity conservation Acts.

We might also see a hastening of changes in places, such as the stock exchange and business generally, towards investment in green energy and divestment from fossil fuels. This could, for example, also come as a result of share-taker advocacy, where young people themselves become part of the business and change practices from within. Recognition of young people might see the implementation of tax and other incentives or disincentives that mitigate climate change. The recognition of young people would also have implications for statecraft and affect how nation-states engage in economic, education, welfare military, and defence policy-making. In each of these areas, the recognition of young people as legitimate political actors would see climate change high on the agenda, unlike today in most nations.

DISCUSSION

The question of recognition of young people matters because it helps address a significant prevailing problem, namely the failure to afford them the full equality of moral respect needed for parity of political participation in all matters that directly affect them. Recognition of young people matters also because it entails acknowledging and supporting their right and capacity to be effective in the choices they make about their own lives, who they are, and who they want to be. Recognition can help promote the possibilities for creating democratic polities that are fully inclusive of them. On a more practical level, paying attention to recognition encourages thinking about how such a situation might be achieved and what the outcomes would be. As we have learnt from earlier liberation movements and the extension of political enfranchisement, equal recognition is crucial for those interested in democratic practice (Taylor, 1992). Recognising young people as legitimate political agents would be a first step toward creating a new imagined democratic life that ensures that the voices and interests of young people are included in decisions that affect them (Wall, 2021).

Our thought experiment about the recognition of young people flags a number of diagnostic and social benefits.

- a. It helps identify and uncover assumptions that inform what are mistakenly taken to be neutral, objective, “natural”, or universal characteristics that describe and define “youth”. Many conventional accounts of “youth” involve and rely on adultist claims that pervade scholarship, and societies more generally. They include claims that by virtue of their age, young people are naïve, immature, dependent, and so on. They are also said to be inherently irrational, impulsive, and vulnerable to manipulation. Moreover, it is argued they cannot be politically knowledgeable or competent. For all these reasons, it is proffered by sceptics that young people should never be taken seriously as political actors and indeed should be kept well away from the public sphere (Walkeridine, 1993, pp. 451–69; Wall,

- 2021). From this perspective, doing otherwise would be irresponsible and harmful for the individual young person and the prevailing social order.
- b. It helps uncover problematic assumptions underpinning claims that the category of “youth” is a neutral, objective, “natural”, or universal category. In particular, it helps to see the problematic nature of claims that these representations are the same as photographic accounts of what is actually there. It also serves to remind us how these representations have a performative character that helps to constitute identity and so to populate our political and social life, often with highly negative and harmful consequences.
 - c. It serves as a reflexive reminder that all such exercises in representing people using any various identity markers (e.g., age, sex, gender, ethnicity, status, regionality, indigeneity, class, etc.) are informed by particular interests and are the result of political classificatory struggles. The work by Bourdieu (1977) on classificatory struggles highlights the complex interplay of various capitals that provide the resources, which make the struggle possible, while also serving as the goal of the contest. Understanding the struggle for recognition as a classificatory struggle highlights how people can be misrepresented or misrecognised as result of persistently unequal social relations. This raises questions about power disparities and how the inequalities of capitals used to inform social practices and relations might be challenged.
 - d. It highlights how social representations change in time and space. This works as a salutary reminder that they can change again. Seeing how certain groups or “kinds of people” are known or recognised changes across time and space challenges the popular, but mistaken, assumption that they offer complete and unmediated accounts of factual reality. This realisation matters because assumptions that these accounts are objective typically overlook the powerful interests and the prejudices that actively shape those representations as misrecognitions.
 - e. Paying attention to misrecognition enables us to see and better understand the harmful effects they have on young people and the community. The simple fact of being young apparently prevents them from entering the field of politics as legitimate actors.¹ According to some “experts” drawing on the “science of the teen brain”, the brains of people aged 15–25 are not fully developed, which precludes them from exercising good judgement. These accounts have no scientific credibility, but they confirm and amplify old clichés, conventional thinking, and negative stereotypes that young people lack the maturity and other attributes needed to be “political” (e.g., Bessant, 2008, pp. 347–60; Pickard, 2019). They are narratives used to frustrate young people’s formal and informal participation in politics (e.g., Chan and Clayton, 2006, pp. 533–58; McAllister, 2012). We might also point to the ways misrecognition can be internalised, sometimes resulting in a self-devaluation that can be disempowering, or worse, for young people.²

CONCLUSION

This chapter was about the politics of recognition and misrecognition regarding young people, many of whom are not old enough to vote. Particular attention was given to participants in contemporary global youth-led environmental movements. This is not to suggest this argument for recognition is not pertinent to the many other young people engaged in other struggles for racial justice, women’s rights, gun regulation, and so forth.

We started by clarifying what recognition and misrecognition mean. A thought experiment was carried out to think about what would happen if young people were recognised as valid and valuable citizens capable of identifying and expressing political thought, within electoral and non-electoral politics. We highlighted how that recognition would disrupt the status quo that works to the advantage of those who hold power formally by changing the many long-standing ways young people have been represented in denigrating ways. Recognising young people also involves listening to them and including them in decision-making and in policy development, which would translate into more youth-friendly and environment-friendly policies.

Significant action by those in established positions of authority to mitigate climate change would improve the living conditions of young people around the world, especially those in the Global South who are particularly affected by climate injustice. Such a shift would also have a beneficial effect on young people's immediate and future physical and mental health, with improved feelings of well-being, which they could pass on to future generations.

NOTES

1. There is a large quantity of credible empirical evidence coming from health researchers and others that young people by at least age 16 have reached the same level of moral reasoning as most adults and have logical reasoning abilities which are indistinguishable from adults (e.g., Klaczynski et al., 2004; Kuhn and Siegler, 2006, p. 961; Steinberg, 2018). Moreover, young people can engage in scientific and/or means–end reasoning at the same level as adults and can engage in decision-making as competently as adults (*ibid.*). To this, can be added many examples of young people at a very young age assuming major leadership roles and active political roles of the kind normally associated with “mature adults”.
2. Claims that young people are “wired for risk” because they have “adolescent brains” that cause them to make bad judgements and behave irresponsibly and even criminally have been used in criminal justice systems to justify less harsh punishments for “juvenile offenders”. There are, however, no good reasons to believe this justifies relying on the so-called “science” of the “adolescent brain”. To make this claim means overlooking (1) the unjustified determinism operating in the idea that neurological structures explain the cognitive, emotional, and ethical judgements and actions of young people, while ignoring (2) the misapplication of fMRIs to describe the alleged structural features of “the adolescent brain” (Schiffman, 2015). While referring to “teen brain theory” may help some young people receive lighter penalties, there are no good reasons to rely on such “neuromythology” (Tallis, 2011).

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4. Using a human rights lens: learning from children's activism

E. Kay M. Tisdall and Patricio Cuevas-Parra

Over the past decade, academic and public attention have been drawn to dramatic examples of children's¹ activism. These include Greta Thunberg and the climate protests by children she inspired around the globe (see Fridays for Future, n.d.), the thousands of school children who took to the streets in Dhaka in 2018 to demand a government response to the deaths of two students run over by a bus (BBC, 2018), and children's demands for greater gun control in the USA (Witt, 2019). Children are claiming notice, demanding changes, and publicly mobilising, asserting their rights to be heard in collective decision-making and societal change.

The involvement of children in such public and collective activism is not new. Historical research reminds us of children protesting in the past, such as school strikes by children being subject to corporal punishment (Marson, 1973) and the leading role of children in South Africa in protesting Apartheid (Heffernan and Nieftagodien, 2016). A number of fields, such as youth studies and social movements, have extensive conceptualisation and research on activism. But renewed attention to the activism of younger age groups – children – in the past decade has unsettled certain societal positionings of childhood and provided opportunities for participation in collective political concerns, which have been challenging to both practice and academia.

The near universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) has been an impetus for recognising children's human rights to participate. The UNCRC is the most ratified of any international human rights treaty, with the USA the only member state not having done so (at the time of writing). The UNCRC was heralded as radical (e.g., see Ochaíta and Espinosa, 1997; Rap, 2016) for including a range of participation rights for children, which had not been articulated before. The UNCRC has galvanised a range of legislative and policy changes, consultation, and involvement, as well as an immense range of projects, institutions, and activities that have sought to recognise children's rights to participate. Yet, reviews of UNCRC implementation (e.g., Child Rights Now!, 2019; McMellon and Tisdall, 2020) continue to find that children's participation rights are particularly challenging for adults, and all too often children's participation is adult-controlled, tokenistic, and fails to have an impact on decisions. Thus, for those in the children's human rights field, there is particular interest in ways to overcome and move beyond these challenges. The dramatic examples of children's activism are thus increasingly being discussed by children's rights studies, and affiliated fields, because children are taking forward their own priorities, ensuring they are heard, and sometimes very obviously having an impact on decisions (e.g., see Biswas and Mattheis, 2021; Taft, 2019).

This chapter comes from a children's human rights perspective, both conceptually and practically, with the objective of learning from wider discussions of activism in youth studies and other fields, and from the examples of children's activism. We first explore conceptual resources from children's rights and activism in the literature, before considering three themes

that have arisen from examples of children's activism and that, in turn, challenge the literature. The first theme considers key ingredients – children working together, investing their time and energy, and mobilising others to act or change – that led to children's activism having demonstrable impacts. The second theme explores relations of power, between children and adults, and the repositioning of children as knowledge holders and sharers. The third theme considers very common concerns of adults about children's safety, safeguarding, and child protection, and how they can be reconciled with children's activism. The chapter ends with concluding ideas about the relationships between children's human rights, the children's participation field, and activism.

CONCEPTUAL RESOURCES

Stating that children have human rights not only has legal implications – but also has moral ones. It is asserting that children, as with other people, must be recognised as having, inherently, human dignity and that they too should have entitlements and claims that duty-bearers must meet and who can be held accountable. This is challenging to common social constructions of childhood, in both the Global South and North, where childhood is frequently considered subordinate to adulthood (e.g., see James and Prout, 1990; Tisdall et al., 2023). The exportation and colonial imposition of Global North ideologies and practices have perpetuated associated constructions of children as developing beings and, at best, "citizens-in-the-making" (e.g., see Liebel, 2020). Accepting that children have human rights, therefore, is also about changing certain social constructions of childhood.

Children's participation rights in collective decision-making are especially challenging to such social constructions. Participation rights are about children claiming public spaces, being community, social, and political actors, and recognising their civil society contributions now and not just as future citizens. The UNCRC applies to all children under the age of 18. Further, all rights under the UNCRC must be respected and ensured without discrimination of any kind, under Article 2. With the widespread obligations across States Parties from the UNCRC, children's participation rights need to extend to all children.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child identifies Article 12(1) as a General Principle of the UNCRC. The text of Article 12(1) is: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." This right applies to children's participation in individual decisions about their own lives, as well as group or collective decision-making that goes beyond the individual (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Other rights under the UNCRC are grouped as participation rights as well, such as Article 13 (freedom of expression), Article 14 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), Article 15 (freedom of association and peaceful assembly) and Article 17 (access to information).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child provides this definition of participation, in relation to Article 12:

This term has evolved and is now widely used to describe ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes. (2009, para. 3)

This definition is implicitly dealing with many of the problems found in implementing Article 12(1) in collective decision-making, expressed by children and practitioners and found in research. As reviewed by McMellon and Tisdall (2020), too often children's participation has been tokenistic, with agendas pre-set and limited opportunities to influence (adult) decision-making. Children have expressed their immense frustration when their views are not given "due weight" in decision-making, with seemingly limited impact on decisions and they receive no feedback on what has happened or why. While some children may be involved or even over-involved, other groups are infrequently included, such as younger children, children with disabilities, or those who are mobile (such as children who migrate, who are homeless, or who are from Gypsy/Traveller/Roma communities) (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020). These concerns differ in nuance across different parts of the world, but are remarkably similar despite differences in social, cultural, and economic contexts.

Children's activism, then, has caught the attention of the children's participation/ human rights field, because it is apparently addressing several of these pernicious challenges. There are examples of children's activism that have made a demonstrable difference for legislative decisions (e.g., Houghton et al., 2023), stopping individual child marriages and changing community views on the practice in Bangladesh and Ghana (Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall, 2022), or at least altering public debate (e.g., climate change). They appear less under adult control, with children determining their own focus, their own agendas, and their own demands. Rather than waiting for adults to "invite them in" to participation activities, children are putting themselves forward and claiming their spaces (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020). Framing (or recognising) children's participation as activism may provide new possibilities, both practically and conceptually, to ensure that children's participation rights are realised.

Activism has a rich body of literature across a number of fields, from youth studies to identity politics, to social movements. Martin (2007) provides a starting definition of activism: "Activism is action on the behalf of a cause, action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine" (p. 19). Martin's definition focuses on action, action for a cause, and action being done outside the "status quo", willing to challenge social norms, attitudes, institutions, or systems. Yang (2016), though, is concerned about the institutional and political capture of activism, discussing the range of what can be termed activism currently, from "'citizens' political activities ranging from high-cost, high-risk protests, and revolutionary movements ... to everyday practices aimed at protecting the environment ... to corporatized NGO [Non-Governmental Organisations] activism'" (p. 2). The literature has indeed ranged widely, with a history of focusing on the "spectacles" of activism (protests, marches, demonstrations, and public petitions), challenged by other conceptualisations of more "moderate" activism around community work and/or everyday actions (e.g., see Bosco, 2010; Nolas, 2015), and with particular interest in how social media can be and is used in activism (Allaste and Cairns, 2021; Keller, 2012; Loader et al., 2014). As activism becomes a popular word, at least in some circles, the term's definitional boundaries and conceptual integrity become more difficult to ensure.

Norris (2009) distinguishes between citizen-oriented actions, mainly concerned with activism within formal politics, and cause-oriented actions, focusing on specific issues and policy concerns. Norris writes of the increase of cause-oriented actions, accompanied by trends towards decentralised and networked communications, loose coalitions, and hierarchically flat organisations, with informal ways of belonging around shared concerns and identity politics. There are connections with the activism of new social movements, which often focus on

achieving social change through direct action strategies and community building, as well as by altering lifestyles and social identities, as much as through shaping formal policy-making processes and laws in government (Norris, 2009, p. 10).

With children largely excluded from citizen-oriented actions – given their lack of political rights to vote, to stand for election, to form organisations legally, or to join trade unions – cause-oriented actions are ways that they can seek change. The debates in the more general literature about what constitutes activism draw attention to the discourse of activism (what is the power in considering particular activities as activism?), the power relations internal to the activism and with external actors, and how activism is organised and enacted.

Background to the Studies

We consider such issues in light of three themes that emerge as key barriers and facilitators of children's activism, from examples we have learnt from over recent years.

First, in Brazil, an empirical research study explored the engagement of children in identity-based activism and how the child activists constructed and reconstructed their perceptions around gender, race, and ethnicity based on their opportunities and constraints to exercise their children's human rights. The study was undertaken with 39 children and young people (21 girls and 18 boys, according to their self-reported gender), aged 12 to 17 years, who were members of the Young Public Policy Monitoring (MJPOP as its acronym in Portuguese) in Brazil. All participating children and young people reported being from marginalised and deprived areas of their cities and, in order to contest social exclusion, they joined the MJPOP to challenge biased approaches towards them.

The child activists were recruited by using already established networks in their communities. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were the two main data collection techniques to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes: participants had a choice to be involved in one or both data collection methods. Most of them chose to engage in focus groups as this method was perceived as more entertaining and relaxing than individual interviews. Once the data collection phase ended, information from focus groups and interviews was organised and examined using thematic analysis in order to identify patterns and themes of arguments that emerged from conversations with participants (for thematic analysis, see the procedure below for the second study).

Second, in Bangladesh and Ghana, we explored the processes and outcomes of children's activism to stop child marriages, from the perspectives of the child activists, (potential) child brides, and community members. We started with two sites each, in Bangladesh and Ghana, where child activists were supported by respective World Vision offices in these countries. The child activists were all involved in Child Parliaments/ Forums, which are long-standing arrangements where children meet together locally to learn about and act on children's human rights.

The study involved 75 child activists (44 who identified as girls and 31 who identified as boys): in Ghana, 39 child activists (23 girls and 16 boys) between 10 and 17 years old and, in Bangladesh, 36 child activists (21 girls and 15 boys) between the ages of 12 to 17. Ten girls (6 in Bangladesh and 4 in Ghana) whose child marriages had been stopped were interviewed. Further, 22 adults were interviewed (9 in Bangladesh and 13 in Ghana). These adults were

identified by the child activists as important for their actions or the parents/ family members of the potential child brides.

A self-report questionnaire was undertaken with the child activists, followed by in-depth focus group discussions. The groups usually involved both girls and boys, as that was how the children usually met together. A few girls asked to participate in focus groups with only other girls, which we respected. Interviews were held face-to-face and were semi-structured, aiming to learn sensitively from participants' views and experiences (Potter and Hepburn, 2012).

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. This provided certain basic information about the child participants and the extent of their activism on child marriage. Qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis by recording themes or patterns associated with the research questions (Guest et al., 2012). Consideration was given in analysis of each country's data to such factors as geographical location, age, and gender within country contexts. For this chapter, any differences relevant to the analysis are raised below. Fieldwork was undertaken in the participant's preferred language, with local translators and research team members who could provide further clarification about translated terms.

A substantial range of ethical issues were considered in both studies, from seeking informed consent to how to ensure sensitive field work instruments, which are detailed in their respective ethical protocols. Of particular note for these projects, researchers sought to ensure participation was voluntary and contributors were informed of the project details in their own language. Participants provided written consent, which was familiar to them, with the understanding that consent is an ongoing process throughout fieldwork. The research team shared with the participants that, while confidentiality and anonymity were crucial components of the project, confidentiality could not be maintained if someone was at risk of significant harm. All personal identifiers, such as family names and contact details, were removed from the transcribed data, to help protect participants' anonymity.

For more information on these examples of child activism, and methodologies of related research we have undertaken, see: Cuevas-Parra, 2022; Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall, 2022; Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra, 2020; Visão Mundial, 2020; Walker et al., 2019. When writing about these examples, we use the term "child activists" because the participants identified themselves as children and as activists and thought this was how they should be referenced.

WORKING TOGETHER: COLLECTIVE ACTIONS, INVESTMENTS, AND MOBILISING OTHERS

Children were involved because of their passion for a cause. The child activists in Brazil sought solutions to systemic urban problems in their communities. Similarly, the research conducted in Bangladesh and Ghana found that the children involved were highly committed to stopping child marriage for themselves and their peers and to changing community practices. In all of these contexts, this passion brought children together to act collectively for change. These elements are explored in more detail below.

In Brazil, the research found that child activists were taking action on matters that impacted them individually and in their communities. From there, several of them built up coalitions with activists in other countries. A child activist reflected:

In our group, we found a place of resistance where we fight discrimination and violence against children ... Together, we weigh the issues affecting children and prepare strategies for action ... there are many issues, but we focus on the most pressing ones ... But it is not only about other children, it is about us too. We are also victims of violence, so our activism help us and everyone. (Child activist, Brazil, Interview)

The collective engagement of these child activists can be framed within the activism definition provided by Martin (2007), as they emphasised that their collective cause was to defend children's human rights, such as the right to be protected from violence, discrimination, and abuse. The child activists performed mutual direct actions to contest the way people perceived and treated them (e.g., as poor, marginalised, dangerous). They considered their collective activism to be safer than individual activism as a combined voice gave them more protection.

In Brazil, the child activists' immediate actions started at school after they realised that their school premises and classrooms were in an unacceptable condition, with rainwater leaking through the damaged roofs and the risk of electric shocks due to the school's electrical system not being earthed. The child activists organised themselves and initiated a public campaign to make this issue known to the community and municipal officials. Instead of asking adults for help, they took control and agreed to generate their own political agenda and call for action. In addition to spreading the word, the child activists lobbied local legislators and municipal council officers to denounce the precarity of their school premises and demand serious reparations. As a result of these actions, the city council renovated the roofs and wiring systems and improved the overall school condition (Walker et al., 2019). Furthermore, as an unintended outcome of their initiative, child activists from MJPOP began to be recognised and respected by the local authorities and community members as a credible group with precise demands and feasible solutions.

After this first action, the children continued their activism on a broader range of topics, including improving public gardens and community parks, calling for an end to police brutality against black and poor youth, and condemning race-based discrimination and social exclusion. For example, they conducted a public campaign called "I feel it in my skin" to raise awareness of the discriminatory practices and attitudes that demean children due to race-specific biases that target those who are black, poor, and from the outskirts of the city (for further discussion see Visão Mundial, 2020). This collective mobilisation encouraged the child activists to use their African hairstyles as an activism tool; they challenged oppression and racism by growing their hair as a form of contestation and liberation to recover their cultural roots and value their identities. One child activist explained this very deliberate decision:

Brazil was one of the last western countries to abolish slavery, and there is still a belief the one race is better than the other ... Since childhood, we learn to hate our bodies, our colour, and our curly hair. But one day I stopped this and said that nothing differentiates me from white people ... With my friends in the MJPOP we learned the resources we needed to start accepting ourselves, and we are now campaigning for others to do the same. (Child activist, Brazil, Interview)

Their activism was successful because they embraced their identities (including their gender, age, socioeconomic status, race, amongst other dimensions) as part of their political claims-making. Their activism also had an intergenerational component as they built relations with adults in power to nurture partnerships and coalitions toward joint objectives, focusing on challenging inequality, exclusion, and unfair power relationships.

That said, the child activists reflected that their actions were not always as effective as they wished as they lacked political influence and were often considered too young to inspire older community members. They felt that they could address these barriers by making their cause better known in order to get more supporters, increasing their lobbying in formal settings to get the support of a larger number of local authorities, and exploring new communication channels through social media.

The research conducted in Bangladesh and Ghana also found that child activists were able to have an impact, whilst engaging in collective actions and mobilising their peers and adults for their cause. While our research did not seek to confirm systematically, we were informed that the child activists in Bangladesh had already stopped 72 marriages and in Ghana five marriages, alongside action to change community norms with their peers, their communities, and officials. The Bangladeshi and Ghanaian child activists identified child marriage as one of the most pressing issues affecting children in their respective countries. The practice of child marriage is widespread in Bangladesh and Ghana and is rooted in gender inequality, poverty, and patriarchal values (Arthur et al., 2018).

In order to challenge this, the child activists built an activist strategy, collaborating within their local clubs (i.e., Child Forums in Bangladesh and Child Parliaments in Ghana) and networking with influential adults in their communities. The ability for the child activists to “tug” on intergenerational relations was vital for their activism, as their actions were predominantly relational and relied on motivating those with power to act, building credibility, strengthening intergenerational dialogue, and enhancing relationship-specific investments (e.g., with police officers, local government officers, community leaders, NGO workers, school authorities). An example is given by a child activist in Ghana, who explained: “First of all, we have to go to the Chief, who is the highest among them. So, if you go to tell [the Chief] anything, they will put action into it, and maybe call the parents or a meeting concerning child marriage.” (Member of Child Parliament, Ghana, Focus Group A). Such connections were observed in both Bangladesh and Ghana, with child activists in Bangladesh additionally expanding their influence to national-level government officials, journalists, and social media.

In undertaking the research with child activists in Bangladesh and Ghana, the considerable investment of the children was notable. The child activists were passionate about their cause, willing to use their time and energy to stop child marriages. This often involved an outburst of quick action, as children were typically the first to know of an impending child marriage, which could be taking place within less than a week. They would first strategise as a group, then collectively go to those with power to stop the child marriage and to visit the potential bride’s family, bringing people and information together through the child activists’ willingness to make the connections. The child activists shared a sense of pride in their activities, bolstered by increasing (although not unilateral) parental and community affirmation. This affirmation rewarded them, making them feel positive about their actions and eager to expand their influence.

For the Bangladeshi and Ghanaian child activists, a belief in the importance of promoting children’s rights was pivotal to sustaining their activism. They explained that children’s participation rights were at the core of their collective actions to challenge traditional beliefs and values around child marriage. Thus, they organised and mobilised to claim public spaces and become recognised as community, social, and political actors who had a say on relevant issues linked to their direct actions. Through their coordinated actions, the child activists made a difference on decisions relating to their cause: by convincing parents and local leaders to

stop child marriage from happening; changing community members' perceptions about this practice; and elevating the issue into public debate (for further information, see Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra, 2020). Their child activism helped change intergenerational relations, by giving children a place in decision-making forums and transforming adults' attitudes towards them. Child activists became perceived as credible, reliable, and trustworthy partners in stopping child marriage.

RELATIONS OF POWER

Intergenerational relations are not without their tensions. Children's activism can challenge adult mediation, power, and control, especially in the intersections between Article 12 (participation), Article 5 (parents' direction and guidance), and Article 3 (best interests of the child) of the UNCRC.

Children's activism gains notice because children are contesting their lack of power in mainstream society by mobilising themselves for a joint cause and calling for political and social change on issues relating to their lives (Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra, 2021). For instance, child activists in Bangladesh challenged adult power by carrying out unconventional and innovative actions to counter conventional politics; they demanded solutions to their problems, especially child marriage. Bangladeshi child activists recognised their relationships with adults were intricate and often defined by adults' authority at school, at home, and in other settings. However, they also considered there to be some equitable spaces where they could share power with adults. For instance, within their activism, they conducted child-led research in their communities and then, through and supported by their Child Forum, shared their findings with identified decision-makers in their communities. Having this research evidence helped them to challenge traditional beliefs in which adults were considered the experts and children were perceived to be the objects of learning. Gaining knowledge, and sharing the knowledge persuasively, created a positioning for the child activists that made their activism successful in both stopping individual child marriages and influencing societal change.

The research conducted in Brazil showed that children perceived that their roles as activists – and resultant negotiations of power – were framed positively and negatively by their social identities. On the one hand, they, as a marginalised group, used their race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status to distinguish themselves from other campaigners and mobilisers. On the other hand, the child activists observed that their social identities negatively influenced their opportunities for representation and the extent to which they could exercise power. This was due to exclusionary practices that prevented them from participating on an equal basis with adults and other children from more privileged backgrounds. These child activists felt they were marginalised, first, by being under the control of adults due to their age and, second, for being poor, black, and from the outskirts of the city. They reported that this made it difficult for them to engage in conventional forms of participation and confront power inequalities, but they were nonetheless determined to break down these barriers.

The child activists' perspective echoes Foucault's (1983) position that depicts power and resistance as entangled; one relies on the other and the relationships continuously evolve. Equally, Freire (1993) points out that disadvantaged people can have limited political power to challenge structures of domination and oppression, but, when they realise that they can be part of a process of transformation and critical dialogue, they can become vital actors in the change

process. Child activists from Bangladesh, Ghana, and Brazil embraced this belief, and their activism, in turn, allowed them to express their ideas and contest, transform, and challenge social norms, such as child marriage and race-based violence. By accessing and providing information on their chosen causes, they contributed to transforming adults' positions of control and, consequently, they were able to build their own identities as social and political actors.

Across these examples, children's activism was intertwined with intergenerational relations – because fundamentally they were seeking to ensure adults acted to do or to stop doing something. With different gradations, from more direct campaigns in Brazil to the “behind the scenes” mobilisation of Ghana child activists, their activism was repositioning social norms about children being active in these political spaces. They were able to do so, we suggest from the research findings, because they were empowered by information, they became recognised as knowledgeable and knowledge producers, and they were scaffolded by supporting adults to be interconnected with other adults with power in their communities.

CONCERNS ABOUT CHILDREN'S SAFETY

Children's rights studies have discussed the long-lasting tension between participation and protection rights, in which adults' commonly-cited concerns relating to children's vulnerability and safety have been one of the key deterrents for children's participation rights (e.g., Caputo, 2017; Jiménez, 2021). Apprehensions about children's safety can hinder opportunities for children's participation. For instance, a study conducted in Lebanon and Jordan, on child-led research, showed that adult facilitators did not consult children on dissemination plans, because of wanting to protect the children (Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall, 2019). Specifically, this happened when Syrian children conducted child-led research on their refugee situation and wanted to launch their report at a public event. However, due to widespread public resentment against refugees, the supporting local officers decided that it was better and safer for children not to attend the event. Whilst this may have been a good decision in principle, the supporting local officers did not decide this with the child activists. Following the event, adult facilitators analysed this choice and concluded that their process could be improved: children should have been involved in decision-making relating to this particular issue as they had different ideas about how the risks could be managed.

In the research on child activism to stop child marriage, Bangladeshi and Ghanaian child activists described a few upsetting interactions with adults from their communities. These were adults who did not think children should engage in activities to prevent child marriage, on the basis that children lacked the necessary knowledge or maturity to engage on this issue and could place themselves in danger. In addition, the child activists pointed out that many parents did not want their children to be active in this way, fearing that some community members would stigmatise them for acting inappropriately for their age. Therefore, their activism was perceived to potentially intensify their vulnerability. The child activists reported that their activism gradually became more appreciated over time, and received less disapproval, as it accumulated.

These attitudes toward the child activists reveal that, when the lens of vulnerability is used in isolation, other rights can be undermined. Rather than focusing only on protection, adults can support child activists' efforts to engage with others to make a change, recognising that

children benefit from resources and tools for capacity building, knowledge, and safeguarding. This was evident, for example, for the child activists in Bangladesh, where supporting adults had invested, with the children, in relationships with local power brokers. Thus, the child activists were able to go to the police or the local government official to be received and listened to, and this official help was enlisted so that the child activists could safely and successfully stop a child marriage. Further, the Child Forum provided a place for concerned children to join together and plan collective action. One result was that girls were able to move around their communities quickly to stop a child marriage, because they were in small groups and/or accompanied by activists who were boys. This made their activism possible in communities that typically restricted girls' mobility. As one child activist explained: "When we make visits to families, our male colleagues accompany us. When they go with us, we girls feel supported. This gives us more power" (Member of Child Forum, Bangladesh, Focus Group 3). By adult sharing of social capital and children's collective support, both children's protection and their participation were respected and supported.

In such ways, children's activism potentially offers a solution to overly protective or tokenistic forms of participation. Child activists develop the skills to participate and influence change. They can contest adults' views of vulnerability, by having spaces for children to identify their own protection concerns and outline feasible solutions to minimise the risks.

CONCLUSION

From a children's human rights perspective, the ever-growing examples of children's activism are challenging those of us who are adults and inspiring us to learn from the activists and their activism. Children's activism shows the potential for children's participation not to be perennially subjugated to adult agendas, for children to identify their own priorities for action, and to have impact on collective decision-making – thus addressing many of the oft-cited challenges for children's participation.

Article 12 is much cited and celebrated in the children's rights field, both academically and practically, as a radical recognition of children's participation rights. However, it is a modest right, relying on assessments of children's capability to form their views and the weight given to those views, presumably dependent on adults (and not children) to assess and to weigh in the final decision. This is far from autonomy in the liberal enlightenment sense of a rational individual having the freedom to make their own choices (for discussion, see Daly, 2018). The definition of participation given in the UN Committee's General Comment on Article 12, cited above, emphasises that adults will be part of the equation, as there is discussion of mutual respect between children and adults and how both adults' and children's views shape outcomes.

Children's activism, thus, arguably goes beyond Article 12. It draws on other participation rights – such as freedom of expression, of association, and of peaceful assembly, and the right to access and give information – to provide potentially more power for children to articulate and express their views in collective decision-making. While a lodestone in children's rights internationally, the UNCRC is a minimum standard of children's human rights (as with all of human rights treaties) and States Parties are welcome to go beyond it. Children's activism arguably does. It is challenging: while the examples we have shared in this chapter are congruent with widespread ideas of social justice and internationally accepted norms, children's

activism will not be acceptable to some and sometimes will not be palatable to the status quo. But this is recognising children's human rights to their freedoms of expression and protest.

Picking up Norris' (2009) distinction, the examples we learnt from were all cause-oriented actions and not citizen-oriented ones. Children came together because of their causes, which matches Norris' depiction of networked communications, hierarchically flat organisations, and people belonging around shared concerns and identity politics. The child activists had limited choice to engage in citizen-oriented activism because they were quite literally excluded from many forms of political actions in democratic contexts (e.g., voting, holding political office, being in trade unions) and most mainstream political activity required the invitation from those with political power (e.g., to give evidence to Parliamentary committees or to participate in government decision making (Houghton et al., 2023)). By coming together to take action for a cause, following Martin's definition, the child activists were challenging children's role at the sidelines of politics. They were claiming political spaces and recognition as political actors (see also Dar and Wall, 2011; Nolas et al., 2017). The case studies reviewed in the article show that children's causes varied according to contexts, but, across them, their social identities (e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status, race) were central components of their narratives and change strategies.

This provides a potential contribution to other fields. As Bosco writes eloquently in 2010, the broader literature on political geography pays little to no attention to children, yet children can so definitely and importantly be activists in their and their families' daily lives. We have similar findings. The rich youth activism literature has tended to sit alongside but barely touching the childhood studies literature, losing the potential for cross-fertilisation and the testing of presumptions about age and competences (e.g., see Bruselius-Jensen and Nielsen, 2021). This literature could learn from what is commonplace amongst childhood studies: to note that social constructions of childhood, which focus on their vulnerability, their dependency, and their lack of competence, have a pervasive effect on policy and practices (e.g., see Tisdall et al., 2023). As a result, children are often not even visible in many arenas, but institutionalised in schools, conceptually kept "at home" in families and kin relations, and kept out of public spaces. This is equally a challenge for the activism literature, which does not yet fully consider differences by ages, stages, and intergenerational relations as it would for other aspects of intersectional oppression such as gender, ethnicity, or class.

In considering these examples of children's activism, we show how children re-position themselves not only as political actors but also as knowledge holders and sharers (for further discussion, see Taft, 2021). The children bring their own knowledge to their cause, they may well be scaffolded with knowledge by supporting adults, and they gain knowledge as they take action. Their knowledge is a resource for their activism that can be very persuasive to get adults to act (like child activists in Bangladesh locating birth certificates to prove a child is under age to be married) or to negotiate with adults for change. This recognition of children as holders and sharers of knowledge is challenging to certain conceptualisations of childhood, as found in the examples shared here, but also reshapes and widens the spaces for children to take forward their causes and actually impact decision-making. For those who appreciate Freire, this is not a surprise: there is power in knowledge and being recognised as having knowledge.

Children's activism is arguably a particular form of participation – one in which certain children decide to invest their time and energy because they have a cause. At least in the examples discussed here, and in light of local social norms, the activism was arguably successful because the children did strategise, act, and reflect together. Further, despite the enthusiasm

(from the children's rights field, for example) about children so visibly taking action, in our examples the scaffolding and support of facilitative adults were often important components for successful activism, such as children being able to gain audiences with those with power in their communities. Adults were not absent in the activism we learnt from; it was more that certain, hierarchical intergenerational power relations were changed, so that certain adults were facilitating children's activism, rather than doing it on their behalf, while the adults with power were not the sole holders of knowledge, respecting that the child activists had important knowledge to share. Children's activism, at least in these examples and when they were successful, was entwined in intergenerational relations.

Within the intergenerational relations and collective actions, there were risks for the child activists. Girls, for example, in Bangladesh protected themselves from community condemnation by travelling together and/or with activists who were boys. Child activists in all of the examples reported some difficult incidents with parents, with those with power, and with other community members. The research highlights the potential for both participation and protection rights for children (as well as for other activists?) to be considered together: that children should be involved in decision-making about their protection and they themselves are supported with safety and information skills. It is a tenet of human rights that all rights must be considered holistically and there is no hierarchy of rights; thus, both protection and participation rights need to be respected, fulfilled, and supported.

NOTE

1. In this chapter, "children" is used to refer to children under the age of 18, as defined in Article 1 of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989).

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PART II

YOUTH ACTIVISM IN SPECIFIC GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS

5. Youth activism in Ukraine before and during the Russia–Ukraine war

Olena Nikolayenko

Ukrainian youth have witnessed a broad spectrum of political changes since the collapse of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. These monumental changes created a wealth of opportunities for youth activism, yet they also presented a plethora of challenges. The emergence of a multiparty political system and the growth of independent media provided a fertile ground for political competition in the country situated between the European Union (EU), on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other (Ryabinska, 2017; Way, 2015). Compared to their peers in neighboring Belarus and Russia (Hemment, 2015; Krawatzek, 2016; 2019; Omelchenko, 2021; Silvan, 2022), Ukrainian youth could participate in genuinely competitive elections and more freely articulate their opinions on various public policy issues, including the rule of law, the quality of education, and national security. Erpyleva (2018), for example, finds that Ukrainian adolescents subscribed to the ethic of personal independence and freedom in the public sphere, while Russian adolescents perceived themselves as incompetent political actors. Yet, though the former Soviet republic was gradually shaking off communist-era legacies of social control, democratic institutions were quite fragile and corruption was rampant (Hale and Orttung, 2016; Herron, 2020).

Likewise, the transition from a planned economy to a market economy had far-reaching consequences for youth's participation in the labor market. The introduction of market reforms widened the range of available career options and stimulated the development of entrepreneurship (Roberts et al., 1998; Roberts and Fagan, 1999). Once known as the breadbasket of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became a major exporter of wheat, corn, and sunflower oil. Ukraine also experienced the dynamic growth of the Information Technology (IT) sector, accounting for 8.3 percent of total exports in 2020 and employing approximately 200 000 IT specialists, especially recent university graduates (Dickinson, 2021). Concurrently, the arrival of capitalism increased the incidence of poverty and socioeconomic inequality (Predborska, 2005; Yurchenko et al., 2021).

Ukrainian youth also experienced a fundamental change in the cultural sphere. In particular, state authorities and civil society actors launched various initiatives to revive Ukrainian culture and undo the enduring effects of Russification, the policy of forced cultural assimilation in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Kulyk, 2018; Rewakowicz, 2017). For example, the percentage of universities with Ukrainian as the language of instruction increased from 61.6 percent in 1997 to 91.6 percent in 2013 (Karmazina, 2014, p. 264). Meanwhile, Ukraine joined the Bologna Process in 2005, which accelerated the internationalization of higher education in the post-Soviet period (Kushnarenko and Knutson, 2014; Zakharchuk, 2020). Young Ukrainians displayed a keen interest in international travel and studying abroad. According to some estimates by the think tank CEDOS, the number of Ukrainian students at foreign universities tripled between 2008 and 2017, with Poland as the most popular destination (Stadnyi, 2019). The number of Ukrainian students at Polish universities increased tenfold from 2831 in

2008 to 33 370 in 2017. Furthermore, young people became producers and consumers of innovative Ukrainian-language cultural products in art, film, literature, and music (Helbig, 2014; Naydan, 2005). Most recently, the Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra won the 2022 Eurovision Song Contest by performing the Ukrainian-language song *Stefania*, representing an original blend of rap and folk music.

Another tremendous change occurred in Ukrainian foreign policy (D'Anieri, 2019; Schmidtke and Yekelchyk, 2016). Over the past three decades, Ukrainians repeatedly took to the streets to reaffirm their aspirations to live in a free, European country and defend their homeland against Russia's imperial ambitions (Emeran, 2017; Kowal et al., 2019; Onuch, 2014). In the fall of 2004, thousands of Ukrainians, including many university students, protested against vote rigging during the presidential elections and reasserted their right to choose the country's path of development (Wilson, 2005). In November 2013, a cross-cutting coalition of social forces, representing people of different ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, again occupied Independence Square (*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*) in the capital city of Kyiv and demanded the country's movement toward European integration (Channell-Justice, 2022). The 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity, also known as the EuroMaidan, culminated in the removal of the incumbent from power and the subsequent signing of an Association Agreement with the EU.¹ Among other things, this economic partnership enabled visa-free travel of Ukrainian citizens to the Schengen area and facilitated the cross-national diffusion of ideas.

In recent years, Russia's war on Ukraine has had a profound impact on Ukrainian youth. In the spring of 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, a peninsula located in the Black Sea, and provided military backing for separatists in eastern Ukraine (Grant, 2015; Kuzio, 2022). As a result of Russia's military intervention, over 14 000 people, including approximately 3000 civilians, were killed in the conflict-affected areas between April 2014 and January 2022 (International Crisis Group, 2022; OHCHR, 2022a, p. 4). The number of casualties has grown exponentially in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights officially recorded 6595 deaths of civilians between 24 February and 20 November 2022 (OHCHR, 2022b). Meanwhile, the mayor of Mariupol claimed that over 22 000 civilians died in the besieged port city alone (Mazurenko, 2022). UNICEF estimated that at least two children had been killed daily between February and June 2022 (United Nations, 2022a). Numerous human rights organizations documented war crimes committed by Russian soldiers, including rape of children and adolescents, torture of civilians in occupied territories, and systematic shelling of civilian infrastructure in residential areas (Human Rights Watch, 2022; United Nations, 2022b; Wamsley, 2022). The largest ground war in Europe since World War II has caused enormous migration of people. In addition to eight million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 6.5 million people, mostly women and children, left the war-torn country by May 2022 (UN Refugee Agency, 2022). Concurrently, with a few exceptions, men aged between 18 and 60 were banned from leaving the country in anticipation that they might be called to fight against the Russian army.² The war sparked the growth of civic activism related to the provision of humanitarian relief for IDPs, the collection of donations for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the counteraction of Russia's disinformation campaigns.

This chapter takes stock of existing English-language scholarship on different forms of youth activism in contemporary Ukraine. Ukrainian youth's diverse experiences have received surprisingly little attention in youth studies. A search for articles on Ukrainian youth published

between 1992 and 2022 in the top five interdisciplinary journals such as *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *Journal of Youth Studies*, *YOUNG*, and *Youth and Society*, yielded only three articles that examined Ukrainian youth activism, two of which focused on subnational differences in youth action (Beacháin and Polese, 2010; Predborska, 2005; Tereshchenko, 2012). Most academic sources cited in the chapter are English-language articles published in peer-reviewed journals between 2010 and 2022.

The chapter focuses on youth activism related to (1) free and fair elections; (2) pro-European foreign policy; and (3) national security. Broadly construed, the concept of activism denotes “action for social change” and includes “protest events and actions, advocacy for causes, and information dissemination to raise consciousness” (Sherrod, 2006, p. 1). An examination of youth activism proceeds in a chronological manner, moving from the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity to the Russia–Ukraine war. A brief overview of public opinion in contemporary Ukraine precedes the discussion of empirical research on youth activism.

It should also be noted that the age boundaries of youth are defined somewhat differently by various scholars and policymakers. According to Ukraine’s Law on Key Principles of Youth Policy (2021), youth are defined as individuals aged between 14 and 35.³ Meanwhile, for statistical purposes, the United Nations defines youth as people aged between 15 and 24.⁴ The share of 15–24-year-old people in Ukraine’s total population dropped from 14 percent in 1991 to 9 percent in 2021.⁵ A host of factors, including the declining birth rates, migration flows, and the Russia–Ukraine war, contributed to a decline in the youth population (for an overview, see Romaniuk and Gladun, 2015).

Despite a relatively small size of youth population, young people hold the potential to act as agents of change (Diuk, 2013; Krawatzek, 2022). According to the life-course theory (Braungart and Braungart, 1986), young people are more likely than older age groups to challenge the ruling elite and revolt against the status quo. Generational replacement in countries undergoing dramatic social transformations further elevates the importance of youth. The young generation socialized in the post-Soviet period has had more opportunities and resources for civic activism than prior generations socialized under communism. Compared to young people in the Soviet Union, youth in contemporary Ukraine can exercise a greater degree of political freedoms and civil liberties due to the emergence of a multiparty political system and independent media. Moreover, Russia’s barbaric invasion of Ukraine galvanized many young people into action and deepened their commitment to democratic development and national independence.

YOUTH’S POLITICAL OUTLOOK

Voluminous sociological research has investigated youth’s support for democracy and democratic institutions in Ukraine since the collapse of communism (Diuk, 2012; Kayalar, 2016; Kuzio, 2006a; Nikolayenko, 2011). To assess prospects for democratization in Central and Eastern Europe, numerous studies have analyzed pro-democracy attitudes of the general public in the 1990s (Haerpfer, 2002; Reisinger et al., 1994; Rose et al., 1998). One of the main findings in this literature was that younger, better-educated urban residents were most supportive of democracy during the transition period. There has been renewed interest in the political

attitudes of Ukrainian youth in the wake of the 2004 and 2013–2014 protests to advance the consolidation of democracy (Bondarevskaya et al., 2022). Drawing on in-depth interviews and a survey of students at 14 Ukrainian universities (n=1043), Kamionka (2020) found that Ukrainian students were quite critical of the quality of democracy in their home country in 2017–2018, and one-third of survey respondents declared their readiness to participate in long-term protests. Research also indicates that civic education programs implemented by Polish NGOs from 2014 to 2018 boosted a sense of political efficacy among 18–21-year-old Ukrainians (Pospieszna et al., 2022).

Another strand of research has analyzed youth's conceptions of national identity and foreign policy orientation (Chaban et al., 2021; Chaban and Witten, 2021; Fournier, 2018; Klymenko, 2020; Kotarski, 2017; Onuch and Arkwright, 2021; Peacock, 2015; Sabatovych, 2019; Tartakovsky, 2011). Language is widely seen as a critical element of nation-building. Yet, there was a debate in Ukrainian society, especially in the 1990s, about the legal status of the Russian language and mechanisms for fostering the use of the Ukrainian language in different domains (Bilaniuk and Melnyk, 2008). Through her ethnographic research in Lviv, Peacock (2015) observed class-based differences in youth's conceptions of the relationship between language use and national identity. A related finding in this literature was the juxtaposition of Ukrainian national identity and Russian imperialism. Drawing on focus group discussions with 18–22-year-old students at various institutions of higher education in the city of Poltava, located in central Ukraine, Klymenko (2020) showed how young Ukrainians imagine their nation in terms of such features as the socio-political order, cultural traditions, and mentality. Among national character traits, Poltava students emphasized "loyalty to Ukraine as a sovereign state, independent from Russia" (p. 133). However, research suggests that Ukrainian youth hold more favorable views of the EU than their home country. Based upon surveys of students in Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Odesa, Chaban and Whitten (2021, p. 599) concluded that Ukrainian students perceive the EU in normatively positive terms and "the national Self" in normatively negative terms.

Considerable attention has concentrated on regional differences in the political outlook of young people and in particular the east–west cleavage. As a result of substantial differences in the history of colonization, the implementation of Soviet-era population policies, the structure of the local economy, and the composition of the ruling elite, there was a stark contrast between Donetsk and Lviv at the dawn of Ukraine's transition from communism (Hrytsak, 1998; Malanchuk, 2018). Located 45 miles from the Polish border, Lviv was a driving force behind the restoration of Ukrainian statehood and the revival of Ukrainian culture. In contrast, bordering on Russia's Rostov region, Donetsk positioned itself as an economic powerhouse, with a web of coal mines and heavy industry factories. According to the 2001 census, ethnic Ukrainians comprised 94.8 percent of the population in Lviv oblast (province) and 56.9 percent in Donetsk oblast.⁶ Moreover, 95.3 percent of Lviv oblast residents and only 24.1 percent of Donetsk residents regarded Ukrainian as their mother tongue (*ridna mova*). Against this backdrop, scholars explored subnational differences in youth attitudes toward political processes in the country. Tereshchenko (2012), for example, analyzed different conceptions of citizenship among 15–18-year-old students in western and eastern parts of the country in the wake of the Orange Revolution. More recently, Howlett (2022) explored how young people in Ukraine's borderlands – Chernihiv, Volyn, and Zakarpattia – engaged with national narratives related to the EuroMaidan in 2014–2015. Regional differences in youth's political attitudes, however, are likely to decrease over time. Onuch and Arkwright (2021), for example, found

that ethnicity and language were not key determinants of youth attitudes toward EU accession in the spring of 2019.

Nadia Diuk's (2012) book, *The Next Generation in Russia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan: Youth, Politics, Identity, and Change*, provides an in-depth analysis of the political attitudes of 16–34-year-old people in three former Soviet republics. Polling for this study was conducted in 2003 and 2010, which yields valuable insights into youth's attitudes and lifestyles across countries and over time. One of the characteristics that set young Ukrainians apart from their Azerbaijani and Russian peers was a low level of trust in government. In 2003, for example, 72.5 percent of young Ukrainians, compared to 17.4 percent of Azerbaijanis and 12.6 percent of Russians, reported lack of confidence in the incumbent president. Likewise, despite the turnover of power, 78.4 percent of young Ukrainians expressed little or no confidence in the president in 2010. Yet, disillusionment with political leaders did not necessarily translate into political apathy. The remainder of the chapter highlights multiple ways in which young Ukrainians became involved in politics.

YOUTH AND ELECTIONS

Free and fair elections are an essential attribute of democracy. Since 1991, Ukraine held six presidential elections and eight parliamentary elections, resulting in the regular turnover of power.⁷ Given a great deal of public discontent with the government, Ukrainians routinely voted the incumbent out of office. To date, only Leonid Kuchma, a former manager of the largest rocket factory in the Soviet Union, has served two presidential terms (1994–2005). In 2003, Kuchma published a ghost-written book, titled *Ukraine is not Russia*. Unlike the chief executive in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin in Russia, along with Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Belarus, has been in power for more than two decades. Nonetheless, some elections in post-communist Ukraine were marred by gross violations of democratic procedures. In turn, different modes of youth activism emerged to enhance electoral integrity and advance democratization processes.

The 2004 presidential election was marked by a high level of youth activism at a turning point in Ukrainian history. The election campaign was a battle between Viktor Yanukovych, former governor of Donetsk oblast, and Viktor Yushchenko, former head of the National Bank of Ukraine. The majority of young voters, especially in central and western parts of the country, supported Yushchenko's candidacy because he campaigned on the promise of accelerating European integration and implementing robust market reforms. Yanukovych, on the other hand, favored an economic partnership with Russia. A number of youth-led initiatives were launched to boost youth voter turnout, monitor the quality of elections, and organize post-election protests. For example, the civic initiative *Znaiu!* (I Know) aimed at voter education and voter mobilization was spearheaded by Kateryna Botanova, Petro Koshukov, and Dmytro Potekhin. Inspired by the example of such youth movements as Otpor (Resistance) in Serbia, Zubr (Bison) in Belarus, and Kmara (Enough) in Georgia, Ukrainian youth formed a similar youth movement named Pora (It's Time). A group of activists from Kyiv and Lviv, including Andriy Kohut, Volodymyr Viatrovych, and Yaryna Yasynevych, established the youth movement that later became known as black Pora. Another group of activists from Kyiv and Kharkiv, including Anastasiya Bezverkha, Vladyslav Kaskiv, and Ostap Kryvdyk, coalesced into the youth movement known as yellow Pora. These two youth groups were distinguished based on the main colors of their print material (black or yellow). Putting aside some

tensions among movement leaders, hundreds of youth activists participated in election-related activities organized by these movements. Young people joined street actions, distributed leaflets, handed out stickers, and pitched tents to press for democratic change. Beissinger (2013, p. 581) estimates that 23 percent of participants in the 2004 post-election protests were aged between 18 and 25. Though young people did not make up the majority of the protest movement, youthful protesters played an important role in employing methods of nonviolent resistance in a creative manner and mobilizing other strata of society.

Copious research has analyzed the causes and consequences of youth activism during the 2004 Orange Revolution, constituting a part of the wave of electoral revolutions across the post-Soviet region (Beacháin and Polese, 2010; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006; 2007; Emeran, 2017; Fournier, 2007; 2012; Kuzio, 2006b; Nikolayenko, 2007; 2015). Scholars have identified a mix of structural and agency-centric factors associated with a spike in youth activism during national elections. Beacháin and Polese (2010, p. 619), for example, attribute the rise of youth movements to a synergy of five factors: “elite attitudes, the character of the opposition, the role of external forces, civil society activities, and the attitude of local population.” In the book, *Youth Movements and Elections in Eastern Europe*, Nikolayenko (2017) traces how the use of innovative tactics facilitated anti-regime mobilization. A consistent finding in the literature is that past participation in anti-government protests is a strong predictor of civic activism. Drawing on in-depth interviews with five civic activists, Emeran (2017) provides valuable insight into an individual’s decision to get involved in the 2000–2001 Ukraine without Kuchma movement, the 2004 Orange Revolution, and the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity. Emeran (2017), for example, observes that “the actions taken by these individuals to redefine their socially defined roles as youth, dissatisfied and passive, were necessary conditions for activism to occur” (p. 74). Following the EuroMaidan, some youth activists overcame their aversion to the dirty business of politics to propel the implementation of robust reforms by virtue of their representation in government.

STUDENT ACTIVISM AND THE EUROMAIDAN

The 2013–2014 protests were initially triggered by the incumbent’s decision to suspend the process of signing an Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013. Thousands of university students took to the streets, demanding the government’s renewed commitment to European integration (Olearchyk, 2013). Students occupied Independence Square in the capital city and called for a strike. In response, the riot police deployed excessive force against peaceful protesters. Early in the morning on 30 November, the police charged into the square and ruthlessly hit protesters with batons to crush civil resistance to the regime (Matviichuk, 2014). Yet, state repression produced a backlash.

The protest movement grew in size and became more diverse, bringing together people of different ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and political leanings (Onuch and Sasse, 2016). Furthermore, protesters expanded the scope of their demands, calling for the resignation of the incumbent government, the release of detained protesters, and a transparent investigation of cases of police violence. More broadly, protesters demanded greater respect for human dignity by the ruling elite (Nikolayenko, 2020). On 3 February, 80 percent of respondents in an on-site survey of Kyiv-based protesters indicated they were willing to protest “as long as it takes” (*stil’ky, skil’ky bude treba*).⁸ Despite a high level of police violence and the deaths of nearly

one hundred people (Aronson et al., 2018), regime opponents persevered in their struggle for democracy and the European future and occupied the urban space until Yanukovych's ouster from office.

Given the salience of student activism, especially during the initial phase of the EuroMaidan, it caught scholarly attention (Channell-Justice, 2014; 2019; Junes, 2016). Junes (2016) argued that Ukrainian students were at the forefront of the 1990 Revolution on Granite, the Orange Revolution, and the EuroMaidan. Based upon ethnographic research and work with the independent student union Direct Action and the Student Coordinating Committee, Channell-Justice (2014) uncovered how university students seized an opportunity to draw public attention to the quality of higher education and in particular the quality of student life. In late February 2014, students occupied the building of the Ministry of Education and Science to demand reforms in the education sector and have a voice in the appointment of the new Minister of Education and Science. The Student Assembly endorsed the candidacy of Serhiy Kvit, president of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA) and a former Fulbright scholar, and the national parliament voted in favor of his appointment. Yet, the implementation of robust reforms in the education sector and the promotion of university autonomy came under threat with the notorious appointment of Serhiy Shkarlet as the minister in December 2020, which ignited another wave of student protests spearheaded by NaUKMA student organizations (Hunder, 2022). To date, the quality of education, along with the obstruction of reforms by some political forces, is a matter of utmost concern to Ukrainian students.

WARTIME ACTIVISM

Russia's war on Ukraine has spawned the development of civic activism in the war-torn society (Stepaniuk, 2022; Worschecch, 2017). Stepaniuk's (2022) ethnographic work, for example, shows that ordinary citizens in "seemingly passive regions", located in eastern and southern parts of the country, volunteered out of "local security concerns and affective reactions to the heightened precarity of others" (p. 1). It should also be stressed that a variety of informal social networks and volunteer groups, rather than non-governmental organizations, assumed a crucial role in addressing societal problems (Sereda, 2018). Young people became involved in various civic initiatives, providing humanitarian aid for IDPs, crowdfunding for the Ukrainian military, and waging information warfare against Russia's propaganda machine. According to nationally representative surveys conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2015), the amount of volunteer time has increased since the onset of Russia's military intervention, and young people emerged at the forefront of volunteer activities in their communities. For example, 31.7 percent of 18–29-year-olds, compared to 20.4 percent of those over 60, donated several hours of their time weekly to a social cause. Two-thirds of volunteer work and monetary donations in 2015 were geared towards assistance for the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

A growing body of research examines the role of information and communication technologies in affording multiple forms of civic engagement in Ukraine (Bohdanova, 2014; Lokot, 2021; Pospieszna and Galus, 2019). Given the heavy consumption of social media (Internews, 2022), young people extensively and creatively used various social media platforms to sustain a protest movement and support the war effort. Crowdfunding – raising small amounts of

money from a large number of people via social media – has become a salient feature of youth activism during the EuroMaidan and the ensuing war. In the absence of adequate state funding, ordinary citizens raised funds to purchase military gear for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, secure medical supplies for combat medics, and provide medical treatment for war veterans (Boichak and Asmolov, 2021; Hunter, 2018). Come Back Alive (*Povernys' zhivym*), one of the largest civic initiatives since 2014, raised funds to supply technology, training, and accoutrements for the military and, for example, purchased more than 1000 thermal imagers for soldiers on the frontline.⁹ Moreover, social media has become a popular venue for waging information warfare and fostering a sense of community. Focusing on the city of Mariupol, Boichak and Jackson (2020) showed how local activists employ social media to facilitate the construction of national identity in a fragile state. In addition, hacktivism – the use of computer-based techniques for a socially or politically motivated reason – has drawn academic attention amidst the rise of digital resistance to Russia's aggression. An analysis of Twitter posts by pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian hacker groups engaged in DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks unravels how these groups construct a collective identity of “patriotic hackers” (Lokot, 2017).

Furthermore, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 triggered a wave of young men and women's volunteering to defend their homeland by joining the Territorial Defense Force (*Terytorialna oborona*). According to the Law on the Fundamentals of National Resistance (2021), these formations were charged with the task to “ensure security and order behind the frontline, assist the armed forces in combat operations, guard key infrastructure facilities, and render assistance in combating hostile subversive activities in their local areas” (Ponomarenko, 2022). In December 2021, amidst concerns over the heavy concentration of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border, 29 percent of 18–24-year-old people expressed their readiness to join territorial defense forces (Ukrainian Institute for the Future, 2022). An abundance of media reports documents the motivations and modes of youth's involvement in armed resistance against the Russian army. For example, in an interview with *Deutsche Welle* (2022), 25-year-old Marharyta recounts how Russia's full-scale invasion transformed her life:

My life consisted of sports, learning Spanish, meeting friends and my love of traveling. Then suddenly it was all gone. When Russia invaded Ukraine again on February 24, that was it for me. My family was in Kharkiv and I was alone in Kyiv. Fleeing was not an option. That's why I joined the Territorial Defense Force. Now my new reality consists of falling asleep and waking to the wail of sirens, and learning new skills. I had completed a first-aid course before and that's how I was able to join the Territorial Defense Force and offer medical assistance. My job is to track down medicine and help with patients. Right now I am training to be able to treat the wounded.

At the time of this writing, the Russia–Ukraine war continues to rage, causing significant disruptions in the lives of young people. Nonetheless, Ukrainians display the will to fight for national independence, territorial integrity, and democratic development. In particular, Ukrainian youth stoically wage a struggle against Russia's aggression and creatively reassert people's aspirations to live in a free, democratic state.

CONCLUSION

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, Ukrainian society was shaken up by at least two revolutions (the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity) and Russia’s barbaric war. Against this backdrop, Ukrainian youth have engaged in forms of activism such as voter mobilization, protest participation, volunteering, and crowdfunding for a social cause. A set of key issues tackled by youth activists and discussed in this chapter included electoral integrity, foreign policy, and national security. Taken as a whole, this body of literature shows that young people can act as agents of change in a society with fragile democratic institutions and a relatively small youth population. In particular, young people can be quite visible and vociferous in articulating their dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and demanding political change.

One of the main findings that emerges from the nascent research on wartime activism is that the Russia–Ukraine war united Ukrainian society and provided a catalyst for youth’s greater engagement in state-building and nation-building processes. Faced with the threat to Ukraine’s national independence, young people put aside their dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and joined the war effort on the frontlines and the home front. Among other things, Russia’s invasion triggered a switch to the Ukrainian language among Russian-speaking citizens in order to distinguish themselves from the occupying force and signal their allegiance to Ukraine’s statehood (Walker, 2022). Furthermore, the EuroMaidan and the ensuing war engendered the growth of transnational activism. For example, young Ukrainian Americans in New York City set up the non-profit organization Razom, which means “together” in Ukrainian, to support democratic development and provide critical humanitarian war relief for the citizens of Ukraine (Kovalchuk and Korzh, 2020). Future research should explore multifaceted ways in which the Russia–Ukraine war has shaped youth’s political attitudes and civic engagement.

Following Ukraine’s anticipated victory in the war against Russia, the country’s struggle for democracy is far from over. Ukraine faces plenty of policy challenges pertinent to post-war reconstruction, eradication of corruption, poverty reduction, and improvement of the quality of education. Having suffered staggering human and economic losses during the Russia–Ukraine war, Ukrainian society needs to develop and implement a robust plan for post-war reconstruction. Despite the conduct of competitive elections, state authorities have yet to root out corruption to uphold the rule of law and improve the functioning of a market economy. The Ukrainian government should also implement reforms in the education sector to spur innovation and better prepare students for participation in the global economy. A host of political and socioeconomic reforms are necessary to meet the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. The young generation will play a vital role in strengthening the quality of governance and advancing Ukraine’s European integration.

NOTES

1. In this chapter, I use the terms EuroMaidan and the Revolution of Dignity interchangeably to refer to mass mobilization against the regime from November 2013 to February 2014.
2. For an English-language summary of the martial law introduced by President Volodymyr Zelensky in February 2022, visit the webpage of the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-03-03/ukraine-martial-law-introduced-in-response-to-russian-invasion/>.

3. The full text of the Law is available in the online legal database of Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's national parliament, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1414-20#n356>.
4. On this point, see the webpage of the United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>.
5. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea and occupation of parts of Donetsk oblast (province) and Luhansk oblast in 2014, the size of Ukraine's total population in territories under the government's control officially dropped to 42.8 million people the next year, signifying that as many as 2.5 million people resided in territories under Russian occupation. Author's estimates of youth population are calculated using data retrieved from the online archive *Statistics of Ukraine's Population*, State Statistics Service of Ukraine, http://database.ukrcensus.gov.ua/MULT/Dialog/statfile_c.asp.
6. Data are retrieved from the online archive of the 2001 Population Census conducted by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results>.
7. For details, see the *Election Guide* compiled by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/223/>.
8. The Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) conducted a survey of protesters in downtown Kyiv on 3 February 2014 (n=502). Six percent of the survey respondents were university students. For further details, see KIIS (2014).
9. On the activities of Come Back Alive, visit the website <https://www.comebackalive.in.ua/>.

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6. Why and how South Asian youth are involved in politics: a systematic review of literature

Yog Raj Lamichhane and Bharat Raj Dhakal

South Asia, as a subregion of Asia, is recognized for its geographical boundaries and cultural quirks, as well as for being home to some of the oldest civilizations. Among various regional, economic, and political bodies of the region, the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), an inter-governmental regional organization of eight countries consisting of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, is a dominant organization, which was formed in 1985. These nations have experienced great political and social changes. Youth have significantly contributed to these changes through different movements, mainly for independence and re/establishment of democracy as well as local issues. This chapter systematically reviews the literature on South Asian youth activism, qualitatively synthesizing the published journal articles from 2000 to 2022. Only the studies from the member nations of the SAARC are considered for review.

Youth is generally understood as the period of one's life between childhood and adulthood. Since member states and other organizations have varied definitions of youth, the United Nations Secretariat uses the terms "youth" and "young people" interchangeably to denote those between the ages of 15 and 24 (United Nations, n.d., p. 2). The UN uses such an age frame in defining youth for uniformity in maintaining global data. The biological identification of youth as age and a class of society becomes broader when they are also defined politically with regard to action. Thus, "understanding the concept of youth means understanding the relationship between young people and society" (Jones, 2009, p. 30). This highlights the role of social context in explaining the space to relate youth to action. However, this study remains flexible in terms of age and also includes students from higher education. Sometimes youth is defined in regard to age, whereas sometimes it is defined in terms of activeness. Therefore, while discussing youth activism in any study, one should not deny the agency of student politics or movement in its reference. This study presupposes that almost all university students are youth, but that all youth may not be students.

Youth, with their thought and action, bring some affirmative changes in the life of the nation as well as society. However, the engagement of young people in politics is, sometimes, not seen as productive. Consequently, it emerges that youth involvement in politics is perceived as both generative and violent. Particularly, in tracing the culture of youth activism in the twenty-first century, the following two questions that guide the study are:

- How do South Asian youths involve themselves in politics?
- What are the reasons for their engagement in youth activism?

There appears to be a noteworthy number of studies on youth activism in individual member states of SAARC, but there is virtually no coherent and collective study on this issue. In exploring the political dimensions of youth agency, this study draws on different disciplines,

such as history, cultural studies, and political science to ascertain patterns of youth activism in South Asia.

METHODOLOGY

Techniques of Identifying the Literature

Google Scholar, an academic search engine, was used to identify the papers for a systematic review of literature on youth activism. However, the actual papers were downloaded from different databases. In contrast to conventional databases, this search engine automatically indexes data from the academic web, and numerous researchers now utilize it as their first choice while conducting literature searches because of its simplicity, breadth of coverage, and quick indexing speed (López-Cózar et al., 2019, p. 95). Millions of academic records can be identified through the engine. Therefore, this study used Google Scholar to locate the journal articles for the systematic review.

Strategy of Searching Literature and Criteria for Selection

At first, the search was performed on Google Scholar to identify the papers on youth activism in South Asia for the qualitative systematic review. The terms for the advanced search were: (“youth activism” or “youth movement” or “youth politics” or “student activism” or “student movement” or “student politics”) and (“Nepal” or “India” or “Bhutan” or “Afghanistan” or “Maldives” or “Bangladesh” or “Sri Lanka” or “Pakistan”) in the title of the paper. Given these parameters, Google Scholar identified 100 documents, including journal articles, books, book chapters, book reviews, and so on. Among them, no documents were found concerning Bhutan or Maldives and there were hardly any results about Afghanistan or Pakistan according to the criteria. Moreover, journal articles were few and this study includes only journal articles for the review. So, instead of excluding these countries from the study, the present study obtained articles by searching again and being flexible in terms of keywords to incorporate the literature of these countries. Keeping the name of the concerned country intact, papers having any keyword among youth and student in the title were considered for the search. Through both processes, there appeared a corpus of 777 documents which were individually assessed, and finally, 29 journal articles on youth activism were selected for this review.

A corpus of literature is fundamental for a systematic review of the literature. In this study, the process of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of literature is shown in Figure 6.1. Similarly, the dominant theme of each selected paper is comprehensively presented in Table 6.1 in the results section.

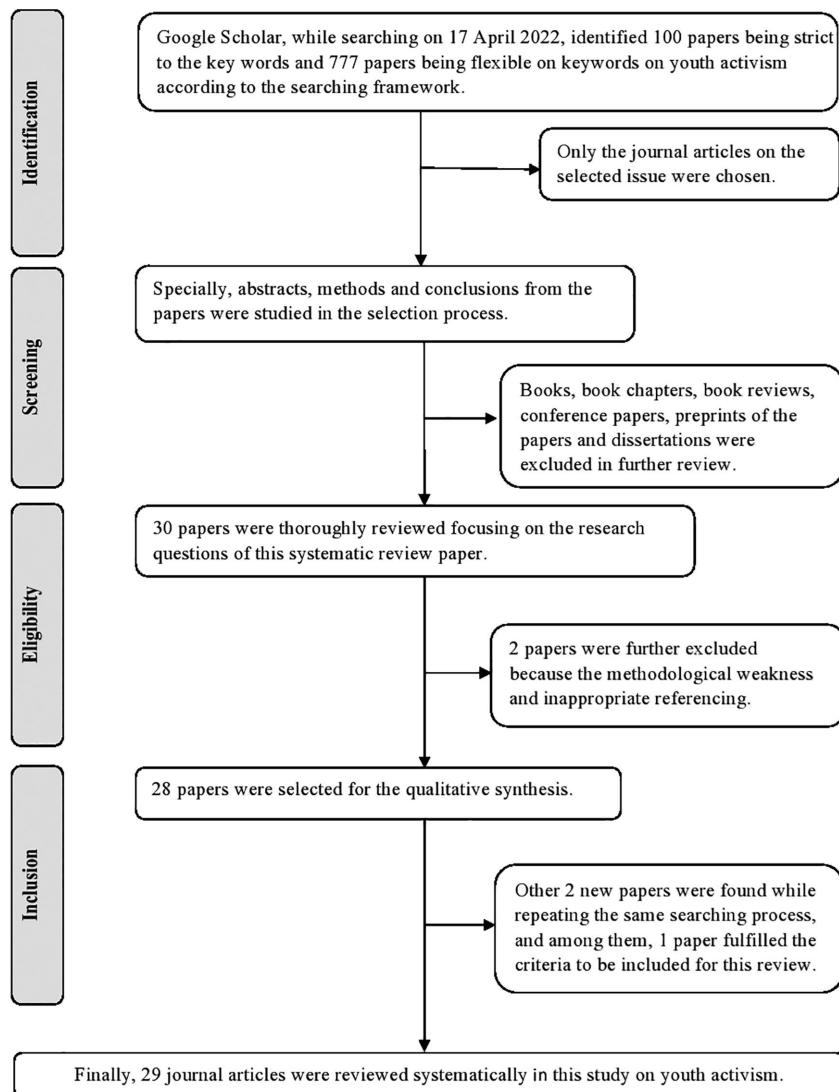


Figure 6.1 The procedure for selecting literature for the systematic review

Procedure of Systematically Reviewing the Selected Literature

A systematic review is itself a methodology as well as research. In the process of such a review, the researcher locates prior research, picks and assesses their contributions, examines and synthesizes data, and presents the evidence in a form that enables reasonably unambiguous inferences about existing knowledge, not existing knowledge, and expected knowledge. In this way, the review establishes a body of knowledge about the particular reviewed topic. The selected 29 papers were thoroughly scrutinized, especially focusing on the ideas concerning

research questions. Moreover, studies undertaken in non-South Asian settings were compared to the prevalent issues identified and examined by the current research in the results section.

Table 6.1 The dominant themes of the final selected papers

S.N.	Theme of the paper/s of the concerned nations	Author/s (Year)
Afghanistan		
1.	Conservative thought and action in the modern age	Giustozzi (2010)
2.	Youth against corruption	Wardak (2015)
3.	The disinterest of youth in politics	Orfan (2020)
Bangladesh		
4.	Violence and victimhood for vested interest	Suykens (2018)
5.	Student activism to party politics	Andersen (2019)
6.	Youth as the cadre of political parties	Kuttig (2019)
7.	Visibility through social media	Kuttig & Suykens (2020)
8.	Protest for great social and political issues	Talukdar et al. (2022)
Bhutan		
9.	Silent protest through social media	Christensen (2017)
India		
10.	Social reform in class, caste and religion	Jeffrey & Young (2012)
11.	Politics for community welfare through ICT	Ilavarasan (2013)
12.	Generative politics and changing the definition	Jeffrey & Dyson (2014)
13.	Social concern and destruction of autonomy	Urvashi (2018)
14.	Voice for great national concern	Sekar & Siwach (2022)
Maldives		
15.	Productive engagement for public progress	Rasheed et al. (2019)
Nepal		
16.	Freedom through self-agency	Fujikura (2001)
17.	The shift from radical to liberal politics	Snellinger (2005)
18.	Hopeful prospect despite the hostile environment	Zharkevich (2013)
19.	Procreative politics for the local community	Zharkevich (2019)
20.	Cultural turn and visibility	Lamichhane (2021)
Pakistan		
21.	Violent disagreement if non-violence neglected	Mullick (2008)
22.	Disillusionment with mainstream politics	Lall (2014)
23.	Religious versus secular agenda of student politics	Nelson (2011)
24.	Political discourses through social media	Ida et al. (2020)
25.	Nonviolent protest for student issues	Mushtaq et al. (2020)
Sri Lanka		
26.	Equal engagement despite different backgrounds	Abeyasinghe et al. (2009)
27.	A turn from grand agenda to local agenda	Samaranayake (2015)
28.	Violence as a means to establish a voice	Kumari & Fernando (2021)
29.	Threatening protest if not addressed	Kumari & Fernando (2022)

RESULTS

The dominant themes of all the selected 29 articles are presented in Table 6.1 along with the name of the nations, the authors, and the years of publication.

Afghanistan: Radical to Social and Ultimately to the Disinterested Notion in Politics

Generally, students are understood as youth with a wider horizon of thoughts and knowledge. With the knowledge and skills acquired from academic institutions and self-learning, they possess positive and progressive perceptions, which enable them to fight against backward, conservative thinking.

Throughout history, students have been important agents of affirmative change in the status quo of any nation. However, Giustozzi (2010) offers a grim picture of student politics in Afghanistan characterized by conservative notions. Comparing the significant shift in modern student politics of Afghanistan to the politics of earlier generations, Giustozzi finds the students of “the post-2001 period as much more conservative than their predecessors, for a number of reasons” (p. 4). Explaining the reasons as well as their implications, Giustozzi (2010) infers that the fundamentalist-controlled educational system created a more conservative mentality in modern youth than that of their parents (p. 4). The ideology of youth is largely shaped by the ideology and practices of the rulers of a nation. It is quite surprising that the youth who studied abroad also possess a similar mentality.

Conversely, youth play a significant role in the progress of any nation through various means. Instead of struggling against grand political agendas, youth are also seen in social campaigns. In this respect, Wardak (2015) traces the brighter aspect of youth immersion against corruption to establish a virtuous society supporting the government against the anti-corruption campaign (pp. 104–108). The creative undertaking of youth in such a social movement turns out to be a milestone for the bright future of the nation.

Similarly, social media, in today’s world, has been utilized by people of almost all age groups to express their opinion, and youth are no exception. Contradictorily, a study by Orfan (2021), examining youth involvement on Facebook during the 2019 presidential election, notices that youth in Afghanistan exhibit low engagement on political matters through Facebook, express very little commitment, take low risks, and expend little effort (p. 1). This nominal engagement of youth in political matters through social media may be because of the political system of the nation.

The overall observation of the youth initiatives in Afghanistan denotes that even in the first decade of the twenty-first century, youth possessed a conservative ideology. However, the scene has changed. Moreover, the youth have fought against corruption but are now disillusioned by the politics of the nation and exhibit disinterest in politics.

Bangladesh: Pervasive “Partyarchy” in Youth Activism

The youth movement in Bangladesh can be characterized as having much affinity for party politics. Much of the research depicts the youth movement as adopting violent means to fulfil political agendas. A shift from student politics to party politics can be observed in Bangladeshi student activities.

The student movement, in its early phase, appeared to germinate spontaneously. However, with the gradual expansion and emergence of complexities to their movements, students have taken recourse to political parties. Andersen (2019) observes the transformation process of student politics into party politics at Dhaka University in Bangladesh where: “paying attention to the minutiae of organizational dynamics – the everyday interactions and intimate relations – is productive in understanding not just youth activism and the working of political organi-

zations, but also the making of shared political identities, which transform individuals from students into activists” (p. 14). Such practice legitimizes the active existence of student wings of political parties in academia, and students set their journey to parliament from the halls of their campuses. Especially in the inner dynamics of forming groups, the intimate communication and civic performance of student activism support active party politics (Andersen, 2019, p. 1). In this sense, universities become unacknowledged training centres for party politics.

Another study on youth activism also shows that youth from Bangladesh are strongly affiliated to party politics. Talukdar et al. (2022) describe youth who have been strictly controlled by the party structure, giving them no space to raise their voices; however, recently, they have expressed their dissatisfaction by protesting in the streets, signifying hope for democracy (p. 1). Given the demands of the time, youth are considered to have a great deal of resilience, but the “partyarchy” has curtailed their flexibility. Nevertheless, some glimpses of hope are also observed as “today’s youth are committed to ensuring that human rights, the rule of law, equality, and fundamental freedoms are completely upheld in their efforts to improve democracy, create inclusiveness, and increase societies’ resilience” (Talukdar et al., 2022, p. 9). This is the hope for both youth and democracy.

Though violence is generally perceived negatively as a destructive means, which creates many victims, sometimes it can also be utilized as a means to obtain political benefits, where victims themselves capitalize on their victimhood. Highlighting the surprising use of productive political violence in the case of student politics in Bangladesh, Suykens (2018) interprets student violence:

as a means of gaining access to party-state resources and patronage. Violence operates to mark out and maintain power relations between student groups and factions ... While actively engaging in political violence provides legitimacy within student hierarchies, victimhood provides a powerful means of publicly displaying one’s commitment to a political party. (p. 883)

Such application of political violence in student activism enhances the access and authority of its users in party politics as well as state resources, and the endurance of victimhood is further utilized in capitalizing on one’s political future.

Despite the spontaneous involvement of students in social and political matters, in many cases youth are also seen as a tool to be utilized by politicians for their petty interests. In the context of the Rajshahi University of Bangladesh, Kuttig (2019) explores how student politics are shaped by party ideology where “student groups in Bangladesh are closely affiliated to political parties and serve as their most important source for mobilization in a party-political regime commonly referred to as a ‘partyarchy’” (p. 1). Such partyarchy minimizes the agency of student activism by utilizing the strength of youth as an instrument for the party and party leaders.

To obtain political and social visibility, youth use many tools. In this regard, social media have offered their users ample opportunities for social and political recognition. In the case of Bangladesh, “student politicians ... have become adept at using Facebook as a performative tool” (Kuttig and Suykens, 2020, p. 27). Thus, social media seems to be transformed into political media. In this virtual reality, students can effectively turn everyday life into a performance by moving to the digital sphere, turning the ordinary into a spectacle whereby ordinary events can get political interpretation when executed on social media (p. 27). Thus, the digitalization of politics has transformed Political Science into Performance Studies and street politics into online politics.

Thus, the youth movement in Bangladesh is strongly affiliated with politics. The studies on youth activism explore the fact that instead of being heavily engaged in social and cultural matters as well as students' own concerns, the youth of Bangladesh appear to be heavily politicized where personal political progress is preferred in comparison to the public welfare.

Bhutan: Silent Resistance Through Media

It does not always seem to be the case that resistance takes the form of violence. Sometimes, silence and unusual behaviour can be the means of protest. In this regard, taking a surprising story of a legendary man retold by a respondent while conducting an interview for research on freedom of speech and youth activism with a student using a pseudonym at a campus in Bhutan as a reference, Christensen (2017) reports that the college authorities had set up CCTV cameras around campus and the hostels, which was strongly opposed by the students. One male student started making fun of the cameras in public. He loudly told the camera what vegetables he intended to buy and in what quantities. Some students say he was called in for a talk with the college authorities (p. 101). The allegorical protest, which was performed in front of the CCTV camera, represents the "democracy" of Bhutan and the rage of youth towards authority. Even in the discussion related to student activism, the anonymity of informants is guaranteed by the use of pseudonyms, which describes the condition of freedom of speech. In the case of self-censored student activism on campus, "the online silent protest and the consumption of the online content represent the practice of private opposition, an active disagreement with the non-discourse on sensitive issues" (Christensen, 2017, p. 103). The silent online protest of students from the campuses of Bhutan against authorities establishes the crucial role of the internet.

India: Youth Initiatives for Social and National Concerns

Indian youth appear to be constructively engaged in topics of both local and national concerns. Their involvement in creative politics for national issues as well as for community welfare and social reform through the eradication of discrimination based on class, caste, and religion gives a sanguine picture of the enthusiastic youth of India. However, sometimes, Indian youths' involvement in party politics has also resulted in the loss of their autonomy.

Politics is generally understood as a power play. However, Jeffrey and Dyson (2014) examine the nature of the civic form of politics of youth in Uttarakhand, India and reveal "how it might be reimagined as 'generative'—concerned with building resources—rather than 'allocative'—a zero-sum game of competition for power" (p. 994). Thus, in generative politics, no party is a loser. All are winners, as are the youth from Uttarakhand. To explain such politics, Jeffrey and Dyson (2014) narrate an event in 2012 in which there was initial conflict regarding the failure of a water pipeline in different parts of a Himalayan village. A group of young men got together, fixed pipes, checked water tanks, and restored the water supply, but the work involved a lot of discussion and negotiation with other villagers. After the problem was resolved, one of them joked, "Aaj bahut rajnitik ka kaam ho gaya" [That all involved a lot of political work] (p. 967). Keeping service at the centre, the youth have added different definitions of politics, which appear as an indication of their existence as political beings in a society.

Similarly, modern youth overtly disdain politics but proactively involve themselves in civic activities. Ilavarasan (2013) shows: “how youth in India understand, get involved in, and actively use information and communication technologies (ICT) … Helping the needy outside of work and college is a common form of community work for young Indians. Others engage with their communities through paid work at non-governmental organizations” (p. 284). This research clarifies that young Indians are involved in politics for social welfare through the use of ICT. Ilavarasan (2013) points out that while most contemporary young Indians are apolitical, there are some notable exceptions whose “civic engagement is greater than the political activism dimension” (p. 297). This indicates the shifting politics of young Indians in ICT.

In contrast, the youth of India seem equally active in politics of national concern. The youth actively raise their voice against the government if they find some fault in its decisions and policies. For example, in reaction to the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by the government of India, a protest erupted across India. A significant number of offline and online demonstrations occurred both in support of and against the CAA. In this context, Sekar and Siwach (2022) analyse the political engagement of Indian youth on social media during the time of the CAA protest and observe that the modern young Indians were using social media effectively. The use of social media enabled youth activists to create a kind of “digital discourse” and spread their political convictions.

Youth activism in India seems to have multifaceted dimensions, ranging from rebelling against mainstream political reforms to raising their voices for major social and cultural improvements, particularly in religion, caste, and class. In an ethnographic study conducted in Uttar Pradesh in India, Jeffrey and Young (2012) observe how the sociopolitical movement of young, educated university students from the *Dalit* community challenged long-held misconceptions that they do not have any self-agency and always have to “wait” for generations since they do not have consciousness of their goals (p. 638). The study highlights the role of such underprivileged youth and their struggle against economic marginalization and subordination in academic institutions.

Similarly, studying the history of student politics ranging from the colonial to post-colonial period of India, Urvashi (2018) traces the significant shift in methods and issues of great national interest like nationalism through direct rejection of European colonization to local concerns such as corruption, caste discrimination, and secularism. However, these student organizations started to become affiliated with the mainstream political parties and, as a result, the “political parties inside universities and colleges have destroyed their autonomy and academic atmosphere and stimulated political activism among students” (Urvashi, 2018, p. 177). Further, the academic institutions could not remain aloof from political intrusions, and this kind of association with different political parties also divided student organizations with varied ideologies of their affiliated parties.

Consequently, breaking with the stereotypical and distorted representation, the youth movement in India creates a positive image as they have been successful in establishing themselves as agents of change at both local and national levels. Youth have also established themselves as the voice of the nation and the voice of the voiceless.

Maldives: Generative Politics of Youth for Social Service

Youth are pillars of change. Youth with affirmative thoughts and unselfish actions are considered a boon to any nation. The youth of the Maldives are a typical example of this, as depicted

in the study of Rasheed et al. (2019), which explores youth participation in community service, especially in economic work. Youths' active and noble involvement in community work is helping to lead a nation on the path to prosperity. Various factors play a significant role in such engagement of youth in social work. This study identifies four major factors that contribute to Maldivian youths' community activities, including "community characteristics, family life, employment opportunities and education" (Rasheed et al., 2019, p. 31). The determinants of youths' positive engagement in social life may not always necessarily be associated with a nation's politics. Sometimes, youth can identify with a role model in their community. Similarly, family support and education, along with opportunities for employment, foster optimistic thinking and action in youth.

Nepal: Dynamic Shifts in the Youth Movement and Rays of Hope

The Nepali youth/student movement appears to be zestful. Rather than engaging in destructive activities, the youth of Nepal exhibit a great deal of involvement in constructive social, cultural, and national issues driven by self-agency. As a result, they achieve visibility on social media.

The dynamics of student activism vary according to the political ideology of the nation. While analysing the gap between politically active and non-active students in the context of Nepali student politics, Snellinger (2005) identifies that students of the twenty-first century are actively advocating for radical political reforms in their nation, following the precedent of the student movement for the establishment of democracy (p. 20). However, student politics have shifted to a certain extent. Beyond political motives, students seem to organize issue-oriented social movements, such as "tuition increases, facility improvement, and petrol and transportation price decreases" (Snellinger, 2005, p. 28). Such shifts in student politics occur as they do not have the appropriate reasons for purely political struggles.

Rather than only demanding social welfare, youth play a constructive role in the development of the community in post-war rural Nepal "to amass social capital and attain respectability within the local community" (Zharkevich, 2019, p. 70) as generative politics.

The culture of generative politics seems to be a continuous process in Nepal despite some adversities. As each cloud has a silver lining, the Maoist insurgency also had some affirmative impacts on society. Zharkevich (2013) emphasizes the experiences of youth in the Maoist insurgency in Nepal beyond violence, concentrating on learning as well as comprehending literature, forming discussion groups, and organizing consciousness-raising programmes (p. 126). All these provide a considerable opportunity for them to gain life skills.

This shift from demanding positions to the state of action of youth can be interpreted as a shift in the dynamics of youth activism in Nepal. Lamichhane (2021) also notices the cultural turn of youth activism in Nepal, observing the "Enough is Enough Movement" against the government's indifference in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and inferring that the non-violence movement generated wider participation of youth and visibility in media (p. 1). This implies that contemporary youth are motivated to creative resistance.

More specifically, certain social movements gain acceleration and reach their logical conclusion because of self-agency. For the emancipation of bonded labour in Nepal, some youth activists from the same community with strong aspirations and actions ultimately achieved emancipation (Fujikura, 2001, pp. 34–5). These activists justify that the youth are the agents of change.

Therefore, youth activism in Nepal displays a vivid picture of hope for the nation. The engagement of youth in local as well as national questions also gives them a favourable image.

Pakistan: Multifaceted Nature of Student/Youth Politics

The Pakistani youth movement is perceived as oriented toward politics and violence and, at the same time, it is involved in the creation of healthy political discourse through social media. The simultaneous struggle to establish their political voice and their disregard for politics characterizes the Pakistani youth movement as uncertain and disillusioned.

Establishing and strengthening the basic principles of democracy, political reform, and public welfare are some of the common motives of Pakistani student activists. In this regard, Mullick (2008) depicts students as non-violent advocates of the freedom of the press and independence of the judiciary even during the state of emergency imposed by military dictator Pervez Musharraf (p. 5). This non-violent dissent appears to be their strongest weapon against autocratic regimes.

Student politics sometimes receive negative comments in Pakistan. Political activities were negatively perceived and banned during the time of General Zia-ul-Haq, but even in such an adverse political situation, students, in the form of a “Solidarity March”, were able to regain freedom regarding their political activities during the tumultuous political time of Prime Minister Imran Khan (Mushtaq et al., 2020, p. 137).

Student politics also seem to engage with politico-religious issues. The secular versus sheer religious doctrines also become the dominant issues, creating an impasse and resulting in violence. In this regard, Nelson (2011) examines the violent nature of Pakistani student politics based on “religious-cum-political engagement” (p. 592). This kind of involvement of youth in purely religious matters and conflict among them for the establishment of their religious or secular motives in academic institutions diverts them from establishing genuine student issues.

Contrastingly, Pakistani youth are disillusioned with the politics of the nation. As the majority of Pakistan’s population is under 24 and disenchanted with mainstream politics, Lall (2014) argues that they “see little or no point in being politically active, given corruption, and feel that Pakistan’s power structures prevent rather than encourage participation” (p. 536). The chaotic political situation of Pakistan might have created such a mentality among youth. Surprisingly, they comment on politics as “the passive role of watching TV and reading the news” (Lall, 2014, p. 556). Whether they have misunderstood politics or satirized them remains unknown.

In contrast, in recent days, youth seem to be involved in politics differently with the advancement of social media and their utilization of it for political purposes. Ida et al. (2020) connect the participation of youth in politics to their usage of social media as the common experience in Pakistan and Indonesia, concluding that “the use of social media facilitates youth to participate in political activities and those activities enhance their knowledge, provide a chance to participate and build the capacity of political efficacy” (p. 1285). The creation of such political discourses through media can be interpreted as the consequence of the advancement of ICT and the inclination of youth toward politics. For millennials, social media is a useful tool for young people to learn about, engage in, and execute political participation (p. 1295). Thus, addressing the issues raised on social media is also recognizing the discourses of the young generation of the nation.

Such a picture of youth involvement in politics as well as their disinterest in it generates the idea that the youth movement in Pakistan has not reached its maturity yet.

Sri Lanka: Heterogeneity in Youth Engagement

A shift to the local agenda from the national agenda, a positive attitude toward violence as the only means of establishing voices, and the same level of engagement of youth in social and political matters sketch a peculiar image of the Sri Lankan youth movement. Amidst the diversified nature of the youth movement in Sri Lanka, the research does portray a completely grim picture.

Students may involve themselves in violent political activism if their issues are not addressed by the government. Samaranayake (2015) maintains that “to mitigate the risk of youth getting involved in violent politics, it is necessary to address larger structural issues of inequality” (p. 24). The sense of subordination associated with structural matters can lead youth to adopt some unpleasant methods to establish their voices. Similarly, the study also identifies students involved in two types of organization: “norm-oriented” and “value-oriented”. Analysing students’ involvement in different movements, Samaranayake (2015) states that in its early phase, the student movement was norm-oriented or theory-oriented, having some political affiliation “with a specific limited issue such as student’s rights, university reforms, or a particular government policy” (p. 28). However, such a norm-oriented movement got changed to a value-oriented movement towards the second half of the twentieth century. As a result, the “ideology and perception of the student movement shifted from interpretations of Marxism to varying interpretations of ethnonationalism” (p. 29). This shift in the student political movement seems similar to the experience of student political activism in other nations of South Asia to some extent.

No matter whether youth movements are guided by norms or values, they hold different political agendas with different means, irrespective of diverse socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds. While investigating the motive behind the activism of youth as students on campuses in Sri Lanka, Abeysinghe et al. (2009) identify youth activism as a means of building identity and citizenry by youth across different socioeconomic and academic backgrounds with equal levels of engagement in colleges (p. 123). The finding signals that the environment of campuses is a more influential variable than the background of youth.

Viewing student activism from its means and consequences, it can be seen as being as destructive as it is productive. Portraying the darker picture of student activism resulting in a great economic and social cost in Sri Lankan state universities, Kumari and Fernando (2021) remark that the state university system has to endure much suffering (p. 85). The destructive aspect of student activism gets further defamed as they engage with the administrators and obtain political support, leading to “deaths, injuries, custody, arrest, suspension of students; damaging public properties, and closure of universities” (p. 86). However, student activism has also been depicted positively, as the researchers remark: “the activism has brought numerous positive changes to the system, particularly in the aspects of administrative changes, caused for the improvement of welfare facilities, infrastructure developments, curriculum revisions, and protection of free education at large” (p. 87). This productive aspect of student activism can be boundless compensation for the great loss faced by the universities.

Furthermore, the violent nature of student activism has an outlet if their demands are not addressed in time by colleges. Teaching, learning, and research are considered the significant aims of the universities and sometimes the smooth functioning of the institutions is hindered by students and their activism. Kumari and Fernando (2022), in the context of Sri Lanka, identify “a higher level of social networking, lower level of social commitments and left-wing

political ideologies” (p. 583) as the leading determinants for inspiring students towards such activism. The factors appear more socio-political than personal. Although they initially participated in movements with positive intentions, student activists’ behaviours seem increasingly destructive at the execution stage (Kumari and Fernando, 2022, p. 590). This indicates that if the voices of the students are not addressed in a timely fashion, they may lead to further violence.

Such a multifaceted nature of youth politics indicates a lack of uniformity in agenda, instrument, and means.

DISCUSSION

The dominant issues identified and analysed in this review are studied in comparison to the studies conducted in non-South Asian settings. Exploring the reasons for youth activism in the twenty-first century, Akiva et al. (2017) list social justice work, relationships with adults and peers, and sanctuary as their top motives (p. 20). In this way, young people express a desire to effect change by taking risks for their dignity and identity in society. To achieve such goals, Noguera and Cannella (2006) opine that the youth can “articulate that critique in verbal, written, and artistic form, and … move beyond critique by taking action to assert and affirm their interests” (p. 333). With this ability, they take action against the forces that dominate, confine, and bound them and society even without the backing of state resources and authority setting new trends.

Jeffrey and Young (2012) observed the socio-political movement of young, educated university students from the *Dalit* community of India for social activism; correspondingly, Falch and Hammond (2020) examine the nature of the students at Japanese universities in recent decades and identify that they have been seen as politically indifferent and uninterested in organizing for change at the local level (p. 435). This indicates that the youth are more concerned with social issues than political matters.

The political situation of the nation is the major variable for the forms of resistance. Christensen (2017) explores the silent e-rebellion of the students of the Bhutanese university, and, in the same manner, Kukulin (2021) has opined that “university students in Russia are tied in with global processes with the help of social media and therefore see how prefigurative tendencies are arising in culture in various countries and how, simultaneously, anti-authoritarian movements are strengthening, from #BlackLivesMatter to #MeToo” (p. 183). The political system of Russia discourages physical protest and the anger of youth might be released from social media. In addition to political activism, social media can also be used for environmental protest. A study by Scherman et al. (2022) on youth and their environmental activism in Chile shows that “social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are positively associated with participation in environmental protests. Individuals who spend more time on social media platforms are more likely to participate in such protests” (p. 763). Modern youth’s involvement in other areas such as environmental sectors, apart from purely political matters, through social sectors have diversified the nature of their activism.

Violence is generally observed and practised in politics. While searching for the reasons behind the incursion of violence in student politics, Valencia et al. (2021) find a strong association between violence and hopelessness and recommend that “policy-makers should consider hope-based interventions for reducing future risk-taking behaviours, including vio-

lence" (p. 1140). However, a study by Suykens (2018) in Bangladesh observed that the use of violence in student politics and victimhood is celebrated. The celebration of violence and victimhood is the second stage, but the initial involvement in violent politics of the student from Bangladesh might also be the consequence of hopelessness.

Victimhood, as one of the pillars of a political career, is celebrated and capitalized on for achieving visibility. Regarding this, Horwitz (2018) opines that "the victim has become among the most important identity positions in American politics. Victimhood is now a pivotal means by which individuals and groups see themselves and constitute themselves as political actors" (p. 553). Victimhood is similarly perceived by the politically active youth from Bangladesh, where Suykens (2018) notes the capitalization of victimhood for entering into party politics, acquiring state resources, and securing political future.

The youth of the century have shown much disinterest in party politics. Orfan (2020) has explored indifference of Afghan youth towards party politics and Lall (2014) has also found Pakistani youth disenchanted with such politics. The similar unwillingness of British youth to engage with party politics, as discussed in the study by Henn et al. (2005), reveals that they "support the democratic process, but are skeptical of the way the British political system is organized and led and are turned off by politicians and the political parties" (p. 556). The political system and situation of these nations are fundamentally different, so uniformity in the thought of the youth is surprising.

Different forms of a shift in youth activism are common among most of the papers reviewed in this study. Snellinger (2005) has identified the shift of the student movement to social issues from purely political issues in the Nepalese context, and likewise, Kamuf and Weck (2022) observe the participation of youth in social activism in an East German town and detect "youth as active drivers of local development and creators of less institutionalized platforms for democratic engagement" (p. 935). The decrease in the ideological radicalization of the youth and their inclination toward local issues reflects the rays of hope in youth activism.

Corruption is one of the major problems faced by most nations in the world, and youth activists are willing to call it out. Lall (2014) in a Pakistani context and Urvashi (2018) in an Indian context have touched on the activism of youth against corruption; additionally, Wardak (2015) traces strong youth immersion against corruption in Afghanistan to establish a virtuous society. In this regard, Lewis (2021) examines two sorts of corruption in Nigeria, finding two different perceptions that "elite corruption is positively correlated with protest, whereas police corruption is not" (p. 227). In this sense, contrary to perceptions of police corruption, larger perceptions of elite corruption are positively connected with a rise in general and anti-government discontent. However, the anti-corruption movement of youth from Afghanistan targets any class of society equally.

The above discussion has identified that South Asia's youth activism culture is not fundamentally unlike the experience of other non-South Asian nations that mainly engage in local to national social and political agendas non-violently.

CONCLUSION

This is not a comparative study between the youth/student activism of the twenty-first century and the past. However, there is a considerable shift in activism due to the advancement of ICTs, the inclination to generative politics, fascination with a local agenda, the enthusiasm

for social reform, and demanding national concerns, which seem to materialize through social media, public awareness, advocating rule of law, and self-agency. All these forms of activism contribute to the larger visibility of youth activism in society. There is also extreme politicization of youth and student movements, where their activism is reflected as violent, conservative, destructive, and self-centric, thereby leading to regressive understandings of their intentions.

The unavailability of appropriate literature on the topic in significant numbers from Bhutan, Maldives, Afghanistan, and Pakistan implies that the political environment of these nations is conducive to neither absolute democratic exercise nor social research. Surprisingly, the silent and symbolic resistance via social media indicates the lack of space for political protest. Moreover, even the celebration of victimhood reflects that youth are using violence to gain visibility which may give them authority.

Furthermore, the systematic review contributes to painting an overall portrait of youth activism in South Asian nations, which might be helpful to understand the political culture of higher academic institutions as well as the nations.

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7. Charting youth activism in Chile: contemporary areas and trends

*Juan Pablo Rodríguez, Lucía Miranda Leibe, Rodrigo
Torres, Nicolás Ortiz and Nicolás Angelcos¹*

On 19 December 2021, Gabriel Boric, a 35-year-old former student leader, was elected president of Chile. Fourteen months earlier, secondary school students had decided not to pay for subway tickets in response to an increase in public transportation fares. This act of civil disobedience lit the fuse for the largest protests in Chile's history, as thousands joined the students to protest about social inequalities, injustice, and exclusion. As a result of the social uprising, political elites achieved a cross-party agreement for the elaboration of a new constitution to replace the one created under Pinochet's rule, this time drafted by a democratically-elected Constitutional Convention.

Young people in Chile have been a key transformative force in post-Pinochet Chile. Youth-driven politics have fulfilled a double function: that of critically diagnosing the impact of neoliberal development on the lives of ordinary Chileans (not only students) and of mobilizing large parts of the citizenry to demand social rights. Born during democracy, Chilean youth have focused on the failures and broken promises of a socioeconomic order that – while it allowed many to access social services from which previous generations were excluded (such as university education) – created inequality and violence.

The student movement has historically been the main organizing form that youth activism has taken. However, over the last few years, youth activism has diversified, to either resist or protest against the effects of neoliberalism in different areas. As we show in this chapter, youth activism in Chile goes beyond education, having fulfilled important roles in other social movements and civil causes, denouncing and criticising issues such as sexism, gender inequalities, employment precarity, and discrimination, among others.

This reflects the huge impact that younger generations have had in recent social and political transformative processes in Chile, but it might also indicate the end of a fruitful cycle which started in 2006, when secondary school students for the first time demanded quality education for all. The draft constitution, elaborated by a gender-equal and mostly non-partisan Convention, was rejected by 62 per cent of voters. While some of the youth did not trust the constitutional process and therefore did not mobilize for its success, others were actively involved, and were even chosen as delegates at the Convention. Moreover, several norms of the new proposed constitution reflected, on a constitutional level, longstanding demands put forward by youth-led movements.

Currently youth activism seems to have entered a period of abeyance and relative public invisibility, compared to the 2006–2022 cycle. Following Conner and Rosen's definition of youth activism as "acts that challenge the status quo and seek to reconfigure asymmetrical power relations" (Conner and Rosen, 2016, p. 2), in this chapter we describe and analyse some of the many paths that youth activism might take in a context in which the enthusiasm for

radical change in large parts of the population has lessened. We also reflect on how neoliberalism constrained youth's lives and how they have managed to resist and protest its impacts.

As Coe and Vandegrift (2015) have noted, despite important commonalities among youth subjectivities in Latin America and the rest of the globe – such as the increasing relevance of cultural politics, digital culture, and a declining interest in electoral politics – the Latin American path toward neoliberal modernity informs the ways in which youths resist, imagine and practise alternatives to neoliberalism's pernicious effects. Therefore, drawing on the extant literature and our own research with youth activists,² we first present a brief historical account of Chile's major socioeconomic transformations, locating youth activism practices in the context of the Chilean youth emerging as a social and political actor; we then describe some of the areas in which youth activism has developed over the past 15 years. Finally, we examine some of the main trends and areas of youth activism in Chile today.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chile, like other Latin American countries, has since its inception been impacted by its peripheral position in the world market. In the eighteenth century, the colonies' desire to negotiate directly with Great Britain led to the political independence of Latin American countries. Agricultural and mineral exports to the British market helped to establish an incipient national bourgeoisie and labour force in the new nation states. As dependency theory suggests, Latin American economies' dependent character greatly affected the model of development and physiognomy of the young independent republics (Taylor, 2006). Chile's economy was built on the export of agricultural products and minerals (especially nitrate), and the emergence of an embryonic proletariat proved crucial to the country's future development.

National-developmentalism was the form that the state took in order to deal with the ongoing transformation of Chilean society. This form of state capitalism led to increasing conflict between divergent class interests over the services and products provided by the state. By the beginning of the 1960s, the Chilean economy's dependence on capitalist accumulation's central powers, alongside the fluctuation of the international market, created a political scenario whereby organized groups could no longer maintain the national compromise. The Popular Unity government led by the socialist Salvador Allende sought to widen the limits of the state by allowing and actively fomenting the participation of workers, peasants, and the urban poor in the struggle over the model of development and the state. The implementation of these measures led to inflation and a government spending deficit. The Chilean bourgeoisie fiercely opposed the programme of the Popular Unity government, as they saw it as diametrically opposed to their interests. Consequently, with the backing of the US government, the Chilean bourgeoisie intensified the economic crisis by boycotting production and cutting off investments.

In September 1973, a group of anti-Allende military carried out a coup d'état aimed at "restoring order"; they bombed the palace of the government and initiated a period of state terrorism unprecedented in Chile's history. The coup significantly changed the country's political landscape and had a major impact on the lives of Chileans, especially young people. The authoritarian regime of the Military Junta and Pinochet restored social order through a brutal policy of repression. In the absence of political opposition and democratic control, a group of Chilean economists trained at the University of Chicago, known as the "Chicago Boys",

implemented neoliberal reforms, making Chile the first “laboratory” of neoliberal statehood (Harvey, 2007).

There is a consensus in the social sciences today regarding the need to clarify both the concept and the uses of the term “neoliberalism” (Connell and Dados, 2014). Although it consolidated during the economic recessions of the 1970s and 1980s, neoliberalism was born as a set of ideas and values associated with a specific anti-socialist and anti-collectivist political project that aimed to be an alternative to Keynesian state interventionism and classical liberalism in the interwar period (Mirowski, 2014). Therefore, it has been subject, in different historical periods, to disputes around its meaning (even among different versions of neoliberalism). We use the term “neoliberalism” to refer to a new stage in the development of capitalism, marked by the ascendancy of financial capital, large conglomerates and corporations, and a change in the relationship between the state and society, characterized by an active involvement by the state in creating institutional conditions for the functioning and expansion of the free market and free market rationality to different areas of the social fabric. Most of the theories about neoliberalism also emphasize the political nature of the neoliberal project, in the sense that neoliberal economic policies of fiscal control, deregulation, and privatization, among others, were designed, imposed and/or implemented as a way of legitimizing a project of capital accumulation, in a context marked by the crisis of the welfare state in Europe, and the model of import substitution industrialization (ISI) in Latin America. In Chile neoliberalism sought to demobilize the popular sectors and promote individualism and competitiveness over collective organization and class solidarity (Rodríguez, 2021), reproducing and creating violence against excluded groups.

Scholars working in the field of youth studies in Chile (Aguilera, 2016; Duarte, 2005) have highlighted how the very category of youth emerged during the 1970s and was established during the dictatorship amid neoliberal reforms. Against the hegemonic narrative which equated youth with middle-class university students, scholars started to map the heterogeneity of Chilean youth, including young workers, the urban poor and peasants. Crucially, since the 1980s, Chilean youth were socially produced at the intersection of a rapidly growing consumer market which appealed to young people and a rise in secondary education enrolment. At the same time, throughout the mid-1970s and 1980s, the youth began to re-organize after the initial years of military repression, especially in poor neighbourhoods, and, with the support of the church (political parties were prohibited), young people engaged in cultural activities in their neighbourhoods (Muñoz Tamayo, 2002).

In 1988, Chileans voted in a Plebiscite to replace Pinochet with a democratic political regime. Patricio Aylwin won the first democratic elections in 17 years and took office in 1990, beginning a 20-year period of centre-left government. The main objective of the new ruling coalition – the *Concertación* – was to lead the process of democratization in the country. The first years of the Concertación were marked by an attempt, after years of state failure, to integrate the youth into Chilean society and its path of modernization: labour training, incentives for companies to hire young people, and the promotion of state-sponsored youth participation were some of the measures the state took during the first half of the 1990s (Cottet and Galván, 1993; Duarte, 2005).

The rule of centre-left governments ended in 2010 with the victory of right-wing billionaire Sebastián Piñera. While he did not challenge the structural features of the Chilean model, he reduced social spending and changed the economic rhetoric to prioritize competitiveness, individual entrepreneurship, and domestic security. He also pursued a privatization agenda to

modernize the provision of public services and attract foreign investment. It was during the second Piñera government, following the second term of Michelle Bachelet, that the social mobilizations of 2019 exploded.

THE LONG TRADITION OF YOUTH ACTIVISM IN CHILE

Chile has a longstanding tradition of youth activism. The early years of the twentieth century saw the formation of the first students' organization, called "Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Chile" (FECH, Universidad de Chile Students' Federation), in 1906. This was the first and most active student federation in the country and the institution from which the youth movement flourished (Moraga, 2006). If the beginning of the Chilean student movement was concerned mainly with spaces for participation within the university – a process which finds its most definitive expression in the Cordoba movement in Argentina – then the transformation of Chilean society and its universities led students to become more actively involved in social problems beyond the university. Thus, during the 1960s and 1970s, the youth became a relevant political actor at a national level, first through the process of Reform within universities, and later in the campaign and subsequent government of Allende's "Unidad Popular" (Popular Unity).

During Pinochet's dictatorship, youth activism was decimated. Student leaders were persecuted, and student organizations were banned or taken over by the government. In this context, young people started to organize in local churches and NGOs, in underground political parties, and in some cases, in subversive organizations such as the "Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez" (FPMR, Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front). These organizations were vital to the wave of protests that rocked the country in the first half of the 1980s and would be crucial to the referendum campaign that ousted Pinochet from the presidency in 1988 (Muñoz and Durán, 2019).

The return of democracy presented different challenges for youth activism. The continuation of the socioeconomic policies of dictatorship under the democratic governments meant that there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction. However, this did not translate into political mobilization as a climate of obliviousness became hegemonic. In this context, youth organizations such as Students' Federations went through a process of decomposition that saw most of them disappear in the first half of the 1990s (Muñoz Tamayo, 2011; Thielemann, 2016). The academic discourse about youth focused mainly on issues of social deviance such as drugs and hooliganism, portraying the youth as a social problem (Aguilera, 2016).

In the following years, university students would begin to reconstruct their organizations and to demonstrate against the continuation of the neoliberal policies (Moraga, 2006). The year 1997 brought the first national cycle of protest, involving most of the public universities in the country. During this contentious process, students reinstated the "Confederación Nacional de Estudiantes de Chile" (CONFECH, National Confederation of Chilean Students), a national organization that coordinated the actions of undergraduate students around the country. At the time, these demonstrations gained relevance as the largest mobilizations against neoliberal policies in the country. However, they were confined to the borders of university campuses and did not resonate with the larger population. The following decade would see the birth of national mobilizations that would gather support from the wider population, changing the political landscape of the country (Muñoz and Durán, 2019).

In 2001, secondary school students stormed the streets of Santiago protesting the decision of the government to allow private companies to administer their bus passes. This mobilization, known as “Mochilazo”, was the first large demonstration organized by secondary students since the return of democracy. Behind the demonstration was the “Asamblea Coordinadora de Estudiantes Secundarios” (ACES, Secondary Students Coordination Assembly), an organization formed just a few years before. ACES worked as an open assembly, where students from different schools could participate freely, without the need of an elected representative. Inside the organization student leaders were selected as speakers, with the mandate to represent decisions taken by the assembly, and could be ousted at any time (Donoso, 2013). These features became prominent throughout other youth organizations, breaking with those structures that were inherited from political parties. These transformations in political organization were part of a larger generational and cultural change that proved central to the strength of youth activism in the coming years.

The generation that has led youth activism in the twenty-first century is one that does not have direct experience of the dictatorship. One of the most distinct features of Pinochet’s dictatorship was the use of political violence against opponents, including human rights violations such as torture and disappearances. This produced an environment of fear surrounding political activism that endured even after the beginning of democracy (Stern, 2020). Although these feelings can be passed from one generation to another, lived experience of dictatorship is a greater deterrent to political participation. This was a generational feature that became a source of identity for activists involved in mobilizations, with them describing themselves as “the generation without fear” (Ortiz Ruiz, 2021).

By the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, new forms of youth organization began to emerge. Young people organized in collectives around different trends: music taste, artistic interest, fashion, football teams, and so on (Zarzuri and Ganter, 2018). These organizations – sometimes defined as “urban tribes” – were described by academia as part of the postmodern condition and a need for identity references among young people. However, these articulations proved crucial to future political organization, providing, as Aguilera (2016) argues, the frames and motivations for political participation. Specifically, they were sources of experience that established links of trust and friendship that facilitated political organizing.

AREAS OF YOUTH ACTIVISM IN CONTEMPORARY CHILE

During the second half of the twentieth century, it was mainly on university campuses where young people could become activists, and while young people figured in other important social movements, such as the *pobladore*s movement and the labour movement, their identity as young people in these movements was subordinated to the main structuring pattern (Muñoz and Durán, 2019). This has radically changed. Although student activism is still important, since the 2000s youth activism in Chile has expanded to different areas, such as environmentalism, feminism, animal rights, housing, and crucially, it has travelled to different places, reaching beyond university campuses and secondary schools. This is due in part to the aforementioned processes of neoliberalization and to internal changes within political youth organizations – these are increasingly subject to young people’s scrutiny towards eradicating violence and abuses of power within organizations. Nowadays the transformative power of young activists is expressed through a variety of different areas.

Some of these areas are discussed below.

Student Activism

Student activism in Chile over the last 15 years is one of the most relevant political forces in the country. Starting in 2006, it brought about the “times of politicization” (PNUD, 2015), a series of mobilizations that altered the political landscape of the country, reshaping political parties and putting social movements at the centre of politics.

In 2006, secondary school students started mobilizing against the dire condition of public education in the country. This mobilization was dubbed the “Penguin Revolution”. After three months, the students dropped the mobilization after reaching an agreement that would see the formation of an “expert commission” and, later, a political agreement between the major political parties. This agreement did not fulfil the expectations of the students, who considered it a betrayal by political elites (Donoso, 2013). Five years later, undergraduate students would carry out the biggest cycle of demonstrations in the country since the end of dictatorship in 1990. This mobilization demanded free tertiary education and brought about the largest street protests since the return of democracy (Ortiz Ruiz, 2021). The 2011 student movement had a huge impact on both educational policy and Chilean politics; the student movement became a social movement for social rights in general, with the support of most of the citizenry.

In a similar vein, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, secondary school students have also actively denounced the effects of neoliberalism in education and mobilized around other societal issues. They were the first to demonstrate against the fare increase of the underground train (Metro), and they led the contentious actions throughout what came to be known as the “October Revolt” in 2019. The students took part in these actions not because they were directly affected (the increase did not actually apply to students’ tickets), but because, according to some of their spontaneous activists, Chilean families could no longer tolerate the burden of socioeconomic precarity in the face of political elites disconnected from people’s most urgent needs.

The current Gabriel Boric government is one of the main legacies of the 2011 student movement. In their cabinet there are two other former student leaders: Camila Vallejo and Giorgio Jackson. Other student movement activists have played important roles in state politics, as deputy secretary, party leaders and also as delegates of the Constitutional Convention.

The force and impact of the student movement at a national level between 2006 and 2019 is in sharp contrast with the current situation of student organization. Years of mobilizations have given way to fatigue, with most students no longer interested in contentious politics. Currently, secondary students have been mobilizing sporadically for better conditions and have been demanding a new constitution; however, this has not translated into a nationwide movement.

Feminist Activism

Youth feminist activism in Chile has risen significantly in recent years. The fight for gender equality and women’s rights has been led by student organizations, feminist collectives, and social movements headed by young women.

Cycles of feminist protest and mobilization have been recurrent in Chile and around the world, allowing feminism to be characterized as one of the longest-standing movements

(Franceschet, 2003; Ríos et al., 2003), with feminists making their demands visible even in periods of dictatorship (Valdés, 2000). Feminists have also played a key role in the process of claiming civil, political, and economic rights for women, leading Julieta Kirkwood to argue that “without feminism, there is no democracy” (1986, pp. 196–7).

The waves of women’s movements that have been classified worldwide (usually in western countries) do not perfectly coincide with what happens in Latin America (Lamadrid and Armijo, 2015). In Chile, the second wave of global feminism erupted more than a decade later (Cortés and Retamal, 2017; Lamadrid and Armijo, 2015). Additionally, the demands of women in southern countries (given their particular contexts and history) have traditionally been different from the demands of women in northern countries (Basu, 2000). The types of demands raised by women’s movements are key, because they allow us to distinguish between those that prioritize particular interests of women from those that challenge patriarchy and the resulting subordination of women based on gender (Beckwith, 2007).

The year 2018 marked a milestone and turning point in Chile for the feminist movement after activists from different universities took over their campuses (in some cases for more than four months). The mobilization, called “the Feminist Spring”, coincided with a sequence of feminist awakenings in the region. However, the process of mobilizations experienced in Chile was distinct in that it emerged from within the universities (Lara, 2020); two years later, in 2020, this would be replicated by Mexican students (Cerva, 2022).

The feminist presence in the student sphere is not incidental, as we have already mentioned; historically, student politics has been configured as a fundamental space for ideological and political articulation in Chile, occupying a leading role in the mobilizations and political discussions that concern the country (Avendaño, 2014; Barozet, 2016).

However, the feminist movement was the first to simultaneously achieve significant and permanent changes within universities (changing the curriculum and university structures) and outside of it, at the cultural level. The types of demands made significantly distinguish the movement of 2018 from previous ones: in 2001 (with the demand for free school passes), 2006 (demanding the modification of the Constitutional Organic Law of Education), and 2011, where mobilizations were organized around demands for quality, free and non-profit education (Bellei et al., 2014; Cummings, 2015). The demands of the feminist movement of 2018, by contrast, focused on ending sexist education, sexism, misogyny, and homophobia (Miranda and Roque, 2021; 2019).

In previous studies about organizational logics of the 2011 movement, it was observed that being directly linked to the Confederation of Chilean Students (CONFECH) boosted efficiency in the implementation of student demands (Avendaño, 2014; Miranda Leibe, 2016). Additionally, due to the involvement of several leaders of political organizations, the student caucus emerged; its members are now part of Gabriel Boric’s government cabinet. The 2018 feminist movement, on the other hand, in addition to advocating for a non-sexist education, was characterized by its attempt to break away from the prevailing hierarchy of decision-making structures (Miranda and Roque, 2019). In fact, the presence of prior membership in formal political organizations is much lower among feminists (Miranda and Roque, 2019), partly due to the rigid and hierarchical structures that tend to prevail in political parties.

Youth Activism of the Urban Poor

The youth activism of the urban poor has been particularly important in recent years. Whether through participation in housing committees, community kitchens, or other community initiatives, “popular” youth³ have developed important youth activism practices for their communities. The explosive emergence of grassroots collectives and organizations throughout the country is no longer due, as with the 1980s, to the exclusion of marginalized youths from the Chilean social structure (either because the state failed to ensure that impoverished urban youths received an education, or due to lack of employment during the economic crisis under dictatorship), but to the access of many poor urban youths to universities (Angelcos et al., 2020). The contact of these youths with the university world has allowed them to acquire or socially validate tools for social and political analysis that recognize, on the one hand, the foundations of the social inequalities that affect them, and on the other hand, the cultural substrate of their neighbourhoods of origin, contributing to the construction of a collective local memory about the experiences of others.

Youth activists in urban poor neighbourhoods have trajectories of upward social mobility but they do not leave their neighbourhoods. They participate in artistic and countercultural collectives, in religious groups, as well as in left-wing activism. In general, the activism of urban youth from poor neighbourhoods focuses on confronting the violence generated by the neoliberal socioeconomic model, derived from its distinctly segregationist urban policies. They also participate in self-management activities, providing services (educational, cultural, recreational, and food-related, as with during the pandemic) that the state does not provide for these groups. Youth activists try to prevent other young people in their neighbourhoods from consuming drugs or participating in drug trafficking, and they organize in collectives and assemblies, participating in housing committees, community schools, and left-wing collectives.

During the 2019 social outburst, popular urban youth activism was notably prominent. The participation of youth from popular neighbourhoods in the massive protests was met with strong police repression and subsequent criminalization by the media. However, the truth is that in various peripheral neighbourhoods, youth had created assemblies to debate and deliberate on the reasons for their indignation that, for the first time since the dictatorship, appeared to voice the indignation of the entire Chilean people against the political elite. The same youth who carry out cultural activism in their neighbourhoods divided their time between their local neighbourhood assemblies and Plaza Italia, renamed “Plaza Dignidad”, in the centre of Santiago.

Cultural Activism

Cultural activism, which has political undertones, has been another relevant area of youth activism in Chile. From the return of democracy in 1990 to the end of the 2000s, forms of expression in social protests were still strongly conditioned by the legacy of the dictatorship (Ortiz, 2019). One example of this is that protest actions followed a ritualized logic, marked by marches in the streets denouncing decisions by authorities or commemorating political events, such as Labor Day or 11 September, the day that marks the 1973 coup d'état. In this context, for a large part of the citizenry fear and mistrust marked the relationship to collective

action forms, such as protests, and it was mainly political party members, unions, or student federations who participated in these actions.

However, starting in 2011, the various youth-led protests in Chile highlighted new strategies of expression on the streets, indicating a shift towards aestheticization and performativity of protest repertoires (Giacoman and Torres, 2022; Pinochet Cobos, 2021). Indeed, the massive student movement of 2011 stood out for incorporating carnivals in their marches, staging artistic interventions, and especially for organizing different types of flash-mobs to present their demands in public spaces, generating a form of collective action that dialogued with a large part of the citizenry (Torres, 2013).

Since 2011, aestheticization of protest repertoires has consolidated forms of action for youth activism in different areas. We can point to the case of the environmental movement in southern Chile, in which the re-appropriation of traditional dance and music from affected regions has been used as a form of political protest (Cabello and Torres, 2015). Another relevant example is from the feminist movement of 2018, in which demonstrators, mainly young students, used their bodies as instruments for different political performances, making a significant impact on public debate (Serafini, 2020).

The aestheticization and performativity of youth mobilizations reached its highest point during the October 2019 protests. To distance themselves from the violence that was occurring on the streets, youth developed various cultural interventions as a way of denouncing excessive government repression and presenting diverse social demands about the political and economic system. One of the most relevant examples was the performance “A Rapist in Your Path” by the feminist collective Las Tesis. In this performance, the bodies of the demonstrators expressed, through song and choreography, a denunciation of *macho*, police, and institutional violence (Serafini, 2020). The worldwide impact of this protest performance, along with other expressions of the appropriation of public space through graffiti, dance, or music during October 2019, demonstrate the consolidation of the aestheticization of protest by youth-led demonstrations (Veas and Bello, 2022).

Environmental Activism

Another area where youth activism has developed significantly is in the environmental field. Since the mid-2000s, different protest actions have denounced the environmental impact of dam construction and hydroelectric power plants in different parts of the country, highlighting cases such as “Hidro Aysén”, “Alto Maipo”, and “Pascua Lama” (Maillet and Albala, 2018). From the 2010s, these conflicts have gained an important socio-territorial dimension, highlighting the involvement of communities impacted by particular projects or, more broadly, by the agricultural or fishing industry; in several cases these mobilizations were led by young people (Cabello and Torres, 2015; Cabello et al., 2018). In fact, between 2009 and 2016, approximately 40 per cent of young adults between 18 and 29 years participated in environmental demonstrations (Scherman et al., 2022).

In addition to the social conflict field, we must add how, in recent years, concern about climate change has increased among young people and adolescents. Various initiatives comprise the actions that young people take to protest about the climate emergency in public discussion, from participating in the global Fridays For Future events to the development of awareness-raising organizations and programmes in the student sphere.

To conclude, as this context has developed, environmental activism among young people has undergone significant innovation in terms of its forms of expression. From the significant relationship between social networks, dissemination, and environmental mobilization (Scherman et al., 2022), to responsible consumption practices and an increase in the adoption of veganism among young people, activism for the defence of animals and the environment are understood as a way of life (Giacoman et al., 2021).

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

What are some of the outstanding characteristics of youth activism in Chile considering the diversity of areas in which it has developed over the last 15 years? Literature has highlighted the features of global youth activism, such as the decline of formal political participation, the rise of digital culture, the precarious socioeconomic conditions that young people have to live with as a result of the effects of neoliberalism, and the violence, state repression, and discrimination that youth are often exposed to (Coe and Vandegrift, 2015; Earl et al., 2017). Although Chilean youth activism shares some of these characteristics, three trends stand out: the relevance of territory as an axis of activism, the relevance of individual biography as a foundation for the collective experience of resisting or combating the effects of neoliberalism, and a definitive detachment from fixed forms of politics and identity, with phenomena such as multiple activisms. To be sure, these trends follow more general changes in contemporary forms of activism (and not only of youth activism), but the way in which these categories relate to one another accounts for the specificity of recent youth activism in Chile.

The Centrality of Individual Experience and Biography

As Rossi and others have noted about political activism experiences (Rossi, 2009; Pleyers, 2009), in Chile young people also tend to become politically active when the causes they defend are closely related to their biography. This does not mean, as some authors argued during the 1990s, that young people are particularly selfish or individualistic, but rather that they mobilize because they feel that no representative institution or group will do it for them. In the biographies of young activists, it is not only individual concerns that appear, but also stories of families, friendships, and members of different communities that young people feel a part of and, in some cases, a duty to help. It is not that young Chilean activists mobilize for personal problems, but rather that they get involved in activities to bring about political change based on their individual experience of a specific problem (e.g. educational debt, pollution, lack of housing, discrimination, or violence). This contrasts with “classic” youth activism, for which the youth activism of the 1960s is paradigmatic, where young people primarily mobilized to put political and cultural ideals into practice.

In a series of interviews we conducted with popular youth activists regarding the social outburst and their opinions on the constituent process, young people linked their personal experiences of suffering the effects of economic inequality in Chile with their motivations to participate in the 2019 mobilizations. At the same time, in their stories, the fact of participating in some organizations generated feelings of solidarity and hope that things – social ties – could be different. Participating in an organization thus plays a positive emotional role to the extent that, through protest and organizing, young people feel recognized by their peers.

Chilean youth activists do not locate their main motivations in abstract causes, but rather relate these to concrete aspects of their biographies. This does not mean that all young activists in Chile only mobilize if they feel that a particular personal problem afflicts them, but rather that they have to make and feel as their own the problems they seek to solve through social mobilization.

Territories

Another important category for describing recent youth activism in Chile, and which links closely to the previous trend, is that of territory. Once again, the territorialization of politics is characteristic of youth and non-youth mobilizations in other Latin American countries (Bryan, 2012), yet it is a distinct and insufficiently emphasized characteristic of the Chilean youth activism of recent years. Territory is the symbolic unit of reference through which young activists construct their identities, and it is the “from where” they present their demands. Territory is what is at hand, and it is the most important space in life-worlds of young activists; it can be the classroom, a locality devastated by industry or the effects thereof, the population, or the body. Territory is not a fixed construction but, rather, it is fluid.

The classic referent of territory is the neighbourhood. The effects of neoliberal privatization, along with the economic crisis of 1985, changed the Chilean social structure: salaried popular sectors were reduced to mass unemployment, and young people from working class neighbourhoods did not find a place in the new economic structure. In contexts of crisis like these, but also with the growing social and health crises in Chile, the neighbourhood becomes a place of sociability and refuge, where people in general, and young people in particular, access the services that the state often fails to provide. Although, as shown above, popular youth activism has been renewed from that of the 1980s, territorial logic is not exclusive to the neighbourhood, and it has been extended to other local areas of belonging that serve the same functions as the neighbourhood, such as the classroom and other localities.

The idea of territory is linked to that of community. There are elective affinities between the communal and tribal aspects of urban tribes, but in the case of political activist experiences, community, rather than closing off or maintaining boundaries with other communities or society, opens and connects activists to something beyond a specific community.

Flexible Politics

Until the student movement of 2006, youth activism in Chile was closely linked to political parties. However, starting with the mobilizations of secondary school movements, the influence of parties on youth organizations began to weaken. Aspects of youth culture present in non-activist youth, such as the valorization of horizontality and rejection of rigid hierarchical structures, were expressed in various forms of activism. In addition to the classical forms of political parties and social movements, the forms of collectives, assemblies, and coordinators emerged. This has been a characteristic of social protest movements globally, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States or the 15-M encampments in Spain.

The particularity of Chilean youth activism over the last 15 years is in its ambiguous and flexible relationship with institutional politics, dependent on specific circumstances and causes. Activisms that are performed far from any forms of institution, including social movements, coexist with those expressed through the formation and participation of new political

parties. Often, differing attitudes toward institutional politics produce tensions within and between organizations of young activists.

An illustrative case of this flexible attitude toward formal politics is provided by the recent Constitutional Convention, in which several young activists from different educational, environmental, and housing organizations participated as delegates. The decision to participate in the official body to draft a new constitution was debated and discussed by different groups of activists. While some groups decided not to participate in the Convention, considering it an expression of official political institutionalization, other groups decided strategically to participate in order to enshrine the demands, for which they had mobilized over the last period, at a constitutional level. At the same time, several young activists from the 2006 and 2011 student movements participated as members of political parties in the Frente Amplio, which brings together parties formed from the 2011 student movement and is mainly made up of young people, including the president.

Finally, another expression of a flexible attitude toward formal politics is the phenomenon of multiple and/or nomadic activisms. Young activists often engage in several causes at once in various “territories”, sharing networks of activism with other young activists that are activated and deactivated at various times. This is one of the central features of youth activism over the last period. Interestingly, for young activists, this flexible approach to youth politics does not equate with a disengaged or naive attitude towards their political actions. Rather, they express a deep commitment to democracy as a way of life and experience and a rejection of the dogmas of old politics constructed by adults.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have reviewed some of the contemporary trends and areas in which youth activism has developed in Chile during the last 15 years. We have highlighted the diversity and coexistence of different types of activism, along with the increasing relevance of categories such as individual biography, territories, and communities in the activist identity of young people in Chile. At present times, the main reference point of youth activism – the Chilean student movement – is in a period of public invisibility and abeyance. The causes of this remain to be researched in detail, but it might include a combination of fatigue after years of public demonstrations, marches, assemblies and police repression, and a revision and restructuration of its main historical organizations after the feminist wave. The feminist mobilizations also challenged the sexism that exists within student organizations themselves, denouncing abuses of power and patriarchal ways of understanding and doing politics. The subsequent distrust of historical organizational references – student federations – combined with the educational crisis following COVID, means that students today are either more focused on solving specific short-term issues within their campuses or schools, or they have not yet found a sustainable way to coordinate without creating too many conflicts among themselves.

However, youth activists participate in different organizations to resist and transform on a daily and institutional level the effects of neoliberalism. These emergent axes of youth activism in Chile are not unique to the activism of young people in Chile, as some of them are features of contemporary social movements in general; yet the way in which they intersect and combine is a specific feature of youth activism in Chilean society. In the years to come it is likely that grassroots activism will remain the main type of activism in the different areas

in which young people attempt to fight and transform asymmetrical power relations, but the different organizational forms they might take, and crucially, how they relate to formal institutional politics, also carried out by young people, will be a topic in need of further research.

NOTES

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2. The research projects upon which this chapter is based were conducted over a 10-year period using a qualitative approach. The projects involved participatory action research in feminist organizations, semi-structured interviews with 60 environmental, feminist, and student activists, as well as nine in-depth interviews with urban poor youth activists. For more details on methods and sample, see Torres (2013); Angelcos et al. (2020); Miranda and Roque (2021); Ortiz Ruiz (2021) and Rodríguez (2020).
3. Young people from deprived urban neighbourhoods.

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PART III

METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN THE STUDY OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

8. Methods for a multimodal, collaborative, and engaged research practice: mapping youth activism and cultural production across time and space

Anthony Gerard Wright, Maurice Rafael Magaña and Jurhamuti José Velázquez Morales

In the past decade, scholars of youth activism have drawn attention to the role of networked technologies and social media platforms in transforming youth activist practices. Major social movements, such as the Arab Spring, youth-led climate movements, Occupy Wall Street, and Black Lives Matter, have all involved the unprecedented deployment of networked technologies (Jenkins et al., 2016; Lee, 2018; Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). Youth activists use these tools for a variety of purposes, from strategizing and communicating with each other, to challenging hegemonic accounts, to producing various forms of digital media that harness affective, visual, sonic, and other forces. Social media and messaging platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Signal have all become sites through which youth activist content and dialogues perpetually circulate – a situation that has generated a mix of celebratory and critical responses.

Youth activism is obviously not the only domain of activity that has been transformed by networked technologies and emerging media. Ethnographic practices are also undergoing changes. In recent years in anthropology and related fields, the term “multimodal ethnography” has been used to describe an emerging approach to ethnographic research (Collins et al., 2017). While older versions of ethnography center on the production of written field notes, interviews, and document/artifact collection, multimodal ethnography envisions new research practices that include media formats such as digital graphics, photography, audio, video, live performances, and social media posts. But, as we describe below, the stakes of multimodal ethnography go far beyond merely incorporating more technologies and types of media into the anthropological toolkit. There are also a host of ethical and political economic processes and concerns, which are shaping articulations of multimodality.

In this chapter, we explore our attempts to carry out politically engaged, collaborative, multimodal ethnographic work with youth activists and artists in Mexico and the United States. In doing so, we consider the relationship between multimodal ethnography and multimodal youth activism. How do the two approaches interact, and what forms of relationality and collaboration emerge? How do political economic inequities and potential ethical tensions and contradictions shape both approaches? We begin by describing multimodal ethnography in more detail, situating it in relation to longstanding attempts to incorporate sounds, images, and artifacts into ethnographic methodologies. We then move into a discussion of our respective inquiries, after which we conclude the chapter with a list of strategies and reflections on

multimodal ethnographic practice. We do not offer this list prescriptively, but rather as a set of methodological provocations that different scholars may take up in different ways.

MULTIMODAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In recent decades in anthropology, sociology, and related fields, the term “multimodal ethnography” has been used to describe an emerging approach to ethnography used in research among adults and young people (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019; Dicks et al., 2006; Flewitt, 2011). A significant marker of this shift was the renaming of the “Visual Anthropology” section of the American Anthropological Association’s flagship journal *American Anthropologist*. In 2017, this section became known as “Multimodal Anthropologies” in an attempt to reflect “changes in the media ecologies we engage as anthropologists, changes that have broadened our perspectives to include other forms of media practice, while remaining inclusive of visual anthropology” (Collins et al., 2017, p. 142). As the editors further explain, these changes were shaped by three major developments within anthropology and beyond. These include: (1) globally expanding access to digital tools and networks that enable the production and circulation of media; (2) a methodological shift in anthropology toward collaboration and engagement; and (3) a growing recognition of the dynamic roles that anthropologists play in relation to their profession, as well as to the other communities in which they work.

Of course, some may question the extent to which multimodality offers a new approach. We want to be clear here that we and other multimodal ethnographers do not claim total methodological uniqueness. Instead, we see our work as a process of adapting (which always entails partially transforming) old methods and concepts to meet the demands of new technologies and modes of media production. After all, ethnographic photography and film have existed for quite some time (e.g., Bateson and Mead, 1942; Hurston, 1928), and anthropology has long paid attention to “material culture”, which arguably encompasses all human-made tools, from arrowheads to smartphones (Buchli, 2020). While the inclusion of sounds, images, videos, material artifacts, and other atextual formats into ethnographic archives is not new, the rapid pace, massive scale, and technical ease with which media can be (re)produced and (re)appropriated is relatively new. Multimodality attends to these shifts by exploring how people in various contexts mobilize digital technologies, media, and networks in relation to older modes of meaning production and sociality.

As we emphasize below, multimodality is also an attempt to carry forward the task of critically deconstructing received anthropological wisdom surrounding issues such as ethics, collaboration, and decolonial methods (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019; Takaragawa et al., 2019). While these issues are well-represented in older fields, such as visual anthropology, multimodal anthropology attempts to rethink them in the context of emerging media ecologies, which are suffused with digital technologies and traces that exist in relation to non-digital phenomena. Multimodal ethnographers have experimented with collaborative forms of research that challenge the colonialist and extractivist approaches to ethnography that anthropologists have inherited. For example, Grace Sanders Johnson (2022) describes how she collaborated with environmental humanist and boat specialist Joanne Douglas to design a course called “Modalities of Black Freedom and Escape: Ships”. In the class, students not only read and discussed ethnographic, historical, theoretical, and technical texts about sailing,

boats, and related themes but also worked together to design and assemble a quilted sail. Students learned to use software such as Adobe Illustrator, Canva, and Photoshop in order to create their designs, and they also studied for and earned boating licenses in the state of Pennsylvania, where the class was held. As this example shows, multimodal ethnography brings together digital and non-digital technologies in order to produce and enact knowledge collaboratively. This involves challenging knowledge production as a practice that is entirely controlled by professional academics, who extract information and narratives from “subjects”, who are offered little to no role in the analysis or interpretation of the information they offer. Other anthropologists and ethnographers have done similarly innovative multimodal work with young people, drawing on a mix of digital and non-digital technologies to imagine new ways of co-constructing knowledge (e.g., Dattatreyan, 2020; Heidbrink, 2021; Librado et al., 2021; Luhtakallio and Meriluoto, 2022).

As we describe below, our approach to multimodality challenges extractive approaches to research by engaging in ongoing dialogues with youth activists and other community members. In this way, our work resonates with other approaches that are becoming increasingly common in youth-focused research, such as youth-led participatory action research (Cammarota and Fine, 2010) and photovoice research (Delgado, 2015). In line with these approaches, we imagine multimodal ethnographic research on youth-led social movements as an ongoing process of co-construction that will change over time as new young people enter existing movements and create new ones. At the same time, we resist any romanticization of collaboration as a “silver bullet” for dealing with the ways in which political and economic inequities structure and are structured by academic expertise. Not only are structures of academic training and employment deeply inequitable and shot through with contradictions, but the infrastructures and tools that multimodal anthropologists and activists use to carry out various forms of labor are products of the very neoliberal political economic arrangements that many of us hope to challenge with our work. While this places academics and activists alike in a fraught position, we do not think that the solution to these problems is to abandon the use of digital tools, but rather to use them in the most thoughtful and careful way possible in order to collaborate with activists in exposing injustices and imagining new worlds.

Now that we have situated multimodal ethnography in relation to previous ethnographic approaches and anthropological concerns, we provide accounts of our respective attempts to deploy multimodal ethnography as a collaborative research practice in the context of youth activism. First, we discuss Maurice’s collaboration with youth activists and artists in Oaxaca and Los Angeles, followed by Jurhamuti and Anthony’s collaboration with youth activists, artists, and historians in Michoacán.

EXPERIMENTING WITH MULTIMODALITY AS PROCESS AND COLLABORATION IN MAURICE RAFAEL MAGAÑA’S WORK WITH YOUTH ACTIVISTS AND ARTISTS

My path towards multimodal anthropology has been forged through relationships I have made as an ethnographer of youth cultural politics and through my attempts to recognize and uplift the creativity and contributions of my interlocutors. A common concern in my research on social movements (Magaña, 2020) and transborder communities (Magaña, 2022a, 2022b) is taking youth seriously as creators of social worlds. How do they theorize collective pasts,

presents, and futures (Magaña and Flores-Marcial, 2022)? What kinds of subjectivities and relations do they enact and imagine? How do they give form to the radical imagination? These concerns have led me to explore multimodal anthropology as a possible intervention that might help me better engage my interlocutors, their epistemic contributions (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019), and multiple audiences.

In my earlier work in Oaxaca, Mexico, I sought to understand how a social movement that began as a labor dispute between the teachers' union and the state government erupted into a broad-based popular movement that took over the capital city of the state for nearly six months in 2006. After initially focusing this work on the political coalitions formed between the teachers' union and a diverse group of over 300 social movements, NGOs, unions, and opposition groups, it became clear to me that there was a wide swath of the movement that was being written out of those early narratives of the movement. A quick glance at the walls of the downtown core of the city – a UNESCO designated World Heritage Site – revealed a booming post-graffiti street art scene where protest art saturated walls, building facades, lamp posts, and any other available surface.¹ The visual narratives produced mostly by young artists and activists resonated with stories I was hearing from teachers and other rank-and-file participants in the movement about the important role that youth played in the movement, particularly in forming the frontlines of defense against militarized police forces and paramilitaries. This is where my foray began into both youth studies and engaging visual, largely nonalphabetic texts as significant sources of ethnographic data.

The questions I asked about the movement as the years went on dealt in large part with the temporality and spatiality of social movements. When I first arrived in Oaxaca in 2007 to research the coalitional politics of the teachers' union, the official story that was being told by many was that the movement had ended in November of 2006 when the federal police force retook the city. As the years of fieldwork stretched on to 2008, 2009, and 2010, it was clear that many segments of the social movement, especially the more radical youth currents, did not receive the memo about the movement being a thing of the past. They continued to mobilize under the banner of the social movement. In order to understand how they harnessed the movement's energy over years of sustained government campaigns of repression, I had to focus on how they nurtured and cultivated that energy through everyday organizing and the creation of cultural hubs. Part of the reason radical youth currents were so quickly mobilized in 2006 was because diverse networks of youth collectives, including graffiti crews, anarchist punk collectives, and crews in the independent hip-hop scene were already deeply politicized, in part due to antagonistic relationships with police and other sectors of society that criminalized and disparaged their cultural practices.

Multimodality as Collaborative Research Process

In this early work, one way that I engaged in multimodality was more as a method of collaboration than of data collection. For example, I was invited by a respected graffiti artist and muralist to co-produce an art installation for a community art space located in a small town on the outskirts of Oaxaca City. He invited me to intervene in his installation on the exterior of the building by applying stencils I learned to make at a workshop his crew led a few months prior. On a separate occasion, I helped his crew install an exhibit they were invited to participate in at a small studio and gallery run by an elder movement artist. Later I was invited by a different member of this crew to attend a march with him. During the march, he stopped, dropped his

backpack, and started to pull out aerosol cans and stencils. Having witnessed the collective application of protest stencils during previous marches, I knew he needed someone to help hold the stencils in place, which I did.

Participating in the art installations and the application of protest art ended up being incredibly meaningful for my understanding of the social practices involved in the types of collective art my interlocutors produce. Beyond seeing the finished product or observing the production of art, being asked to participate in the collective practice allowed me to gain a different perspective on the spatiality of post-graffiti street art and the link between this type of collective, often illicit, cultural practice and mobilizing for direct action. These insights informed my analysis of the spatial and cultural politics of graffiti crews, street art collectives, and their activism. Participating in these art installations also highlighted for me how generative it can be when you let your interlocutors lead and listen to the ethnographic material, as Roxanne Varzi (2018) reminds us to do.

Extending Collaboration Beyond Fieldwork: Watching and Listening to Images

Once I moved on to the book (Magaña, 2020), I was blessed with readers, including friends, my University of California Press editor, and reviewers, who helped me cultivate my voice as an author. The result is a book that I am proud to have out in the world and that I believe offers an important contribution to academic scholarship and to writing anarchist and autonomous youth activists into the history of contemporary social movements. It is restrained, however, by the limitations and perhaps more significantly, by my limitations as a first-time author who was not trained to engage images and sounds ethnographically.

When I present “Cartographies of Youth Resistance”, I try to address some of the limitations of the traditional academic book format (i.e., largely text-based narrative with a limited number of black and white images) by making space to exhibit photographs taken by Baldomero Robles Menéndez. Baldomero was part of the punk movement in 2006 and documented its participation in the social movement. His stunning photographs captured moments of joy, rage, conviviality, rebellion, and collective agency in the midst of an extraordinary milieu of radical direct democracy and government repression. His work graces the cover of my book and several of the pages inside of it, though again the limitations of the traditional academic book format greatly restrain his impactful work. When presenting in person, I exhibit photographs he printed and that I framed, which helps add some depth and scope to the work. When presenting virtually, I embed higher quality copies of his photos in my slides and am able to share them in color if the originals were in color. Moreover, I often begin book presentations with music videos from movement artists such as feminist emcee Mare Advertencia Lirika, whose lyrics and narrative are also part of the book, or anarkopunk band Atake Directo who pay homage to one of the martyrs of the movement Salvador “Chava” Olmos García who I also write about in the book. I do not present the photographs or music videos as objects of analysis but rather, as I explain in more detail below, I hope to create a scenario where audiences experience and interpret the visual and sonic narratives and place them in conversation with my written/oral analysis.

As I work to sharpen my own engagement with images, I grapple with how to “destabilize the coloniality of the [ethnographic] gaze” as anthropologists Leniqueca Welcome and Deborah Thomas (2021) meditate on in their multimodal work on black life amid ongoing state violence in the Caribbean. In the case of Baldomero’s photographs, he includes images

of radical militant action in response to state violence, such as protestors throwing Molotov cocktails at heavily armored police vehicles. In the same series, he also includes seemingly mundane images of young punks sharing an embrace or fixing a bicycle-powered appliance. I exhibit a combination of these images when I present, arranging them beforehand and leaving them up after our conversation, again without comment or explicit interpretation of my own, though of course the content of my presentation and curation are always present. That these analyses, narratives, and semiotic modes interact is constitutive of the multimodal paradigm (Wright and Velázquez Morales, 2021).

My goal is to create a situation where audiences are able to sit with the images in ways that can create openings for individual and collective “listening to images” as Tina Campt (2017) invites, especially in the case of some of the more mundane photographs where the protagonists do not seem to be engaged in any action of note. In listening to images, Campt (2017) theorizes “a method of recalibrating vernacular photographs as quiet, quotidian practices that give us access to the affective registers through which these images enunciate alternate accounts of their subjects” (p. 5). In this way, Campt, as well as Welcome and Thomas, are asking viewers of images to break with the sovereign/colonial gaze and ways we have been conditioned to see. Rather than romanticizing the subaltern, these provocations for rupture and refusal require that we take into account how the hierarchies of humanity that academic disciplines have helped create structure our interpretation of images. Indeed, this is crucial when dealing with representations of people not categorized as white or European and who have thus been historically excluded from the “genre of being human” (Wynter, 2003, p. 269). In my work, this is especially pertinent for images of youth who might be racialized as Indigenous, regardless of their own subjective identification, and have thus been excluded from full citizenship in Mexico.

How about the “loud” images of militarized police occupying those same urban peripheries or punks defending the streets by launching pyrotechnics out of homemade bazookas at the police? How can I help the audience engage in what Ariella Azoulay (2008) theorizes as “watching the images” (p. 14)? For Azoulay (2008), watching means reinscribing movement and time into photographic images such that: “when and where the subject of the photograph is a person who has suffered some form of injury, a viewing of the photograph that reconstructs the photographic situation and allows a reading of the injury on others becomes a civic skill, not an exercise in aesthetic appreciation.” (p. 14).

What watching and listening to images share, is an insistence on taking into account how the existing power relations structure the photographic encounter (i.e., the events captured, silences, circulation, political economy of technology, audience, curation, etc.). Of particular interest for me, is how these power relations and genres of humanness color our individual and collective experience of images. I hope that my work, together with Baldomero’s images, help cultivate a way of seeing that allows us to see how people produce social worlds through both mundane and spectacular actions. And because such archives of images are also archives of feelings, as Deborah Thomas (2019) argues, “they are, in the end, technologies of deep recognition, they can cultivate a sense of mutuality that not only exposes complicity but also demands collective accountability” (p. 7). It is this accountability that I grapple with as I continue to experiment with multimodality and the ethics of representation in my ethnographic practice.

Multimodality and Digital Ethnography

More recently, I have been working on a Storymaps project in parallel with my next book project on transborder cultural politics and community formation. I began this project while living in Los Angeles between 2013 and 2016. This initially began as traditional ethnographic fieldwork with activists in Los Angeles who had supported the Oaxaca social movement of 2006. While exploring the transborder social, political, and cultural networks that were mobilized in support of the movement, I found out that several of the art collectives and musical artists I worked with in Oaxaca were being invited to collaborate with organizations and artists in and around Los Angeles. This led me to look more closely at murals produced in Los Angeles by Chicano and Oaxacan artists. In some cases, the “same” mural was produced by the same artists in Oaxaca and in Los Angeles, two places already deeply connected through generations of migration and exchange that scholars and community members alike refer to as Oaxacalifornia (Kearney, 1995). Similarly, musical artists like rapper Mare Advertencia Lirika have toured the United States, performing and holding workshops in some of the same activist and cultural spaces that mobilized to support the Oaxacan movement in 2006.

This emerging project seeks to understand how young people add layers to and mold this shared transborder sociopolitical landscape through cultural productions and activism. Whether through murals, music, or mobilizations, artists and activists take on the role of ethnographers and archivists as they create multimodal records of community formation and politics across borders and geographic space. These records and actions get digitized and circulated online via social media, multimedia recordings, and a plethora of other platforms, thus adding yet another dimension to the multimodal archive produced by artists, activists, and everyday members of these transborder communities. My current work follows their lead in attempting to add another ethnographic layer to these multimodal archives.

In addition to including images, this project adds sonic material and maps to help viewers visualize the deep connections across geographic space and also across time. Given the ephemeral nature of murals and itinerant performances, and the social production of space more generally, the same places change over time. One of the challenges I continue to face with this project is how to destabilize the dominant gaze knowing that audiences are conditioned to see my interlocutors, who are all racialized young people and some combination of Indigenous, Mexican, Latinx, migrant, urban, heavily tattooed, and so on, as deviant, criminal, and suspect. How do I work against reproducing those ways of seeing while also honoring my interlocutors’ visual and embodied politics which refuse respectability? For example, two of the post-graffiti street art collectives I work with include representations of young people from their own communities heavily tattooed or with their faces covered with bandanas in their public murals, despite some community pushback, as acts of refusal and ungovernability (Magaña, 2022a). How do I use text, image, and sound to uplift alternative narratives and help create conditions where the terms of visibility for my interlocutors at once push back against tropes of criminality yet also honor their refusal of respectability politics? These are some of the questions and challenges I face as I explore the possibilities of multimodality as method, process, and product.

MULTIMODALITY IN CHERÁN: ANTHONY GERARD WRIGHT'S AND JURHAMUTI JOSÉ VELÁZQUEZ MORALES'S WORK WITH PURÉPECHAN YOUTH ACTIVISTS

In this section, we reflect on the multimodal ethnographic work we have been carrying out in collaboration with a group of Purépechan youth activists from Jurhamuti's hometown of Cherán, Michoacán, Mexico. In order to contextualize our work, we begin with a brief account of *el levantamiento*, a political movement which began in Cherán in 2011 when a group of community members decided to begin organizing against crime and environmental exploitation. We then describe the anthropological inheritances and academic relationships that have structured our collaboration. Following this, we offer an account of our attempts to enact methodological strategies of multimodality.

El Levantamiento

Cherán is a town of about 16 000 inhabitants located in the state of Michoacán, Mexico. It is populated by the Purépecha, an Indigenous group whose members pride themselves on a heritage of resistance that reaches back to the time of the Aztec Empire, and which has endured through the eras of Spanish colonization, anti-colonial revolution, Mexican state formation, and the current moment of neoliberalization (Verástique, 2000). Most recently, the town has been the site of a movement known as *el levantamiento*, or “the uprising”, which began in 2011 in response to violence and environmental exploitation wrought by narcotrafficking organizations in collusion with corrupt municipal politicians.

According to local accounts, the movement began when a group of women decided to take a stand against the environmental destruction being caused by illicit logging operations in the forest surrounding the town. Armed with rocks, sticks, and fireworks, the women blockaded the road leading out of the forest, stopping trucks full of illicit loggers. As word spread throughout the town, increasing numbers of community members headed to the forest in solidarity. The municipal police eventually came and broke up the situation, but the ordeal ignited a renewed spirit of activism, and the people of Cherán continued to organize. They began to hold political dialogues and meetings around *las fogatas*, or communal bonfires, which were constructed all throughout the town. Through these dialogues and the various efforts that grew out of them, Cherán has built one of the most important Indigenous social movements in Mexican history (Velázquez Morales and Lepe Lira, 2013).

Beyond this community-level organizing, the people of Cherán have also successfully fought for the right to autonomous governance. With assistance from *Colectivo Emancipaciones*, a group of lawyers and scholars who work to promote Indigenous rights, the community fought a legal battle that went all the way to the Mexican Supreme Court. In 2014, the court ruled in Cherán's favor, transforming the town into an autonomously governed Indigenous territory. This enabled the town to dismantle the existing local government and construct a new one guided by Purépechan values and customs (Aragón Andrade, 2019). Beyond this, the movement has organized many youth-directed projects, including an online radio station called Radio Fogata, a youth orchestra called Orquesta Típica Kuerajperi, and a youth artists' collective known as Cherán Crea. As scholars of childhood and youth, we have been studying these and other youth-oriented aspects of the movement most closely.

Anthropological Inheritances and the History of Ethnography in Michoacán

Anthony began visiting Cherán in 2014, when he met Jurhamuti, a scholar, educator, and activist who was born and raised in the community. We met through our mutual work with a group of historians at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo (UMSNH) in Morelia, Mexico. At the time, Jurhamuti was an undergraduate student and research assistant at UMSNH and Anthony was a graduate student in the joint PhD program in medical anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley and San Francisco. Anthony had been invited by Lorena Ojeda Dávila, a historian from Morelia who was a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley, to contribute to an edited volume on the history of anthropology in Michoacán (Ojeda Dávila, 2018). Lorena asked Anthony to write an essay exploring the work of the anthropologist George M. Foster, who conducted extensive ethnographic research in the region, and who founded the PhD program in medical anthropology in which Anthony was a student.

To begin working on the essay, Anthony began reading through Foster's published works. He also found an oral history that UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library produced with Foster in 2000, several years before he passed away in 2006 (Foster, 2000). Although Foster had founded the program in which Anthony was a student, he had very little familiarity with Foster's work prior to this. Foster was assigned in none of the classes Anthony took in the department, and although his name was mentioned from time to time, his intellectual legacy did not seem to have much influence over most of the faculty. As Anthony began reading his work and interviews, he very quickly realized why: Foster practiced what Arturo Escobar (1991) has labeled "development anthropology", a deeply colonialist and interventionist endeavor aimed at bringing about economic development in non-Western countries.

Foster's research in Michoacán was an attempt to explain the lack of capitalist development in rural areas, which he argued was a consequence of what he called "the image of limited good" (Foster, 1965, p. 293). Basically, what he meant by this was that the people who inhabited these regions believed that "the pie", as it were, was fixed, and they therefore responded with envy to the successes of others, instead of realizing that "the pie" could be grown indefinitely to make more wealth for all. Although Foster didn't engage directly with the work of neoliberal economists, he had clearly absorbed their ideas. Foster was convinced that limitless economic growth was possible and that working to "develop" economies by spreading the good news of capitalism was a good solution to global poverty. People (particularly poor people in non-Western countries) just needed to be convinced of the virtues of capitalist development and the counterproductivity of envy.

While Anthony was carrying out work on this chapter, Lorena introduced him to Jurhamuti, who invited Anthony to visit for the annual Fiesta de Corpus Christi and to meet some of the activists involved in the movement. On this first visit to Cherán, Anthony learned about *el levantamiento*, which only further demonstrated the inadequacy of anthropological approaches like Foster's, whose image of a rural Mexican population beset with envy and unable to work together collaboratively to improve the conditions of everyday life couldn't have been further from what was happening in Cherán. Beyond this, the neoliberal fantasy of infinitely growable economic pies upon which Foster's theory was based had clearly not fared well. In response to the ecological devastation wrought by global capitalism and the forms of organized crime and exploitation that it has enabled, the people of Cherán invalidated theories such as Foster's by coming together in resistance and working to protect each other from harm and exploitation.

As Takaragawa and colleagues (2019) point out, the turn toward multimodality in anthropology inevitably occurs in relation to a variety of problematic inheritances. We offer this reflection on Foster's work because his legacy constitutes an unwanted but undeniable anthropological inheritance that led to our collaboration and which structured (through non-example) Anthony's sense of what it means to do ethically and politically engaged fieldwork in Michoacán. By engaging critically with Foster's work, Anthony developed a better understanding of the symbolically violent representations of the people of Michoacán that white, North American anthropologists who came before him had woven into the ethnographic record. This had an impact on his own sense of responsibility to assiduously avoid the inadvertent reproduction of colonialist analyses and methodological approaches. As we describe in the next section, a collaborative, multimodal approach seems to us one way of practicing vigilance against the problematic inheritances that structure the anthropological profession.

Doing Multimodal Fieldwork in Cherán

A multimodal approach to the ethnographic study of youth activism has offered an imperfect but nevertheless valuable way to work against anthropology's colonialist and extractivist legacy, including but certainly not limited to Foster's work. In part, this has involved constructing a multimodal archive that challenges colonialist and otherwise pathologizing representations of Indigenous and rural-dwelling people in Mexico. In doing so, we follow other anthropologists who have argued that multimodality is not merely about diversifying ethnographic representations, as if the primary purpose were to insert more sound, video, and imagery into ethnographic accounts (Takaragawa et al., 2019). Rather, our goal is to better understand the multimodal practices and frameworks through which youth activists articulate their existence in the world. In our work, we have paid attention not only to the linguistic modalities through which youth activists articulate their worlds, but also to visual art, music, radio broadcasts, film productions, social media, and theatrical and musical performances. In this way, we join other multimodal ethnographers in challenging the notion that linguistic constructions provide the most adequate articulations of meaning and knowledge (Vidali, 2020).

At the same time, it is important not to imply that any particular modality, linguistic or otherwise, provides a perfectly transparent window into activist worlds and experiences, as if the processes and products associated with any modality can be adequately interpreted by scholars without significant input from those who enact and create them. In an attempt to challenge the kinds of colonialist conceptual impositions that mark the history of anthropology as a discipline, our approach to multimodality involves ongoing dialogues with community members about how they conceptualize and interpret their own creative labor and the constructions of knowledge and meaning that they produce. For example, through our engagements with youth activists who are also visual artists, we have attended to the ways in which they visually encode the history of *el levantamiento* in their artwork. Elsewhere, we have explored how youth activists have painted murals throughout the town of Cherán, depicting important people and events that have shaped the movement. We show that the artists who produce these murals conceptualize them as central to preserving collective memories of the movement and providing inspiration for further activism. We also show how artwork has been a vehicle through which activists have attempted to communicate the history of Cherán's movement to outsiders – for example, by participating in exhibitions in cities throughout Mexico and elsewhere and by circulating digital reproductions of artwork online (Wright and Velázquez Morales, 2021).

At the same time, our dialogues with artists have shown us that they do not frame their efforts only in terms of historical preservation or commemoration. They also describe the production of murals and other forms of creative activity as important methods of political socialization. In contrast to what Hava Gordon and Jessica Taft (2011) call “the conventional model of adult-led political socialization” (p. 1500), which marks children and youth as lacking the intellect or capacity to have political convictions or to participate in political life, Purépechan activists tend to articulate an understanding of political socialization as an intergenerational and ongoing process in which reciprocal forms of learning and guidance occur between adults and young people. Rather than one age group holding “the keys” to political socialization, it is instead constructed as a multidirectional, intergenerational, multimodal process. The process of mural production (as well as other creative projects) is modeled on this understanding, and children and youth exercise significant control over the form and content of the artwork they produce (see Figure 8.1).



Note: The mural was a collaborative project organized and carried out by local youth.
Source: Photograph by Jurhamuti José Velázquez Morales (2019).

Figure 8.1 A segment of a mural located at the Kumitzaro Bridge in Cherán

In addition to local modes of political socialization, creative activities are also imagined by activists as having the potential to reach the members of the Purépechan diaspora, particularly those residing in the United States, where many people from Cherán have migrated. Some of these individuals are undocumented and unable to visit their loved ones due to punitive immigration laws and the militarization of the US–Mexico border. Many of these individuals have also had children who have never visited Cherán. Youth activists and artists in Cherán

frame their online efforts in part as an attempt to reach these individuals, who they see as having a connection to Cherán and Purépechan history despite the geopolitical forces keeping them apart. In circulating images, videos, written accounts, music, and other locally produced content online via various social media platforms, activists intend for it to serve as a kind of invitation to other Purépechan youth to become aware of and involved in Cherán's history of struggle.

The Risks and Contradictions of Multimodal Engagements in Networked Worlds

While virtually all youth activists in Cherán use digital technologies and networks to engage in creative labor, to generate greater awareness of Purépechan history and culture, and to try to forge transnational connections with other youth, they are also deeply aware of the risks and contradictions implicit in doing so. One such risk that is widely discussed among artists is the potential for cultural appropriation – or, more accurately, cultural theft. Some artists avoid sharing their work widely on social media to prevent this from occurring, while others see the risk as worth the possibility of forging connections with people beyond Cherán. For some, this has resulted in exhibitions at major art museums and galleries in Mexico, the United States, and Europe. This has also resulted in international sales of artwork and visits to Cherán by internationally renowned artists.

Beyond the risk of cultural theft implicit in sharing creative work on social media networks, there is also the risk of surveillance, which other scholars of youth activism have noted (Lee, 2022; Magaña, 2020). By identifying themselves online as activists who hold perspectives that challenge the injustices of global capitalism, the violence of narcotrafficking organizations, and the corruption of government actors, youth open themselves up to digital surveillance by state and non-state actors alike. However, most are aware of this and use various strategies to protect themselves, such as using virtual private networks (VPNs) when making social media posts and only sending private messages using encrypted messaging apps, such as Signal. These are strategies with which we have also had to become familiar as multimodal ethnographers in order to avoid inadvertently enabling the surveillance of our interlocutors.

In addition to the risks of cultural theft and surveillance, there is also a major contradiction implicit in the use of digital technologies as tools of anti-capitalist and environmentalist activism. Namely, digital tools are products of the very forms of capitalist extraction and environmental exploitation that Purépechan activists and many anthropologists hope to challenge. The production of smartphones, tablets, and computers relies on a global economy that exploits labor, extracts resources, and generates a massive amount of pollution in the name of profit, innovation, and connectivity. Beyond the brutality and exploitation that goes into the production of digital technologies and networks, these technologies also create a great deal of environmental pollution in the form of greenhouse gas emissions and “e-waste”, which is often exported to countries in the Global South, thus exacerbating racialized conditions of ecological destruction (Tong et al., 2022).

Clearly, this is a contradiction with which multimodal ethnographers and activists must grapple. As Takaragawa et al. (2019) note, “Many technologies being used in anthropology today are fundamentally implicated in the oppression of people through unequal labor, distribution of resources, and alienation from land, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups in developing worlds as well as minority groups in industrialized spaces” (p. 521). The cameras, phones, laptops, airplanes, cars, and other technologies and infrastructures that most

anthropologists and activists use to carry out our labor are all products of exploitation; at the same time, they seem to hold potential for challenging exploitation by facilitating the construction of transnational activist networks and circulating accounts that challenge colonialist, racist, and violent interpretations and practices.

In deploying multimodal tools, it is absolutely essential for ethnographers to shed light on the problems, contradictions, and risks that these tools pose. Not only can we not deny that our tools are produced through exploitative and ecologically destructive practices, but we also must recognize that the uncritical use of these tools carries the potential to reproduce the violence of anthropology's methodological and epistemological inheritances at an alarming pace and scale. As Dada Docot (2021) has incisively pointed out, "Multimodalities that do not seriously engage with how violence, inequality, racialization, and injustice are perpetuated dangerously reproduce colonialist adventurism and obsessions with charting the unknown and rendering the Other readable and exploitable" (p. 521).

TEN STRATEGIES AND REFLECTIONS ON MULTIMODAL ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICE WITH YOUTH ARTISTS AND ACTIVISTS

In this chapter, we have attempted to show how we and other anthropologists have used multimodal ethnography in collaboration with youth activists, whose work is also deeply multimodal, even if they do not use that phrase. The youth activists with whom we work draw on a vast array of digital and non-digital modalities in their attempts to build social movements and imagine alternative worlds. In our experience, the multimodal ethnographic approach provides a powerful way to contribute to, document, and analyze such efforts. In embracing this approach, we hope to work against anthropology's colonialist intellectual inheritances, which cast Indigenous peoples and cultures in highly pathologized and stigmatized terms.

At the same time, we do not pretend that multimodality offers a perfect solution to these problems. Rather, we see it as a fraught project shaped by violent and unjust political economies and which always carries the dangers of reproducing the colonial inheritances and extractive relationships that we hope to challenge. Despite these difficulties, our work with youth artists and activists has shown us that multimodality nonetheless offers a powerful form of ethnographic engagement with which we encourage others to experiment. In that spirit, we close this chapter by offering a mix of strategies that guide our practice of multimodal ethnography.

1. Build multimodal archives in collaboration with youth artists and activists.
2. Recognize the role of youth as creators of social and political worlds while taking their liberatory visions and practices seriously.
3. Question homogenizing narratives about social movements and communities with special attention to uplifting excluded actors and voices.
4. Embrace the unknown and unsettled in our ethnographic practice.
5. Challenge the logocentrism of dominant academic publication formats.
6. Cultivate visions and practices of anthropological scholarship rooted in reciprocity, mutuality, and dignity while drawing attention to and challenging problematic scholarly inheritances.

7. Approach the interpretation of cultural productions and other modes of expression as anthropological acts deeply rooted in collective histories and dynamic social realities, as opposed to merely an exercise in aesthetic appreciation.
8. Dwell on contradictions and tensions implicit in multimodal approaches to scholarship and activism.
9. Better understand how multiple semiotic/epistemic modalities interact in practice.
10. Emphasize process and experimentation in our ethnographic work and in the sociopolitical work of our interlocutors.

NOTE

1. Post-graffiti is a term used to refer to street art that is influenced by graffiti, either in the artist's own trajectory or otherwise.

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9. By us, for us: a women of color student activist photo-narrative exhibit for sociopolitical wellbeing

Jesica Siham Fernández and Danielle N. Aguilar

As a visual methodology, photovoice has the capacity to bring to light experiences of institutional marginalization that must be documented and addressed by communities. The hope, strengths, agency, and determination to actualize justice can also be similarly illustrated through photovoice. The photovoice process of documenting is oriented toward supporting the development of social change toward conditions that can optimize health and wellbeing (Seedat et al., 2015; Vince and Warren, 2012), especially among institutionally marginalized groups whose experiences are often misrepresented and/or excluded, as is the case of student activists, such as women of color. Among most students of color, the university continues to be a site of struggle and marginalization (Vaccaro and Mena, 2011). As a result, students often engage in university activism to create opportunities and conditions where they can belong and feel supported (Duran, 2019; Gorski, 2019). To be embraced in full is to experience care, which is essential for academic thriving and overall health, both of which are associated with sociopolitical wellbeing.

Photovoice can serve as a medium for revealing issues of community and public concern toward the promotion of health, equity, and social change for sociopolitical wellbeing. Thus, expanding sociopolitical development theory (Watts et al., 2003; 1999), this chapter defines sociopolitical wellbeing as a state of being where humanizing conditions are sustained through affirming, racially just, equitable, and thriving environments that allow for integrated political and personal psychosocial, emotional, and physical health (Fernández, 2020). Sociopolitical wellbeing is characterized by individual and relational experiences of belonging, critical consciousness, and an awareness of the complexities of engaging in sociopolitical work, such as activism. Recognizing these experiences can help cultivate supportive conditions and relationships necessary to sustain organizing (Fernández, 2020). Photovoice can support activists' sociopolitical wellbeing. We demonstrate this by centering women of color student activists' lived experiences and stories of resisting the campus racial climate they documented and represented via their photo-narratives.

Photovoice, or adapting photovoice principles and processes, served as a tool to support student activists' sociopolitical wellbeing. *By Us, For Us: A Photo-Narrative Exhibit*¹ features 21 photographs with narratives by women of color student activists, aged 18–24, most of whom identified as African American/Black women at a private Jesuit institution in the Silicon Valley (CA, USA). *By Us, For Us* was developed as an action-project through a student–faculty participatory action research (PAR) collaboration associated with the Sociopolitical Citizenship PAR (SC-PAR) Project (Fernández et al., 2018). *By Us, For Us* affirmed student activists' lived experiences, along with their calls for institutional change. Both the affirmation and the demands for change that are featured in the exhibit center women

of color student activists' stories. As Emerald, a Black woman and student activist, noted: "Seeing other students share their stories, made me feel seen and heard ... I am not the only one struggling to exist in the white university. I am not the problem. The problem is in the culture of the university that makes us feel unwell and unwelcomed."

Anchored in the reflections offered by Emerald, the goals of this chapter are threefold:

1. To describe the development, implementation, and implications of a photovoice adapted project to support student activists' sociopolitical wellbeing.
2. To demonstrate how photovoice can be used as a tool to shed light on experiences of institutional systemic racialized marginalization that would otherwise go unrecognized and unchanged – and similarly to bring to the surface the agency and resistance of women of color student activists.
3. To demonstrate how photographs and stories can produce counter-narratives for racial justice, equity, and inclusion in higher education that could potentially serve to cultivate sociopolitical wellbeing.

Through a descriptive discussion of *By Us, For Us*, an exemplar of a photovoice adapted approach and process is offered to invite scholars to consider how visual methodologies can be engaged toward social change aligned with sociopolitical wellbeing. To center the agency, voice, and stories of resistance of women of color student activists within the university is a way to cultivate and sustain students' sociopolitical wellbeing alongside their activism.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PHOTOVOICE

Developed in the mid-1990s by health promotion practitioner-scholar Caroline Wang and colleagues, photovoice supports the health and capacity-building of communities (Wang, 1999; Wang and Burris, 1994; 1997; Wang et al., 1998; Wang et al., 2000). As a process that involves communities identifying, representing, and improving their social condition through a photographic technique of entrusting them with cameras to capture and record their stories, photovoice has the potential benefit of catalyzing communities toward effecting social change. Through visual images and accompanying narratives, often presented as stories, photovoice can promote collaboration and partnerships with powerholders and other community members to cultivate healthy, equitable, and just policy changes or reforms (Seedat et al., 2015; Wang and Burris, 1997), as well as liberation (Lykes, 2010).

Aligned with a community-based participatory research (CBPR) paradigm, photovoice is unlike other applied qualitative methodologies as it prioritizes the lived experiences, voices, and agency of communities engaged in research (Catalani and Minkler, 2010; Lykes, 1997). As a methodology that guides the research process, photovoice engages communities in identifying, representing, and improving their quality of life, and community contexts via photograph informed reflections and dialogues. Photographs and stories, often presented as photo-narratives, are utilized to support community empowerment, cultivate capacity-building, and influence powerholders with the goal of creating systemic change, as well as liberatory conditions (Lykes and Scheib, 2015). The promotion of health and wellbeing through self- and collective-representation, authorship, and critical reflexivity about what is being captured in a photo image and story is also an important element of photovoice.

At its core, photovoice has three interconnected objectives: (1) to assist communities in their process of recording and reflecting upon their community's strengths, challenges, and concerns; (2) to promote critical reflexivity about issues of concern to the community, via photo-elicited group dialogues that can garner new or more knowledge about a particular topic or issue; and (3) to reach policymakers and other influential powerholders who can help address the community's needs (Catalani and Minkler, 2010; Wang and Burris, 1997). Together, these three objectives inform the ethics, values, and principles that guide a photovoice process. Although photovoice is an adaptive flexible tool to modify according to the community and context, the underlying goals are to strengthen community engagement in research toward effecting social and policy-level changes. Most photovoice variations privilege individually and collectively voiced experiences, alongside community expertise in determining how best to support community health, wellbeing, and social change. By entrusting community members with cameras, or tools to record their lives visually and discursively, photovoice serves as a mediator between research processes and experiential knowledge (Kessi et al., 2019; Seedat et al., 2015).

Photovoice as a methodology also strategically equip or empower communities to document, analyze, and reflect – capture and author – their own stories with the guidance, resources, and support of researchers who act as facilitators of a collaborative research process (Vince and Warren, 2012; Wang and Burris, 1994; 1997). Although there is no standard procedure for how to engage photovoice methodology, the fundamental principles are to support community determination and agency in telling stories visually with the intention of facilitating reflection, dialogue, and consciousness raising among photovoice participants, as well as stakeholders or constituents in positions of power with the capacity to support or meet community needs. Thus, as a tool toward advocating with and advancing community efforts, photovoice has the potential to contribute to the development of health and healthy spaces or practices by aiding communities in their process of meaning making, whilst instilling social and political action to actualize more just and thriving living conditions.

Informed by iterative cycles of reflection-dialogue-action, which characterize critical consciousness as purported by Freire (1970), photovoice invites communities to “consider, and seek to act upon, the historical, institutional, social, and political conditions that contribute to personal and community problems” (Wang et al., 2004, p. 911). Indeed, because photographs are more durable, capable of capturing moments that can withstand time, they can be utilized strategically by communities to convey the urgency of their calls for change (Harley, 2012). Of most value is the capacity for photovoice to provide recognition and validation to a person's experience; to humanize community struggles via their stories, and to connect with others similarly situated to forge a deep or stronger community with the potential to catalyze change through action and counter-narratives (Lykes and Scheib, 2015). Supporting communities to tell and represent their lives via photo-narratives is an emancipatory process with implications for wellbeing, especially among institutionally marginalized groups, such as students of color at predominantly white institutions (Kessi, 2018; Kessi et al., 2019).

The photo-narrative project described herein offers insights into the possibilities of adapting or modifying photovoice processes to document and preserve stories as resources to support the sociopolitical wellbeing of women of color student activists. The affirmation and validation that such visual representations can provide must not be understated, especially for student activists whose experiences of racism and intersectional discrimination on campus are often minimized, misrepresented, or unaddressed. The intention guiding the descriptive

analysis of *By Us, For Us* is to highlight a collaboration with women of color student activists toward the goal of supporting their sociopolitical wellbeing. A related goal is to demonstrate how visual methodologies can contribute to ongoing developments toward the application, use, and value of photovoice, and related approaches like photo-narratives, which can serve as resources or tools to support sociopolitical wellbeing, especially among women of color in higher education.

REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH POSITIONALITY

Grounded in a community-engaged research praxis that is aligned with a decolonial feminist standpoint, we approach research collaborations and projects from a state of *Nepantla*. Anzaldúa defines *Nepantla* as the *borderlands* or in-between spaces where transformation and tension are possible, and where hybridity, difference, and multiplicity are embraced in the process of bridging what are perceived as contradictions (Anzaldúa, 1993; 2002). As *Neplanteras*, we are committed to utilizing research and co-cultivating knowledge to support community struggles. Through a decolonial feminist standpoint oriented toward transformative justice, our work strives to unsettle or disrupt hegemonic power and colonial assemblages in theory, research, practice, and pedagogy. We enact these values and commitments through a participatory action research (PAR) paradigm. PAR facilitates the disruption of hegemonic discourses through collaboration and relational knowledge that makes visible the intersections of oppression, and the possibilities for systemic change via critical inquiry and action (Fernández et al., 2018; Fine and Torre, 2019; Lykes et al., 2018; Torre et al., 2012). Guided by these values, Jesica, as a community-engaged researcher and educator bridging contexts, positionalities, and perspectives, co-established the Sociopolitical Citizenship Participatory Action Research (SC-PAR) Project with women of color student activists. With humility, critical reflexivity, and transparent collaboration with student activists, SC-PAR works to document their radical wit, hope, and resistance to silence. SC-PAR collaborates with students to create opportunities and leverage institutional resources to support sociopolitical wellbeing and healing with, for, and by student activists.

As the SC-PAR faculty facilitator, Jesica engages with women of color student activists as co-researchers who are contributors and producers of knowledge throughout the research process. Jesica helps cultivate women of color students' research skills, alongside their activism, sociopolitical citizenship, and wellbeing through the development of action projects that raise awareness of and seek to address the campus racial climate impacting them. Through action-projects that build from the bottom-up, or student-led efforts, Jesica positions herself as an ally and accomplice with student struggles, leveraging resources, institutional, material, and otherwise, to support their cause and calls for change. Unpacking the complexities of student activists' experiences within a predominantly white institution, where activism is often seen as a threat to the status quo of the university, is central to Jesica's praxis.

Thus, cultivating sociopolitical wellbeing through photographs and stories as featured in *By Us, For Us*, underlines the importance of fostering a consciousness about social issues, along with a sense of belonging to support activist efforts to transform the institution. Because higher education institutions often compromise the overall health and thriving of students of color, especially women and activists (Duran, 2019; Fernández et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2019), such settings must be held accountable, or at the very least, their transgressions must be

made visible. Cultivating students' sociopolitical wellbeing is imperative within and beyond the academic domain – and the university can and must play a role in leveraging its resources toward this purpose in the absence of institutional transformations.

Project Background

The SC-PAR Project began in the spring of 2016 as a student–faculty collaboration between Jesica, who was an adjunct faculty with a modest grant at the time, and three women of color student activists in the Unity IV movement to address the campus racial climate. Noting the amount of labor placed upon women of color – from emotional and caring labor to leadership responsibilities – Jesica asked students to consider how their mutual interests in activism, and her research on sociopolitical development, youth organizing, and wellbeing could align to sustain their activism. Over the course of several meetings, we agreed to form a research team, the SC-PAR Project, to support women of color student activists and their efforts to respond to the campus racial climate, a climate that, while animating their activism, was compromising their sense of belonging and overall wellbeing. Danielle, a student affairs professional, joined in the fall of 2017, as programming and resources within the Office for Multicultural Learning were accessible to support our action-project. Students acknowledged Jesica and Danielle as faculty/staff allies and supporters of their organizing. We continue to leverage our positionalities and institutional resources, such as funding, to support student activism.

As a collective we utilize a range of participatory, visual, and narrative methodologies to sustain and promote the sociopolitical wellbeing and engagement of women of color student activists. One of our initial projects involved conducting interviews with student activists to document their lived experiences, hopes, and dreams, as well as radical wit in the Unity IV movement (Fernández et al., 2018). Although the student-researcher-activists who guided the interviews, and initially formed SC-PAR have graduated, every year new students join the collaboration. Currently there are two women of color student activists in SC-PAR who are documenting the stories and experiences of students engaged in racial justice activism in the university. Through a process of reflection-dialogue and action (Freire, 1970; Kessi, 2018), we continue to build on SC-PAR. *By Us, For Us* is one iteration of our activist research process.

Photo-Narrative Development Process

By Us, For Us was motivated by some interviewees' reflections and recommendations for next steps on our PAR process. The interview excerpts were powerful in and of themselves; however, some interviewees, including SC-PAR members, felt that some of the stories would be best represented visually. We pursued the development of a photo-narrative exhibit with the support and contributions from some interviewees, including some who eventually became SC-PAR members or co-researchers. The photo-narratives offered an opportunity for women of color student activists to share their stories via visual photographic representations that brought to life their experiences as students, activists, and student-activists.

The procedure for soliciting photographs and quotes for the exhibit consisted of inviting interviewees to review their transcripts after the member-check process and select four to five interview excerpts that they believed were most significant of their experience. Interviewees were advised to select excerpts that they felt comfortable sharing publicly, and would not compromise their wellbeing and safety, including that of others they might have mentioned

in their interview. In addition to selecting quotes from their transcript, they were asked to share an accompanying photograph that would illustrate the story captured in the excerpt. Of the 20 interviewees, ten responded to this invitation. The ten who responded were women of color who were friends with one or more SC-PAR members, or with those who later became members. Additionally, all who contributed maintained communication with Jesica, who often served as a mentor and resource during and after their undergraduate studies. It is likely that only ten responded to this request because revisiting their transcript would have caused some to relive their experiences with racial trauma on campus, which in turn could potentially compromise their health. Interviewees who responded to our invitation by contributing quotes and photographs were provided with a stipend in the form of a \$50 gift card to honor their labor. The total number of photo-narratives was 47, however SC-PAR collectively agreed to feature 21 in the exhibit.

Our process of discerning which photo-narratives to include was guided by the following questions: (1) How does the photograph and quote reflect the student of color experience?; (2) How can the photograph and quote contribute to a better understanding of the student of color activist's experience?; (3) Who is represented and included in this photograph – and are there any risks to this person(s) being featured?; and (4) How can the photograph and quote inform administrators or university leadership about the campus racial climate that students are demanding be addressed? Because the exhibit sought to speak back to the institution by centering visually and aesthetically women of color student activists' stories, SC-PAR members engaged with and involved the interviewees in the organization and presentation of the exhibit, which was on display at the university's library for five months over the course of the fall and winter quarters. The exhibit was held on the second floor of the university library where several students gather to study. Data on who visited the exhibit was not systematically gathered, yet there were informal opportunities for those viewing the exhibit to share their reflections by writing thoughts on a journal notebook we left on display at a table near the exhibit, as well as through a survey that was shared via a QR code. The results of these informal data collection sources are the focus of a separate publication in progress. In this chapter, we focus on photo-narratives and our adaptation of photovoice as a tool to support a sociopolitical wellbeing process among SC-PAR members and interviewees.

The photo-narratives featured in the exhibit highlight the experiences of institutional racism and racialization, as well as the sociopolitical wellbeing, sense of belonging, and activism of students involved in the Unity IV movement. Although each photo-narrative is unique and powerful on its own, the exhibit captures the lived realities of women of color student activists. In this way, it raises awareness about student of color experiences with institutional racism and discrimination, specifically anti-Blackness, which severely compromises student wellbeing. Moreover, the exhibit illustrates the student activists' courage, joy, and hope for creating an anti-racist campus environment where students can learn and thrive.

Organization of Photo-Narrative Exhibit

By Us, For Us represents the threads or connections across the content illustrated in each photograph, along with the story that gives context to the image. Themes were discerned through an inductive and deductive iterative process. Our inductive procedure was informed by recent and relevant literature on student of color activists' experiences in higher education, including narrative and photographic methods to document the campus racial climate (Cornell and

Kessi, 2017; Duran, 2019; Howard et al., 2019; Gorski, 2019; Kessi, 2018; Vaccaro and Mena, 2011), and sociopolitical development (Fernández et al., 2018; Watts et al., 2003; 1999). Our deductive procedure involved multiple viewings and readings of the photographs and narratives, which were accompanied with reflexive dialogues among members of the SC-PAR team. Taken together, the photo-narratives were organized or thematically represented along three themes – sociopolitical consciousness, sense of belonging, and the paradoxes of activism. Through these themes, we encouraged university administrators to recognize and support student activism and to direct resources to transform the campus racial climate. We describe each of these themes via examples of student activists' photo-narratives.

THE *BY US, FOR US* PHOTO-NARRATIVE EXHIBIT

By Us, For Us illustrates three interconnected themes that characterize the student of color activist experience. Themes include student of color activists' sociopolitical consciousness, sense of belonging, and the paradoxes of activism. Together, these render visible the experiences of student activists, who are seldom provided opportunities to tell their stories of navigating and challenging the campus racial climate that impacts their wellbeing. Documenting, telling, and sharing stories can be a powerful way of fostering individual and collective health and wellbeing – this was the purpose and intent of the photo-narrative exhibit.

Sociopolitical Consciousness

Sociopolitical consciousness develops through a critical social analysis of the root cause of social problems (Watts et al., 2003; 1999). Among student activists, recognizing their experiences of discrimination on campus as entrenched in a history of institutional racism and anti-Blackness served to support their sociopolitical consciousness and activism often in the form of speaking up. To illustrate, Jaia's narrative associated with a Facebook screenshot of an experience she had in her ethnic studies classroom demonstrates how she challenged the culture of whiteness and colorblindness (Figure 9.1).

I wasn't afraid to speak up in those classes [ethnic studies] because I knew that if no one around me shared my point of view, I knew that the professor did. When I would have these types of comments that I wanted to bring up in a business class, I wasn't always confident and didn't feel comfortable speaking. [...] But then when I get to my ethnic studies classes and I had these types of ideas, I still may have felt that my peers wouldn't support them, but I knew that the professor would because she's teaching this type of class. So, in those classes I was never afraid to speak up. So, it [ethnic studies] helped me to find my voice in the classroom setting, and then that sort of created a ripple effect for me finding my voice and making it heard campus wide. (Facebook post)

Opportunities to think and respond critically to discrimination and challenge the campus racial climate furthered students' sociopolitical consciousness. African American students, like Jaia who was set to graduate as an ethnic studies and business double-major, often encountered anti-Blackness in their business courses. Recognizing how their circumstances within the university could change if they spoke up was a meaningful experience for students, like Jaia, who eventually joined SC-PAR as a student researcher. Similarly, Jasmyne, a Black woman,

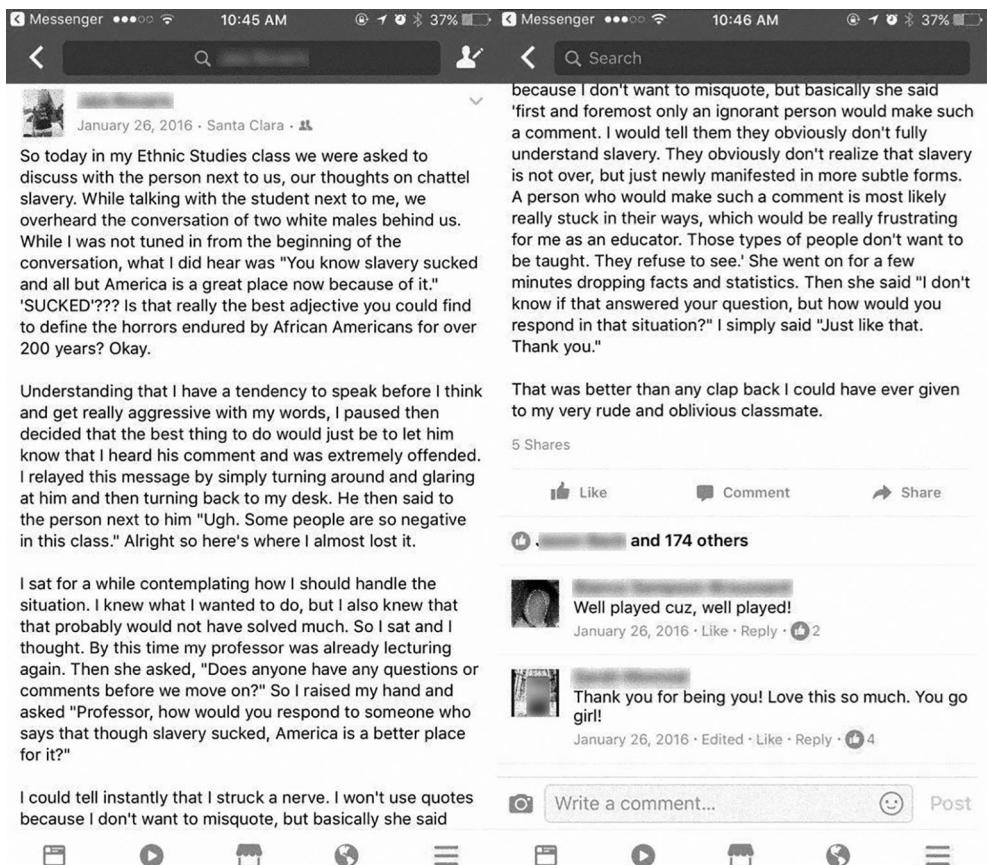


Figure 9.1 Facebook post photo

ethnic studies major, and SC-PAR member, challenged the climate of the university by taking a photograph of the university sign at the entrance of campus and stating the following:

I feel like I know the University inside and out now. In a way it's kind of, it really affects the way you walk around this campus, because you don't just see this as a beautiful place where you just, you go to your classes, and you party, and you do all this. I like see it structurally now – it's weird. But I like it because, you know, I don't walk around blindly anymore. (University sign)

Women of color student activists, like Jaia and Jasmyne, held a sociopolitical consciousness of their lived experiences as situated within a racialized structure. This awareness helped them navigate the university whilst cultivating a belief that change was possible via their activism.

Transforming spaces characterized by a culture of colorblindness, as Jasmyne noted, necessitates being attuned to structures of racialization. Echoing this experience was Ciann's photograph of Igwe, the Black Student Union's official name and logo. Ciann's accompanying narrative also expressed her understanding of some students' motivations to engage in activism: "[The racism] is frustrating because it's so draining. These are things that we care about because they affect us so deeply and [we] are emotionally invested in [them]. If someone does

not feel safe, then I probably don't either. [...] We found ourselves being support systems for [each other]." (Igwe logo).

As an interviewee and alumna who no longer experienced the campus racial climate, Ciann described her experiences as a Black woman needing to create "safe spaces" for other Black students on campus. The exhibit helped students understand their experiences in relation to each other, not as isolated events, but as conditions produced by the structure and culture of the university. Women of color student activists, especially Black/African American women, understood their experiences of marginalization within the university via a critical social analysis of power, racism, and anti-Blackness. The process of documenting their story supported their agency to influence their environment and create conditions where they could feel supported. In telling their story, they saw themselves as agents of change, who individually and collectively shared their photo-narratives to challenge the campus racial climate. Their experiences of marginalization and resistance to racism served to support their sense of belonging.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is an important element for supporting the academic success and retention of students (Duran, 2019). The experienced social connectedness that a student might develop within the context of the university has implications for learning, positive development into adulthood, and student wellbeing (Fernández, 2020). However, not all students experience connection or belonging on campus in the same way. Students that reflect upon their experiences as women of color in a predominantly white and male classroom space, for example, often struggle with the intersections of oppressions – of having their race/ethnicity and gender made salient in ways that may *other* them or position them on the margins. Among women of color these experiences were often amplified by a culture of colorblindness within the university, as noted in Leah's selfie in the library-resource room and her accompanying narrative: "You really get sent the message, like all the time, that you don't belong here. Like, people don't want you here. You can be here, but only if you limit these certain parts of yourself." (Resource room).

As an Asian American woman, ethnic studies, women studies, and English major, just a few months away from graduating, Leah narrates what was going through her mind when she agreed to have her friend and SC-PAR member, Maddy, take her photograph. The experience of needing to limit, surveil, or hide parts of themselves, as Leah notes, was characteristic of student activists' experiences of marginality. Research shows such experiences lead to negative health outcomes for students, especially for students of marginalized genders and students of color (Duran, 2019). The exclusion and *othering* that some students experience can severely compromise their sense of belonging, and consequently their academics and health.

Encountering multiple forms of exclusion on campus can adversely impact students, especially in regard to their academics; however, over time their health suffers as well. Yet among some students, experiences of exclusion often led them to seek opportunities to challenge the *othering* they were feeling. Women of color student activists who contributed to *By Us, For Us* were often motivated by a desire to tell their story and demand their place on campus, as Rhyann and Paris's narratives and accompanying photographs of an Igwe event, and the Black Power Salute demonstrate.

For me it's trying to carve out a space where I feel included on campus. [...] This is supposed to be my home away from home—for me and other people who look like me. For them not to feel comfortable just because of their identity, that's not okay. We all have a right to be at the University. (Igwe group event)

"I think in order to find a place where you feel safe, so you can grow, I've had to make those spaces first and I think there's still a lot of work to be done. If we don't, who will?" (Black Power salute).

Among Black women activists, like Rhyann and Paris, experiences of isolation were shaped by intersecting forms of discrimination, especially anti-Blackness. The feelings of exclusion often contributed to student activists creating spaces for themselves where they could feel connected and supported. In other cases, it led some students, like Rhyann, to join groups where their peers were actively involved in fostering communities of care and support. Rhyann joined SC-PAR after being invited by Jasmyne and Jaia. Paris, however, was set to graduate and was looking forward to leaving the campus environment behind. Activism, despite the challenges, helped students feel seen and heard. Additionally, it contributed to creating a community of care that served to support them in their sociopolitical wellbeing. Sense of belonging was experienced within the context of spaces and relationships where they felt their experiences were seen and heard. Spaces *by* and *for* student activists served to affirm their place on campus.

Complexities of Activism

The third theme describes the challenges of activism, as well as the agency experienced among student activists. Activism can be an affirming and healing experience for some students because it can help them exercise agency in making change. Yet, the emotional energy that activism requires can be depleting and taxing, as Maddy, a Vietnamese American SC-PAR member, ethnic studies, and English major, notes:

The main frustration I have is the lack of recognition and the amount of emotional labor that women of color do as activists because I think that's definitely a thing. I think in the MCC [Multi-Cultural Center], they're like: "We're all students of color, therefore we're all in it together." Well, first of all, it's like well – No! That's not true! Not every single [person], and like group of people experience racism in the same way, which I think is like a big idea, and the MCC is like: "Oh well all of our people struggle." And I'm like we haven't all struggled in the same way, so we can't say that. And, it's almost like a weird version of color-blindness. It's like, "I recognize that we're POC, therefore I'm not colorblind, but I'm gonna think we all experience the same thing," which is a false statement. And that's an idea that was expressed in the "trauma triangle" [MCC meeting]. Well no, we haven't all gone through it [racism]. And when you consider Asian Americans—that's not a freaking monolithic experience. It's just like frustrating. And so there's this like this blindness, there's this color-blindness, but also this intersectional blindness. (TLC t-shirt) (Figure 9.2)

Despite the evidence indicating the positive outcomes associated with activism, there are limitations as well. Activism, as Maddy underscores, can pose challenges to an activist's sustained wellbeing because it may require constantly engaging with intersecting forms of discrimination and willful ignorance that reproduce racial trauma. Over time, activism can have a deleterious impact on individual health and collective wellbeing, especially when the activism is perceived as futile within an unchanging institution.

Some scholars, among them Gorksi (2019), have termed this experience of compromised wellbeing as "activist burnout". Leah, for example, describes this in a photograph showing



Figure 9.2 TLC T-shirt photo

a heart and fist flyer with the accompanying narrative: “Organizing can become your entire life. [...] I’m learning how to say: ‘Please stop.’ [...] We kind of re-expose people to their trauma and we need to be more careful about it. All of us! It’s like I realize that because it personally affected me.” (Heart-First flyer, Image 8) (Figure 9.3).

Unlike other forms of burnout, activist burnout is entwined with a sociopolitical consciousness, as well as the physical and emotional labor that activism requires (Gorski, 2019). Among women of color student activists, this is especially the case because they are often experiencing the intersections of multiple forms of disenfranchisement and institutional marginalization (Bowers et al., 2020; Cornell and Kessi, 2017; Fernández et al., 2018). It is the accumulation of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that comes with consistent and persistent activism that can lead to burnout. The eventual physical and emotional exhaustion can limit the possibilities of experiencing sociopolitical wellbeing, an experience that Marina, a Salvadoran American, public health and ethnic studies major, described in her photograph of a student action, which involved putting up posters of solidarity with Dreamers and DACAmented students² around campus. Marina’s photo was accompanied by the following narrative:

All of a sudden, I became the face of the “undocumented,” which I knew that was going to happen. But people wanted me to speak here, there, do this, do that, what was my opinion, how was the University doing in terms of helping undocumented students. All the knowledge I had [was] from personal experience and from courses that I’ve had, and informal conversations with undocumented students. But all of a sudden, I became the face of it! Like I had all the answers for people. And I think

that took a huge toll on me. Doing this work is really exhausting. I commend people who have their life together and can get good grades in school and be able to do all of this because I've been having the hardest time trying to find the balance. But I've learned to fight for myself because if I don't no one else will. Which is why this University needs an undocu-student resource center so other students don't have to fight for themselves. (Dreamers)



Figure 9.3 Heart and fist photo

Several students considered themselves activists not by choice, but by necessity. The burden of responsibility to transform the university often weighed heavily on some students, especially those who, like Marina, were soon to graduate, yet continued to see incoming students struggle with challenges similar to those they encountered. As Marina illustrates, when activ-

ism is not met with change or resources, relationships and practices toward self- and collective wellbeing are compromised, and activism efforts eventually diminish. Activist burnout limits the wellbeing of student activists to the detriment of their organizing efforts. Thus, creating opportunities to reflect and work through the paradoxes of activism is invaluable.

By Us, For Us helped student activists acknowledge the campus racial climate, including their resistance to it, alongside their desire to facilitate a process of sociopolitical wellbeing. The exhibit helped some women of color student activists reflect upon the complexities of their activism to help sustain their efforts and actions toward institutional change. Cultivating spaces where student activists can strive to create an inclusive anti-racist campus, despite the challenges associated with their activism, is a necessary dimension of individual and collective wellness. *By Us, For Us* sought to bring these realizations to the forefront – to cultivate and further student activists' efforts in transforming the racial climate of the university.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

To reach the hearts and minds of powerholders – and affirm and validate themselves in their struggles, strengths, and agency – communities must illustrate visually their experiences on their own terms and conditions. Photovoice can guide communities in their use of photographs as tools to bring their experiences publicly to the surface, and work toward social change and transformative justice with the potential to contribute to individual and community thriving. Through *By Us, For Us*, we have illustrated the multimodality of photographs and narratives associated with photovoice as a methodology that can provide a unique opportunity for student activists to connect with other students, faculty, and university administrators to support their sociopolitical wellbeing. Activism foregrounds the personal, social, and political conditions that influence wellbeing (Prilleltensky and Fox, 2007). Thus, understanding the lived experiences of students who navigate an oppressive campus climate, as they make meaning of their racialized experiences through their activism, is a way to transform higher education (Kessi, 2018; Seedat et al., 2015). As Bowers et al. (2020) purport, “we must begin to listen to our students instead of listening to others talk about our students” (p. 22). To transform higher education and support the sociopolitical wellbeing of student activists, educators and researchers must engage methodologies that support students in telling their stories (Lykes et al., 2018).

Photovoice is a visual methodology grounded in participatory action research paradigms oriented toward epistemic justice that value the power of stories. Through 21 photo-narratives, student activists illustrated their sociopolitical consciousness, often in relation to their sense of belonging that in turn compelled them to engage in activism despite the paradoxes it often presented. Yet students' actions and engagements that affirmed them in their capacities to effect change also compromised their wellbeing. Photovoice can thus facilitate collaborative relationships among researchers, community members, and powerholders. In addition to facilitating such relationships, photovoice can serve as a springboard for communities to engage in strategic modes of social action, and to participate in demanding resources needed to disrupt the conditions of oppression that impact their quality of life, health, and wellbeing. Photovoice holds much value for research directed at supporting sociopolitical wellbeing, amplifying community belonging and connection, and deconstructing hegemonic discourses and practices toward supporting social change via collective action or activist efforts (Seedat et al., 2015).

Implications

Through their photo-narratives student activists of color offered a meaningful opportunity to raise awareness as well as sensitize others to the experiences of marginalization they encountered on campus. Engaging with student activists' stories can offer members of the campus community insight into experiences of oppression that unfold within the culture of the institution. One key implication of the photo-narrative exhibit is that it offered insight into the experiences of women of color student activists and their wellbeing, which was compromised by the campus racial climate they encountered within the university, along with the lack of resources and support to aid them in their efforts toward creating change. To facilitate and continue dialogues and efforts toward equity, inclusion, and care among student activists, we must first listen and acknowledge student struggles as valid.

An additional significant implication of *By Us, For Us* is its contribution to shaping and shifting the narrative associated with the campus racial climate. While the university has celebrated its purported diversity and inclusion initiatives and provided student activists with a "seat at the table" in leading efforts to transform the culture of the institution via quarterly diversity forums, *By Us, For Us* and students' reflections in response to the exhibit provide a rather distinct narrative. Thus, one of the unique and valuable outcomes of the exhibit is that it has contributed to preserving the authenticity of students' contributions to the transformation of the university, as well as the institutional knowledge and history of student activism. The value of this lies, perhaps in a very minimal way, in recognizing the contributions of students resisting and deconstructing the erasure of their activism and labor, along with the racism that students encounter on campus as they attempt to transform and heal from such conditions.

Limitations

Although the outcomes of this research are of value to discussions on the application and significance of photovoice as a methodology, the research project we have described is not devoid of limitations. The research associated with the project cannot be generalized to other university contexts, even assumed similar institutions, nor can it be replicated. The process, outcomes, and impact of *By Us, For Us* are grounded in the specificities of a university culture, specifically a campus racial climate, that is unique to one institution. Notably, Vaccaro and Mena (2011) cautioned researchers about the risks of generalizing the experiences of a select group of people, especially those with institutionally marginalized identities and experiences. Yet the experiences student activists described, and the analysis herein provided, can offer some insights into the hegemonic culture found within other universities and settings.

We invite and encourage readers to consider how their university might impact and compromise the wellbeing of students activists or communities of color. Specifically, it is worth asking how institutions may support or challenge a community's sense of belonging and wellbeing, along with their sociopolitical development, agency, and actions. In noting some of the limitations, this project may yield insights into opportunities for innovation and creativity in the development of photovoice approaches oriented to maximizing sociopolitical wellbeing and collective thriving.

A Call for Institutional Accountability

Visual methodologies, like photovoice, and in our specific case photo-narratives, are particularly powerful approaches toward creating institutional and systemic change. They also help make visible how the labor of organizing and activism often comes at a great cost to the academic thriving, health, and overall wellbeing of some students. The intensity of having to consistently respond or react to racialized incidents on campus can adversely impact student health. As educators and university affiliates, we must be attuned to the experiences of student activists – and how their organizing, while often affirming and positive, can compromise their wellbeing. How universities respond to student activists, engage with, connect, and support their calls for change and resultantly, how they frame or perceive students' activism in response to demands for reform, is fundamental to transforming the culture of the university. This is also important for supporting students in their sociopolitical development.

Institutions of higher education must play a role in producing sustainable conditions for an inclusive, equitable, and just society. To do so, the university must be attentive and responsive, as well as *responsible*, to the needs of students of color, especially student activists. In the absence of such modes of institutional accountability, the university stands to benefit from activist burnout. As a result of student activist burnout, and the attrition in their organizing, the culture of the university remains unchanged, while the wellbeing and academic thriving of students are compromised. Because the university often lacks an awareness of students' needs, photovoice has the potential to be a critical, powerful tool to document and assess the culture and climate of university – and whether it supports or compromises students' academic thriving, health and wellbeing. Finally, university administrators must come to appreciate and see value in activist modes of civic and political engagement as these are important dimensions of critical learning, citizen development, and democratic participation, which are necessary for healthy development into adulthood and fundamental to our democracy.

NOTES

1. *By Us, For Us* is the title of the photo-narrative exhibit that SC-PAR student activists selected to highlight how the stories featured, along with the exhibit itself, are *by* and *for* student activists. Specifically, women of color student activists. The exhibit rendered their stories visible, powerfully illustrating, via photographs, the realities of their experiences within the university (Howard et al., 2019).
2. DACAmented students is a term often used to refer to students who are or have been beneficiaries of the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program. It is sociolegal, often self-ascribed label or identity that students use to describe their immigrant status in the US.

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10. Visual politicization and youth challenges to an unequal public sphere: conceptual and methodological perspectives

Eeva Luhtakallio, Taina Meriliuoto and Carla Malafaia

The public sphere of today's youth is increasingly dominated by visual content, as their political practices – building arguments, mobilizing, and participating – become firmly anchored in repertoires of visual participation. For example, prior research has highlighted the political character of memes (Shifman, 2013) and selfies (Caldeira et al., 2020; Hardesty et al., 2019; Kuntsman, 2017; Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz, 2015), posing the need for a scholarly engagement with *visual political action*.

However, research on democratic practices and political participation has thus far been concentrated on words, as in analyses textual and verbal modes of argumentation tend to be privileged. Many concerns have been expressed about the scope and reach of such an approach to democracy (e.g., Fraser, 1992; Young, 1992). The philosophical debate about inclusion has been accompanied by a range of ethnographies that emphasize the importance of paying close attention to styles, emotions, and bodily practices in political and civic action (Ahmed, 2004; Eliasoph and Licherman, 2003; Polletta, 2006; Talpin, 2011). These studies have shown how important non-verbal dimensions are for understanding power, and the meaning participation has for people. Understanding non-verbal levels of political participation is crucial in terms of conceptualizing the requirements of democratic inclusion of all citizens – and thus finding remedies to the crises in democratic governance.

We propose to understand non-verbal levels of youth's political action precisely through *action*. This pragmatist view posits that to be a citizen is to "do citizen": tangible, meaningful citizenship is an adverb, and identities are always realized in action (e.g., Neveu, 2003; Rosanvallon, 2006). Citizenship is not a mere status that one is born with or without, but a changing set of practices that require learning, engaging, and doing. "Doing citizenship" requires the use of cultural toolkits contextually available for participation, politicization, and finally, democracy (Swidler, 1986; Luhtakallio, 2012).

An inclusive democracy needs citizens who deploy these toolkits in creating commonality. Rooted in pragmatist philosophy, the notion of *commonality* is crucial in understanding how complex (modern) societies, strongly marked by inter-personal and inter-group differences, manage to hold together (Archer and Maccarini, 2013; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006[1991]; Thévenot, 2007; 2014). This is a fundamental sociological question to pose in political theory and action. By looking at political action at the concrete level of practices, we can understand how conflicts between different interpretations of the common good can be solved without resorting to violence. How do *political* resolutions of conflicts become possible, and *what kind of tools* do actors use to politicize issues?

We argue that today's youth use new tools, and thus enact their citizenship differently from former generations, due to both the institutional crises and changes in modes of engagement.

In particular, we argue that future citizens will increasingly engage in processes of politicization, of solving conflicts, and of deliberating by using partly, and even primarily, *visual* forms. As a result, understanding visual forms of political action is key in grasping both the cultural toolkits of democracy among today's youth, and the future landscape of democracy created through them. In this chapter, we put forward the concept of *visual politicization* to describe and make sense of the visual practices of politicization the youth employ. In addition, and to understand how youth political engagement is changing, the conceptual proposal is followed by two innovative methodological approaches designed to capture visual politicization. First, we introduce the method of "snap-along ethnography" as an application of the ethnographic method that is particularly attuned to apprehending visual political action. Second, we illustrate how an abductive alliance between ethnography and supervised machine learning can enable the big picture of visual politicization to be grasped.

This chapter draws on research conducted in the project *Imagi(ni)ng Democracy: European youth becoming citizens by visual participation* (2019–2024; www.imagidem.eu).¹ It investigates youth visual political action across four European countries (Finland, France, Germany and Portugal), and around different topics – from global climate protests to local mental health activism. The visual culture of young people, whether political activists or not, is inherently transnational, because the tools used to produce the culture (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat) are global. These digital tools and their affordances shape the culture of doing visual politics. Since the same tools are used in all of the countries, we can assume that the ways of using them are similar. Thus, we can ask, what separates the local cultures of visual political engagement from the global culture created by these platforms, and to what extent do these differences exist? Based on empirical examples from our research, we show how new methodological combinations are key to achieving radically new understanding of the ways in which young people engage in politics, and, ultimately, to creating reflexive, resilient future democracies.

STUDYING POLITICS ON VISUAL PLATFORMS

"This is what democracy looks like" is a well-known rallying cry from protests decades ago. In recent years, it has gained new meanings. Images play an increasingly larger role in societal participation. On one hand, pictures from party politics as well as activist events reach wide audiences through social media. Visual representations play a crucial role in struggles over discursive power, the power to set the agenda, and the power to define credibility. What we think of as a collective struggle far away, or in the neighbouring city district, is increasingly dependent on social media content, especially for the youth. In consequence, visual content has multiplied in everyday communication about politics (Jenkins and Zimmerman, 2016; Hand, 2020). On the other hand, nowadays, pictures themselves argue and mobilize both online and in person. In other words, *images politicize*. Protests, demands, arguments and even entire processes of politicization may take purely visual forms. This inevitably impacts the ways in which matters become political, the forms of public influence and discourse and, ultimately, the shape of democracy. Research on the political uses of visual social media is thus emerging: ranging from young people's engagements with Instagram and Snapchat (Metykova et al., 2015; Kuntsman, 2017) to the uses of Instagram in electoral campaigns and by political figures (e.g., Liebhart and Bernhardt, 2017; Pineda et al., 2022). It has been noted that political engagements forming around the use of hashtags hint at novel styles and forms of

collective mobilisation (e.g., Wang and Zhou, 2021) and that young people's self-presentation and political agency require new approaches to understand political communication and action altogether (Kuntsman, 2017; Metykova et al., 2015; Rambukkana, 2015).

But what may these new approaches be? Here, we suggest two key challenges to the current understanding of political action on visual social media. First, we suggest *a broad understanding of the political*, allowing for action outside the self-evidently "political sphere" to be considered as potentially political in nature. This means broadening the gaze to include a variety of image genres that politicize visually, such as images of trash, of norm-defying bodies, of babies as representatives for the future and so on. Seemingly a-political images may, with a deeper knowledge of context and over time, develop layered political meanings. Second, we argue for a detachment from the requirement of a written political message. At times, research on online visual political action remains firmly fastened to textual political messages as the main component of politicization (e.g., Ferreday, 2017), with image serving mainly as a tool to grab attention, to "illustrate" the message, or to show the claim-maker's face as a form of visual signature of one's support for the cause. We call for the exploration of the politicizing potential of images themselves without written political claims.

Our theoretical suggestion for grasping formats of visual politicization is to take a pragmatist approach to politicization and political action. By looking at images as arguments in themselves, we can simultaneously explore the value-basis the images draw on and, in turn, critique, and also look at the taking, posting, commenting, and liking of images as political action – indeed, as key tools in today's youth's repertoires of political mobilization. By simultaneously looking at the content of the images and the image practices that encircle them, we can grasp the political arguments the images make, and also understand which kinds of political tools visual politicization entails. With the concept of *visual politicization*, we can understand how an image politicizes: where its critique is targeted, how it argues and what kind of engagement with the world it creates.

By politicization, we mean deliberate action to "render something playable" (Palonen, 2003): to make something that seems self-evident, contingent and up for contestation (Li, 2019). In our definition, it involves three main characteristics: (1) disrupting the self-evident nature of a given issue; (2) connecting it to some value that is outside the immediate situation; and (3) developing a performance that renders the situation recognizable for others (Luhtakallio, 2020; Meriluoto, 2021). Politicization thus means not only showing that things could, but also that they *should* be otherwise, and mobilizing either shared values, interests, or emotions and feelings for this to be recognized. When conceptualizing visual politicization, we can thus consider how images work in each of these three aspects: how they disrupt our dominant ways of seeing and showing, how they justify, and how they render the matter recognizable.

With a few exceptions, such an approach to visual participation as political action in its own right is largely absent from the scholarship. While the analysis of images has gained significant methodological traction over the past two decades, the methodology remains unsystematic and dispersed (Pauwels, 2010), and the political potential of images continues to be undertheorized in social science literature (however, see Luhtakallio, 2013; Lilleker et al., 2019; McGarry et al., 2020).

We argue that, in order to grasp visual politicization fully, two key modifications to current approaches are needed. First, we need a broader, more encompassing notion of what "political" may look like (*sic!*), approaching all kinds of images as potential critiques to the pre-

vailing orders of value. While we recognize politicians' selfies and images of demonstrations posted by social movements as political, the less obvious and nascent forms of politicization risk escaping our analysis. These novel forms of politicization, we argue, require new methodological tools to be identified and made sense of.

Second, we need to cross the deep-riding epistemological/methodological divide between the offline and online worlds. Research on contemporary forms of political action has illustrated how it increasingly happens in spaces and ways that overlap the technically determined boundaries of the two spheres (Hallett and Barber, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2016). This means that visual politicization cannot be grasped with online observations and data alone, but an additional offline understanding of the youth's actions and meaning-makings is needed. This necessitates overcoming what has been insurmountable in social analysis: the constant switches between online and offline worlds in the meanings and patterns of social action. To be sure, not only do few online ethnographies incorporate offline observations (e.g., Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2010), but also "traditional" offline ethnographies seldom focus on the practices and cultures that take shape on social media (however, see Hallett and Barber, 2014). Understanding the digitalized practices of today's social worlds requires applying ethnographic methods to social media platforms while still being prepared to read between and go beyond the digital lines. To this end, we propose the method of snap-along ethnography (Luhtakallio and Meriluoto, 2022) to fill the void in the current political and social scientific toolkit.

In what follows, we suggest two simultaneous novel directions: ethnographic inquiry and big data mining. Ethnography produces thick and deep descriptions of human interaction. It documents inclusion, exclusion, movement, and physical spaces (Pink, 2009, pp. 63–81). Computational data mining methods, in turn, are based on computer science and make it possible to categorize large datasets automatically (e.g., Bail, 2014; Blei, 2012; King, 2011). Used primarily in textual analysis, by computing occurrences and relations of words and phrases, they enable us to pinpoint topics that are discussed and frames in which discussants present them. Combining these two methodological approaches enables entirely new ground in political sociology to be broken: a deep and nuanced understanding of the role and content of the visual participation among the young people and, simultaneously, a representative macro-level picturing of the said participation. A combination of these analyses, then, renews our theory of politicization and the overarching analysis of the future of European democracy.

ADDRESSING VISUAL POLITICS METHODOLOGICALLY

In the following two sections, we present two methodological avenues taken in the aforementioned Imagidem project to explore and understand visual politicization among young Europeans. In the project, we followed young people aged 18–35, politically engaged with different issues: both cross-country topics, such as climate activism in Finland, France, Germany and Portugal, and local, specific groups, such as those related to housing and mental health.

The first key methodological proposal we present is the very foundation of Imagidem's research design: the combination of and back-and-forth between ethnographic inquiry and computational big data mining and analysis. These methodological approaches lay the basis for analysing the data collected. We will briefly describe the three steps taken to combine the methods and discuss their value for understanding visual political action.

STAGE 1: Initial Image Data Collection

The first step in the process of data collection was building an ethnography-informed collection of “political” hashtags in the four countries of comparison. The list was compiled in tandem with the start of ethnographic fieldwork, online and offline, making use of the ethnographers’ insights into topical issues among young people in each country. This approach ensured that definitions of what is relevant, timely and “political” emerged from the research participants’ meaning-making, instead of the researchers’ preconceptions of relevant topics.

In June 2019, the list from Finland, the home-base context of the project and thus a natural starting point for this work, consisted of 191 hashtags. The list was regularly updated and new hashtags added. When a new theme emerged in fieldwork, all the related hashtags were added and then followed to identify all the accompanying hashtags they appeared alongside. The list was then roughly organized into categories (climate change and environment, minority rights, feminism, immigration and racism, social stigma etc.).

Based on the list, we scraped 150 249 images from Instagram that had been posted with one or several of the hashtags on our list. This created a data sample of “political images” from Instagram.

STAGE 2: Initial Data Mining and Analysis

Next, we used data mining techniques to locate relevant representative content from the large dataset, categorize it, and employ qualitative analysis methods to understand these clusters of images. To categorize large datasets meaningfully and efficiently, we created an AI neural network program based on the Python programming language (Maltezos et al., 2022). Like most neural network-based AI programs, ours works by using a so-called training set of images with qualitatively made classifications. It then looks for similarities in these images (which may not be noticeable to the human eye) and constructs a model for the thing classified. In the next step, it compares new input images to this model and determines whether the image matches the model: if you feed a neural network pictures of kittens, it learns to recognize kittens, and when shown an image of a kitten, it can accurately place it in the folder among other images of kittens.

The problem with visual political action, of course, is that these images are no kittens: they don’t share self-evident visual similarities, and, moreover, they span across a variety of different image genres, making the training process of the neural network particularly laborious. In essence, we had to teach the network all the relevant formats of visual politicization and to create their respective main categories.

The major challenge was to successfully define meaningful categories of political action that would make sense in terms of the ethnographic fieldwork we conducted and based the categories of images on, and, nonetheless, be visually identifiable for a neural network. After much trial and error, we managed to create meaningful, yet visually distinguishable categories of visual political action. First, we qualitatively defined categories based on images from our ethnographic field sites. The team’s five ethnographers studied images collected from our fieldsites and created suggestions for the most prevalent categories of visual politicization. We then pooled these and arrived at a compromise of seven most important and commonly reoccurring categories: protest selfies, groupies, crowds, meetings and deliberation, protest materials, artificial protest images, and threat.

We used these categories as labels to train the neural network in identifying these seven image genres of visual politicization. We then made use of the network to categorize the bulk of the images, further refining the categories into more detailed subcategories on the one hand, and into novel categories that did not fit the original ones, on the other. The end-result of this analysis is a distillation of what different types of visual politicisation look like in action, broken down by countries.

STAGE 3: Theory-Building; Backpropagation, and Comparisons

In the final stage of the analysis, the understandings of stage 2 are used to conduct further qualitative analysis of visual politicization. Most of all, we are interested in the visual frames and *justifications* used in these images posted. How do the images *argue, justify* and *critique*? What kind of *engagements* are behind the youth's actions? The concept of *visual politicization* is built by analysing the collected data with a synthesis from the computational analysis and ethnographic inquiry.

The quantitative analysis also offers intriguing points of departure for different comparative settings. For example, we can now observe the prevalence of different image categories in different themes. By following, for example, the number of selfies in posts with climate-related and, in turn, mental health-related hashtags may reveal interesting insights about the ways of arguing through the visual presence of the self. Moreover, contemporary image data classified in this manner affords a historical comparison with archival data. With the now-trained neural network, we can compare how visual politicization has changed over time, what image genres were the most prevalent 100 years ago, and so forth. Moreover, we can compare both the intentionally produced visual political communications made for Instagram with the more ethnographic and thus perhaps less staged material, and both of these materials in different contexts. Naturally the original four countries of comparison do not represent the whole of the European context, let alone allow for wider generalization, but they are, nonetheless, different enough from one another to produce a meaningful comparative setting. This setting also provides a model for future work with other contexts. Hence, this comparative strategy produces a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how visual material on the internet is used in participation, and what kinds of differences are relevant inside it.

SNAP-ALONG ETHNOGRAPHY

To grasp a thorough understanding of youth's visual practices of politicization, we developed the method of "snap-along ethnography" (Luhtakallio and Meriluoto, 2022) that follows users not just online, but across multiple online and off-line communities to understand better how digital and analogue forms of engagement are mutually constitutive. Following the practice of walk-along ethnography (Kusenbach, 2003; O'Neill and Roberts, 2020), the snap-along method offers a systematic way of combining online and offline observations of picture-taking, sharing, and commenting, as well as the exploration of the images' meaning through photo-elicitation-informed interviewing with key participants. Through offline observations on how images are taken and how they are used in different social situations, snap-along ethnography considers both the context in which images are produced and the phenomenon created and transformed through image-taking. By combining these analyses with

discussions about the images with the participants, the snap-along method enables a simultaneous analytical focus on the images themselves, the talk on the images, and the practice of taking and using them.

The method requires close contact with informants – literally at a distance in which the mobile use of the person can be followed and documented. This part of the fieldwork requires, therefore, the presence of the researchers in the physical contexts of the actors.

The existing scholarship on Instagram as a political platform uses multiple methods to analyse visual participation: most commonly content analysis, focus groups, interviews, and surveys. The salience of the visual in efforts of politicization is mostly addressed in online ethnographies – conducted rarely on Instagram, but on multiple other platforms. Virtual ethnography, online ethnography, or netnography (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2010) refer to participant observation-based research on communities and cultures created through computer mediated communications. This research environment repeats the traditional ethnographic questions of participation, observation, and description, but also differs from the idea of a traditional ethnographic field. The concepts of place and time, processes of entering the field and collecting data, ethical aspects, and the relationship between researcher and the study objects all need to be redefined.

The snap-along method owes much to research on social movement contention, which has always been a particularly spatial, bodily, and, indeed, visual form of politics: its means of influence on the current media-dominated public spheres lies very much in the chance of being seen and recognized. For sociology of social movements, visual representations have offered a possibility to grasp elements of politicization that are complicated to analyse by means of, for instance, interviewing people. The capacity of visual analysis to capture features of everyday life as well as cultural practices, rituals, myths, and symbols has been shown in a vast body of scholarship since the early classics of visual anthropology (e.g., Bateson and Mead, 1942). Recent visual ethnography has been influential in bringing to the centre of social analysis, for instance, the situatedness of everyday life (Pink, 2001) and the implicit power structures inscribed in living environments (Auyero and Swistun, 2007).

Drawing together insights from all of the above methodological strands, the snap-along method adds three novel elements: first, observation is carried out simultaneously offline and online. Participants' picture-taking and picture-using are followed in their physical everyday life settings, while at the same time, the "life online" – shares and comments relating to their pictures as well as selecting, deleting, framing the images online – is followed with equal intensity. We argue that even if a particular research interest targeted visual action online exclusively, the mix of the offline and online is essential. In order to decipher the meanings that participants attribute to image posting and other online actions, it is necessary to observe the everyday offline actions concerning the images and the online activity (for an example, see Malafaia and Meriluoto, 2022; Meriluoto, 2023). Interviewing participants is not enough: for many, the practices of visual action are self-evident; however, others may not have ever thought about them, and for some, talking about images and practices concerning them may be hard just because of the visual form – thus the material acquired with interviews is bound to be much thinner and its usefulness potentially limited.

Second, the snap-along method's concomitant focus not only on the acts and practices of picture-taking, storing, sharing, posting, and commenting, but also on the visual content of the images taken by the participants, combines analysis of the social meaning of image-taking as a practice with the analysis of messages conveyed through the image itself. Unlike most

of the previously developed visual methods, snap-along ethnography positions as objects of analysis the images themselves as well as the means and terms of production and the further uses thereof.

Third, while the interviews we conducted on the participants' visual practices were informed by the photo-elicitation method (Harper, 2002), in contrast to many photo-elicitation examples, the images talked about were not selected and curated by the researcher (e.g., Hodgetts et al., 2007). The participants owned the images: they remained on their devices and social media accounts, and they had the prerogative of choosing which ones to talk about. This is an important feature of the snap-along research design, and it also brings forth new questions that may be asked and analysed: which images does the participant want and not want to talk about? Why would they choose these specific pictures? Moreover, a key feature of the snap-along method is that, contrary to methods such as photovoice, the research participants receive no specific task – let alone cameras to carry out the task with – from the researcher. Rather, the participants' own routines of taking and treating images are at the heart of the analysis. This way, we can follow what happens with the participants' images in time. This is an aspect that visual social studies have largely underexplored thus far: once smartphone images are taken, what is their "life course"? Are they shared and commented on, where, how, by whom? Are other images posted "in response" and what may be the chains of significance forming around images (Hand, 2020)?

ILLUSTRATIONS OF YOUTH VISUAL POLITICIZATION²

We will showcase the value of the snap-along method in grasping youth visual politicization with fieldwork examples that come from two culturally and geographically different contexts (Portugal and Finland) and that portray the method's use in two distinct cases of political action (climate activism and mental-health activism). The first describes the visual action as part of an activist group's protest, whereas the second follows an individual's path towards activism. We use these two examples as they describe the method's value in grasping, first, how visuality is shaping existing forms of activism and protest, and secondly, how it gives rise to entirely new forms of activism. The examples result from two sets of questions addressed with the snap-along method: (1) How do the youth politicize by *taking images*? and (2) How do the young politicize *with images*, both online and offline?

The first example³ illustrates how the snap-along method helps us understand the simultaneous political work done with images and image-practices in a hybridized online/offline space. It showcases how a Portuguese climate movement savvily combined the image contents with a specific style of their posting, creating a sense of shared space and experience despite physical distance.

Since the beginning of the Strike, the people responsible for covering the event live – the "social networks' brigade" – were on it. I kept close to the people dedicated to this "visual task" to understand it on this big day. I went to get more posters with Marta, a member of the brigade, and asked her what kind of images she was registering.

In this demonstration, for me, what is most important is ... well, the messages on the posters are very important because this way, people can get an idea of what the group's claims are. But it is also important to get the movement – to get the songs across and to show the people that are here. I'm posting filming focused on the posters, posters plus people, only people, only the loudspeakers ... I'm trying to diversify. In some stories, I put some messages of the songs, or I don't include any message

at all because the video is self-explanatory. I sometimes also post photos as stories to change things a bit. It would be boring to see only videos. – I'm also posting publications [definitive posts], four or five so far. – I've also posted the "capitalism is not green" [a banner brought by the youth wing of the communist party] to show the different struggles. I've posted a video of kids [young children attending the demonstration] but without showing their faces – this was a story. – You can tell that it's a small person, so people can get the diversity of the public involvement here.

And are you using hashtags or some sort of subtitles? I ask.

I'm not adding hashtags to the publications [...] I would rather have a set of hashtags in advance, and now I would only copy-paste. But I don't have the time. – This is live, so it has to be fast.

I ask if the brigade has some instructions regarding the task of “covering” the event. Marta says no – the thing is just to post a lot.

Posting a lot. Spam. What matters the most is to make your presence felt.

In this example, visual politicization flows seamlessly with movement strategies of visibility. These visual actions resonate with what has previously been described in social movement visuality (e.g., Doerr, 2010; Luhtakallio, 2012), yet the novelty is the immediacy (Hand, 2020) and that the task of producing online visual content has been specifically assigned to certain participants who concentrate entirely on this activity during the protest event. Visual politicization also expands the notion of the public in which the protest assembles and takes shape (see McGarry et al., 2020), reconfiguring both the arena in which the protest is enacted and the public to which it appeals. By oscillating between the online and offline, the protests’ visual performances create a hybrid public arena in which the noises from the loudspeakers, energy of the participants, and pace of the protest are equally felt and shared regardless of one’s physical presence in the protest.

Increasingly, the visuality of the protest becomes imperative, as it is the vehicle through which the sensory politics of the protest – the intensity of the chants, the urgency of the matter, and the determination of the protesters – are being constructed. Although being visually and physically present has always been key in the protests’ impact, this visual presence now takes place simultaneously and seamlessly online and offline.

Our second example⁴ comes from fieldwork with a mental health activist group in Finland. This field, in contrast to the explicitly political climate strikers, was less evidently political. While the group had outspoken political objectives and a name defining them as “an activist group”, the participants did not all self-define as activists and many had scarce, if any, experience in societal participation. Jessika, whom we followed with the snap-along ethnographic method, was one of these people. Despite her being an active Instagram user and posting several images and videos on Instastories every day, she initially shied away from the concept of activism.

We started following Jessika closely in particular because of her unique selfie-practices: in the midst of happy, smiling selfies we usually encounter on social media, Jessika regularly posts selfies where she cries. She has also shared selfies from the psychiatric ward and captioned her selfies with thoughts about her suicide attempt. Despite the frequency of this powerful imagery, their political character was, for a long time, less than obvious.

We meet to discuss Jessika's Instagram posts. I ask about the crying selfies and why she posts them. Jessika is seemingly squeamish and tries to avoid answering the question. This is a difficult topic for her:

I don't know. It's my public diary. I hate the toxic positivity of social media, and I want to show that all feelings are a normal part of life. But this is just normal sharing. I don't care who sees my posts.

A week later, Jessika posts a video on her Instastories. She has started thinking about why she posts selfies where she cries:

I haven't really considered Instagram as having an impact because it demands nothing of me. I don't feel like I make an effort to have an impact. It was a bit of a surprise to realize that I have this objective in the background that social media is too full of positivity and picture-perfect lives. It shows in people's selfies, and it makes me really angry.

In the video, Jessika explains how she wants to counterbalance people's "fake positivity" by showing other emotions as well. She then encourages people to share their own thoughts about their social media activity. A lively online discussion follows, during which people ponder their own reasons for posting and sharing certain content. As she explains her position, Jessika writes:

I have this desire to have an impact on social media and steer it in a different direction with my posts.

She pauses for a bit.

Okay. It was revolutionary to say, "to have an impact".

A week later, I call Jessika to check in. She still seems a bit astonished:

It still feels revolutionary to use the word "to have an impact" and to notice that in fact, I do want change. That it is there in the background. But I recognize the thought now. That has been simply revolutionary.

After her "revelation", Jessika started posting crying selfies almost daily, making them the most recurring image type on her account. When I met her with a small group of activists two months later, "having an impact" had become a natural topic for her, and she confirmed the political objective of fighting "toxic positivity" behind her crying selfies with ease.

Jessika's crying selfies are an example of the less obvious or even only emerging forms of politicization that we can grasp with the snap-along method. The transformation in Jessika's interpretation of her selfies indicates their slow change from expressions of individual feelings of discomfort towards a more politically framed and verbalized argument. Although at first, Jessika described her selfies as "normal sharing", with some sense of things "not being quite right" attached to them, discussions with her social media followers and with fellow activists made her reformulate this feeling of discomfort towards a more publicly oriented political claim. Over the course of a few months, the crying selfies went from being her "private diary notes" to a deliberate critique of "the norm" of positivity and mental tirelessness prevailing in social media.

These subtle shifts in the political imagination of actors from the individual towards the collective and the more explicitly political require long-term observation to grasp the participants' interpretations, worldviews, and meaning-makings of their visual online practices. With mere online observations, these selfies would only have been seen as signs of someone's sorrow or ill-health. On the flipside, with mere offline observations, this form of activism would not have been noticed at all. With the snap-along method, we came across such processes again and again. They were not (always) spectacular, lasting, or successful, but they showed significant shifts in the participants' ways of framing their actions.

This example shows the particular potential of snap-along ethnography to grasp the level of nascent politics whose manifestations may remain obscure for a larger public but may be extremely meaningful for a subaltern counter-public (e.g., Fraser, 1990). For social scientists' ambitions to understand and address social change, this kind of access to the not-yet-public

forms of the political is crucial. In our visual social media age, such transformations from personal unease towards explicit political claims are increasingly likely to take shape in the fast-paced online stream of images. The publicity of intimacy afforded by visual social media makes visible the proto-political emotions of distress. Their subtle transmutations from the personal towards the political can only be fully grasped through snap-along ethnography.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have argued for a wider and deeper recognition of the visual content of today's youth's political action. Apart from responding to the need to better cover important empirical areas from young people's lives and their political practices, our call reaches further in stating that we need to refine the theoretical tools used in analysing political communities. We argue that a dichotomous view between "online communities" and "real world action" is increasingly meaningless and counterproductive, as the separation of these "spheres" does not correspond to the current youth's experiences and ways of acting. As a result, we need to reconsider what we understand as political action, and subsequently to reconfigure the tools for its analysis.

The pragmatist standpoint of creating commonality is an approach that allows the public sphere, including its visual arenas, to be considered in more depth: it is not just the spectacular, popular, and the widely visible acts that matter, but the more subtle struggles and attempts to politicize that pass under the radar of most audiences and yet are of crucial significance to understand the array of ways in which young actors change the political cultures through their actions. Committing to a concept of citizenship defined through action, not institutional statuses, and following this action in whatever form and platform it takes, is the key to bringing up, also in research, marginal voices, faces, and visions.

To identify and understand both the most visible and these less spectacular modes of politicization, this chapter has proposed two new methodological tools. Presenting the methodological work we are carrying out in the ImagiDem project, we have wanted, first, to show the potential in combining new technologies and core social science methods, notably ethnography that provides possibilities for much wider use in different combinations than is often acknowledged. Secondly, we want to invite colleagues to try out and co-develop with us the methodological tools we have presented here. By collecting and categorising images based on the characteristics of visual political action, instead of specific topics, the computational method we have developed offers us a way of unearthing new and emerging themes of future political action that are not yet mainstream, but are gaining momentum. This method enables a current and even prospective examination of visual politics – providing us with clues for future ethnographic fieldwork – but also a retrospective problematization of visual politicization thorough the referred historical archival comparison. The snap-along ethnographic method, on its part, allows the subtle forms of political action to be appreciated that do not currently, or never will, assume a spectacularly public form. In an increasingly blurred online/offline environment, these individual, small-scale politicizations can nonetheless have the potential of becoming mass movements of "connective action" (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Their roots and growth, we argue, can only be observed with methodologically innovative and ambitious approaches.

In future applications of the above methods, it would be important to follow the lives of online images for a longer period, as well as the visual practices that give rise to them and animate them. This will enable a wider picture to be painted of how efforts of visual politicization develop and evolve: which inward and outward effects do they have, which forms of reproduction, adaptation, and transformation do they go through, and so forth.

For young citizens, the realm of visual political action is so much more than superficial selfies and lazily shared ironic memes. It can be an anxiety-provoking world full of pressure on appearances and achievements, but it certainly is also a political arena full of possibilities for finding new ways of mobilizing, new solidarities, and new tools to imagine and create futures different from those often grimly dominating today's public spheres.

NOTES

1. The project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 804024).
2. This section draws on the article by Luhtakallio and Meriluoto (2022). Parts of the article are reproduced here with kind permission from SAGE. For a more detailed elaboration on how to employ the method, please refer to the original article.
3. The first example is from fieldwork with the Portuguese climate strike movement. The fieldwork began in fall 2019 and is ongoing. It concerns the public events and organizational activities of both the climate strike movement and Extinction Rebellion, mainly in Porto and the surrounding region. Fieldwork was conducted by Carla Malafaia.
4. The second example is from fieldwork with a young people's mental health activist group in Finland. The group is run by a CSO and seeks to dispel the stigma associated with mental ill-health. We followed the group and their individual activists with the snap-along method from the beginning of 2020 principally in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The fieldnote is from 22 April–12 June 2020. Fieldwork was conducted by Taina Meriluoto.

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11. Ambivalent narratives of the political self: notes on the coproduction of audio-visual stories in Cape Town and Luanda

Chloé Buire

Ashwin shared, “To be normal, you’d be expected to be doing drugs or be in a gang, or to do all the negativities that happen in Manenberg. But I always wanted to do things better and be different to everyone in Manenberg” (extract from *Ashwin’s Story*, 3’31’’). Yepuka explained, “My dance is a quest for happiness. For my whole life, I’ve been looking to share this. I give free classes here in Cacuaco because I always try to emancipate Cacuaco, for it’s my ‘hood; it’s your ‘hood” (extract from *Kakwaku’s Stories*, 12’40’’). Asekwa reflected:

As a girl who is playing soccer, one of the challenges I face is stereotyping, the fact that the community is expecting us to live the way they want to. For example, if you’re a girl, you’re expected to wash the dishes, clean the house, and if you’re a boy, clean the garden and play soccer. (extract from *RV United, The first female team to win the CocaCola Cup in Khayelitsha*, 9’31’’)

Ashwin, Yepuka, and Asekwa were between 18 and 22 years old at the time of these testimonies. Ashwin and Asekwa live in Cape Town, South Africa. Yepuka lives in Luanda, Angola. Despite different trajectories and ambitions, these three young persons have a lot in common. As shown in the quotes above, they aspire to challenge the social expectations that weigh on them and to bring positive change to their environment. This optimism is not self-evident. Ashwin, Asekwa, and Yepuka grew up in impoverished neighbourhoods, in highly divided cities, in structurally unequal societies. They are more likely to access short professional training rather than higher education curriculums. They can see that most young people around them obtain precarious jobs or become self-employed. Despite everything, they became involved in local community projects and became passionate about social change. I met them when I was conducting immersive fieldwork in Cape Town (2014–2015) and Luanda (2019–2022). In Cape Town, I was a post-doctoral research associate for a project called YouCitizen which compared the efforts of civil society organisations to develop “pedagogies of citizenship” in Lebanon, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and South Africa (Staeheli et al., 2016).¹ In Luanda, the research was of my own initiative. For three years, I followed various networks of youth activists and explored the emergence of new spaces of expression. Although there are irreconcilable differences between both situations, the research projects followed a common goal: to understand youth citizenship “after the miracle”, that is, after the honeymoon period of, respectively, post-apartheid and post-war reconstruction.²

The quotes presented above are excerpts from films made during storytelling workshops. With Ashwin, the workshop took place in 2015. It focused on autobiographical stories. The final products are individual testimonies in the form of audio-slideshows.³ With Asekwa (in 2015) and Yepuka (in 2021), the projects were collaborative documentaries about the youth

organization they were a member of: respectively, a female soccer club⁴ and a political advocacy group.⁵

In this chapter, I reflect on what it means to explore the meaning of youth citizenship in collaboration with young men and women like Ashwin, Asekwa, and Yepuka. Although it includes many quotes from them, as participants in the workshops and co-authors of the audiovisual outputs, this discussion is single-authored. It offers the perspective of a scholar interested in youth political subjectivities in the making rather than that of an activist. Often in the field, I endorsed the role of a mentor as much as of a participant observer and tended to speak of the participants and myself as a collective “we”. However, my status as a white French woman working for a foreign academic institution marks a boundary that is never entirely erased (see Buire, 2021). To explore the porosity of this border, the present chapter addresses the following questions: how does making films together help me, as a researcher, better to understand the multifaceted experience of social and political engagement for young people in two Southern African cities? Under what conditions is it possible for those who take part in this kind of collaborative research to take ownership of the process? How can we measure the degree of intersubjectivity created and the broader effects of our collaboration on the enactment of activism in different contexts?

The chapter starts with a discussion of the multiple objectives pursued in the different workshops, namely the research question explored by the researcher but also the view of the partners, both individually (as active participants in the filmmaking process) and collectively (as youth organisations working with an academic convenor).

The second section of the chapter highlights the key methodological steps followed in order to produce the movies. I argue that the main characteristic of collaborative filmmaking is storytelling. Technical considerations regarding images and sounds must be processed under the light of the story each participant wishes to share. Taking examples from the scenarios developed with Ashwin and Yepuka, I describe storytelling as a matter of intersubjectivity that remains indefinitely open to reinterpretation since each film is likely to resonate differently depending on the audience it reaches.

The meanders of intersubjectivity also reveal the inherent power relationships between the facilitator and the participants. The chapter proceeds with an analysis of how particular narrative choices helped to mitigate the power imbalance between academic and non-academic. This last section eventually discusses the underlying “politics of listening” (Dreher, 2010; Fairey, 2018; Foster, 2019) that play in such participatory projects. Because we are compelled to settle on a narrative that captures our variegated experiences, all participants finally reflect critically on their own positioning in a broader social and political agenda. From this perspective, collaborative filmmaking can be seen as actively reshuffling the definition and performance of youth activism, understood here in a broad Arendtian idea of a capacity to act, or, to quote Isin (2009), to enact one’s political subjectivity in a way that “the order of things will no longer be the way it was” (p. 379).

EXPLORING THE “NEW SCRIPTS” OF YOUTH ACTIVISM THROUGH PARTICIPATORY VIDEO PROJECTS

Angola and South Africa carry the scars of deep social division and structural violence. In both countries, dynamic demographic growth and radical projects of social restructuration put youth at the forefront of an ongoing nation-building process.

Academic literature on youth in Africa is rich and discusses the multifaceted tensions felt by young people (Abbingk and Van Kessel, 2005; De Boeck and Honwana, 2005; Durham, 2000; Philipps, 2014). On the one hand, they live under the general exhortation to “be the change they want to see in the world”, a slogan meant to be motivational but that implicitly places the responsibility for societal transformation on their individual choices (Buire and Staeheli, 2017; Staeheli et al., 2013). On the other hand, strong stereotypes and teleological fates circulate that reinforce intergenerational cycles of poverty (Arendse and Gunn, 2010; De Lannoy et al., 2015; Thieme, 2018). In these contexts, affirming one’s will to simply “be different”, as Ashwin puts it, is already a political act.

Borrowing the vocabulary proposed by Isin (Isin, 2009; Isin and Nielsen, 2008), being able to “actualize a rupture in the given” (Isin, 2009, p. 380) is what distinguishes “activist” citizens from merely “active” citizens.

Active citizenship has become a script for already existing citizens to follow already existing paths. It is most often used to denote the kinds of behaviour that citizens ostensibly follow ... By contrast to active citizens who act out already written scripts such as voting, taxpaying, and enlisting, activist citizens engage in writing scripts and creating the scene. (Isin, 2009, pp. 383 and 381)

Following Isin’s theoretical definition of “activist citizens”, the following pages adopt a definition of youth activism centred on the capacity of young people to write “new scripts”. My empirical work focuses on what young people *do* but also on the kind of “scripts” they write to justify their actions. For example, Yepuka, who aspires to become a professional dancer, does not qualify dance merely as an activity (something he *does*) but more broadly as a general attitude in life (something he *is*), as a tool with which he creates his own path and seeks to influence others around him (something he uses to *act*). In a couple of sentences, he manages to capture the essence of activism, that is, the capacity to combine individual aspiration and collective development. If we consider the broader context in which he offered his testimony, an additional dimension of activism comes up. Yepuka did not simply respond to an interviewer: he staged the whole sequence himself, spoke in front of a camera, and eventually edited the footage and included it in a documentary about political activism. He was both a protagonist and a scriptwriter.

This capacity to reflect on our political selves is at the core of my collaborative approach. I do not mobilize audiovisual tools to document the daily life and work of young activists from the outside but rather seek to create spaces where they, themselves, can explore the multidimensional meaning of their social and political positioning. In this, I borrow Sara Kindon’s (2003) definition of the “transformative potential” of participatory video projects: “not only in terms of the action it may generate, but also in terms of the structure of relationships between the researcher and research participants” (p. 143).

Of course, this transformative ideal is never attained straightforwardly. First of all, as Pauwels (2015) argues, “whether photographic projects really help individuals, groups or communities to obtain a ‘voice’ are empirical questions that need to be asked and answered on

a case-by-case basis" (pp. 108–109). He insists: "there is nothing intrinsically or automatically empowering in using pictures" (p. 108).

Fairey (2018) has shown that in some instances, a form of censorship takes place once the pictures have been taken, at the risk of narrowing the diversity of the final selection and of creating a sense of property leading to self-censorship in the future. Others have questioned the external influences that come during the recording process as well as during the interpretation phase (Luttrell, 2010; Mannay, 2013), the difficulty in taking into consideration the aesthetic worlds of the participants (Shankar, 2016), or the complex interrelation between the visual and the verbal in such workshops (Luttrell and Chalfen, 2010). Indeed, if, in most of the literature, "voice is understood to be co-constructed, and historically and culturally specific" (Luttrell and Chalfen, 2010, p. 198), there is no consensus on how to unravel this construction, either theoretically or empirically. If we look at this more politically, there are also many obstacles to the empowering goal of participatory visual research. Reflecting on his position as a "community-based facilitator", Sousa (2021) denounces the power imbalance that remains grounded in community–university partnerships "in which community groups must claim their marginality to receive a share of the center (the university), such as research skills and information" (p. 1). Sousa analyses the discursive norms that confine community members in a role of beneficiaries and calls for a more radical engagement in partnerships that actively disrupt the dominance of academic knowledge and make space for "different voices and ways of knowing" (Sousa, 2021, p. 4).

In my experience, the combination of these political, methodological and epistemological obstacles makes participatory visual research a platform of experimentation rather than a definitive answer to the challenges of immersive research amongst youth activists. In the following sections, I discuss the practical choices that we make when we produce a video. Decisions over the narrative backbone of a scenario, the selection of specific sounds, or the visual treatment of certain pictures provide subtle opportunities to disrupt the power imbalances inherent in community-based research and lead to a form of intersubjectivity that might not exist otherwise.

COLLABORATIVE FILMMAKING: CAPTURING THE STORY IN SOUNDS AND IMAGES

In early August 2015, amid austral winter, I walked into the Youth Café, located in a former Coloured-only neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cape Town.⁶ The Café is open to the general public but mostly used as the training location of RLabs,⁷ a local NGO specialised in digital innovation for social enterprise. I had attended various activities at the Café before and had worked with one of RLabs' project managers to write the curriculum of our digital story workshop. The objective of the NGO was to train a handful of their volunteers on how to build biographical stories so that they could later use digital stories as a communication tool for the NGO. On my side, I had selected RLabs as one of my case studies to understand how a specific organisation engaged young people as agents of change (interviews with project managers, observation of their public events, analysis of their annual reports and websites). The digital story workshop was a platform to learn directly from the youth about how they shaped their own forms of engagement, inside or outside the NGO. During the workshop, the

participants knew I was there both as a facilitator and as a researcher who would take notes on our interactions and discussions.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed between RLabs and YouCitizen guaranteed that all the data gathered during the workshop would be processed under the rules of anonymity (not using people's real names) and confidentiality (not sharing data with third parties). When we finalised the digital stories, however, the issue of anonymity was discussed in a new light: the participants wanted to endorse the authorship of their story and publish it under their real names. This is why in the present chapter, I retained the real name of my interlocutors. I do not, however, disclose any personal information that they did not also share in their story. The fieldnotes below were edited to respect the principle of self-disclosure.

Ashwin was one of the six volunteers identified by the project manager to join the workshop. We initially scheduled the training over three weeks. It would eventually take us almost two months to finalise the stories, but on day one, Ashwin already knew what his story would be about. Here are excerpts from my fieldnotes at the time:

03/08/15: When I asked them whether they had previous experience in telling their stories, Ashwin said that he came out as a gay man during a live TV show. This experience had an immense impression on him.

06/08/15: Ashwin said that he thought of three different stories but really the one he wants to tell is the one about coming out as a gay man. He said that he sees a lot of young gay people who don't even admit to themselves that they are gay and live a life that is not theirs. For Ashwin, coming out gave him a role beyond himself.

At first, the perspective of working with a young man so confident about "his story" was comforting. However, when we started the actual production, Ashwin struggled to imagine what images would best convey his narrative. He intuitively organised his story chronologically, from the personal process of naming and accepting one's homosexuality, to the public announcement. But the only images he thought of were a set of family photographs picturing him as a child blowing out birthday candles or as a teenager competing in ballroom dancing. He also scrolled on his phone through selfies taken during fashion shows and parties downtown Cape Town.

I was sceptical when I saw how self-centred the material was. In my fieldnotes, I wrote "I am not 100% sure I'll be able to drive him out of the clichés" (fieldnotes 17/08/2015). Years later, thinking of this particular moment, I feel quite ashamed. Why was I so convinced that he *had to* include references to his broader environment in order to reach others? This is, however, a good example of the insidious power that I held over him at the time. After that session, I convinced him to add pictures of the geographical environment in which he grew up. My intuitive (and unreflecting) idea about what was important in Ashwin's story ended up influencing the final product. My fieldnotes continue:

17/08/2015: We eventually agreed that one way of being a little bit more creative would be to tell more about Manenberg, as not only the geographical location of the story but also as one of the elements that Ashwin had to factor in while coming out.

We will go out in Manenberg together on Friday to take pictures of the place, to look for key objects and symbolical landscapes that can enrich the context. For the rest, Ashwin insists on using the pictures he has of himself.

The final story eventually included pictures of his street, his church, his primary and secondary schools, and from inside his home.

If the decision to collect these photographs came from me, the actual experience of taking them offered us a privileged moment to discuss more deeply the significance of his self-affirmation. Practically, being on the street together with a camera and an audio recorder in hand redistributed the power between us. Ashwin said he would never have felt comfortable doing it on his own, whereas I would have been totally unable to know which images and sounds were appropriate to represent his life-long experience. In this configuration, taking pictures is more than a pretext for what classical ethnography would probably name “an informal interview”: it deepens the reflexivity of both partners in the conversation.

To reason in the classical terms of visual sociology, fieldwork here became both a work *on* and *with* images (Harper, 2012). We worked *on* images in the sense that we had to choose which pictures would convey his message best, but this was also a work *with* images since half of these images needed to be produced on the spot. Being out and about in Manenberg with Ashwin transformed our conversations. It placed the visual and aural dimensions of his story at the heart of our discussions. As such, I think we reached another type of relationship with the images here: we worked *in* images (Maresca and Meyer, 2013) in the sense that some of the images we took and debated on that day eventually became critical in the final presentation of our reflexion. Figure 11.1 illustrates how one single picture, once it is contextualised and laid out with a voiceover in the first person and background soundscape, can become a site of multi-layered meanings.

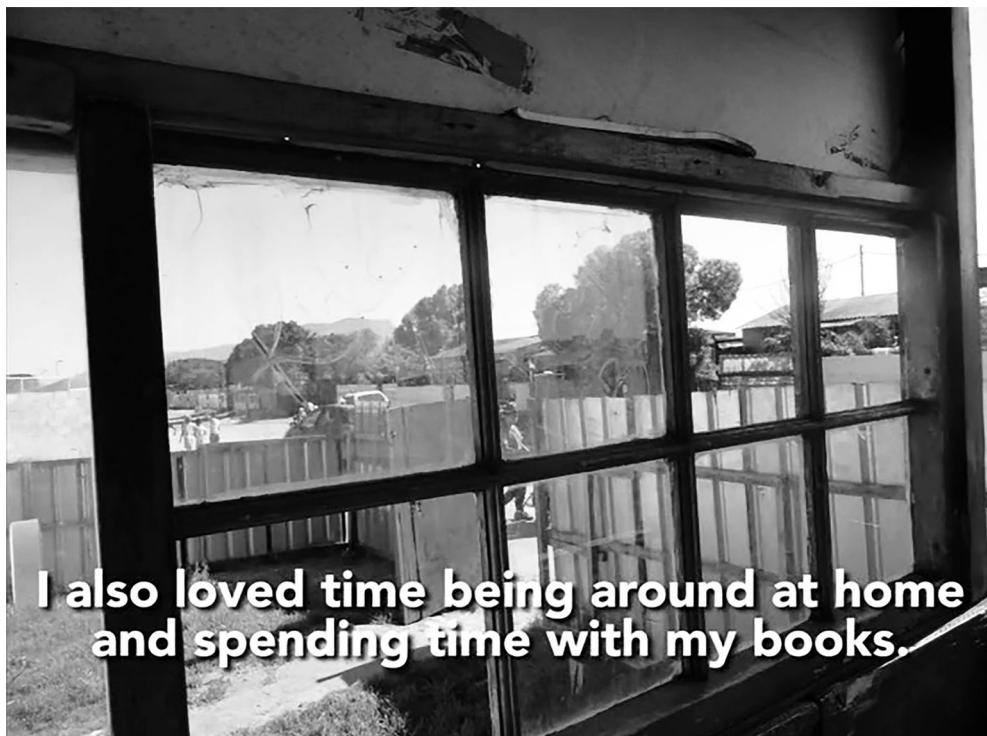


Figure 11.1 View from the porch, Ashwin's mother's house, Manenberg, August 2015

Technically, Figure 11.1 presents a visual composition made of a strong foreground framing what happens in the background. This effect of frame within the frame unmistakably conveys the idea of multiple, and nevertheless porous, borders between the intimacy of the home and the openness of the street. Despite the plot being fenced off with sheets of corrugated iron, a passer-by is visible through the gap in the gate. Despite the addition of a wall to close the porch off, a window is broken. The picture itself suggests the ambivalent spatial practices that characterise everyday life in the peripheries of Cape Town (Buire, 2019; Ramphelé, 1993). The voiceover amplifies the inside/outside duality. Talking about this picture, Ashwin says he used to play on the street. Now he insists on his capacity to “also” stay at home, suggesting a subtext of masculinity that doesn’t expect boys to stay indoors. Finally, a third level of meaning comes from the soundscape used in this section of the video. We recorded ambient noises on the street, including children playing, birds chirping and occasional motorbikes passing by. This aural presence of the outside in a picture taken inside is not accidental. It resulted from discussions Ashwin and I had about the pressure he felt growing up in this specific neighbourhood and his need to be physically and emotionally sheltered from the violence of the street. It is also a direct metaphor of the “coming out” that the whole video seeks to represent.

The example of Ashwin’s work illustrates the cautious construction of meaning that takes place when working on an object such as a digital story. In his case, writing the narrative backbone of his story was not difficult but having to make it visually and aurally accessible represented a challenge he hadn’t expected. Of course, I also learnt a lot in the process, especially on the slow process of building mutual understanding in the deepest sense. Taking and editing these pictures together required that we share a common vision, a common desire for what the digital story would look like in the end. Once this trust was established, I better understood the value of the selfies archived in his cell phone. We eventually used a swiping effect to make them appear in the story as if the viewer were leafing through a model portfolio. This direct reference to the visual codes of fashion shows made the meaning of the selfies more explicit: they are a symbol of self-acceptance and question the representation of Coloured men in LGBTQI+ iconographies.

The same kind of discussions happened during the making of the documentaries about the female football team in Khayelitsha and about the nature of political activism in Luanda.⁸ There is not enough space here to detail the technical choices we made in each case, but each workshop involved deep conversations about the “how” of our storytelling. Which images best illustrate the happiness of Yepuka’s dancing? Which sounds can convey Asekwa’s engagement on the pitch? How to transition from the evocation of pejorative stereotypes to the decision an individual takes to ignore them?

With Yepuka and his colleagues, we discussed at length, for example, whether we would shoot footage of rubbish piling up in the street. The six participants were divided between using the opportunity of the documentary film to call attention to the worst features of their communities – hence including footage of rubbish – or on the other hand to amplify the positive energy of young people taking ownership of their environment – hence silencing the negative aspects they already felt too associated with. In the end, the movie focused on uplifting programmes. These include Yepuka’s free dance classes, an independent primary school, and various small businesses owned by young people in their neighbourhood. Beyond what appeared as a mere exercise of scenario writing, the question touched on the broader political script we wanted to uphold. Should our movie embrace the liberal celebration of private entrepreneurship and downplay the structural failure of the Angolan social system (in terms of basic

education and youth employment, for example)? Or, conversely, should we adopt a position of strategic victimhood? These are questions that concern Angolan political activism at large, and we had never had the ambition to provide definitive answers of course. Nevertheless, I contend that our film suggests these political tensions in quite a sensitive way.

Another example of this political subtext comes in the sequence shot with José, the headmaster of a community school. José's school is a unique resource for more than 350 students in a neighbourhood ill-served by public schools, but it has also become his own personal source of income after he lost his job. In a classical documentary style, we show the rudimentary blackboard hung on the wooden structure, we zoom in on the cautious handwriting of children copying the alphabet in their notebooks, and we open and close the sequence with the songs they learn in class. But the white stick in the hands of José, together with his dark sunglasses are important details too. In his interview, he explains that he became unemployed because he suffers from glaucoma. The ophthalmic disease is curable, but in his case it caused total blindness as a result of inadequate medical treatment. Behind the portrait of a devoted community member teaching children in need, lies a denunciatory discourse pointing to structural social failures prejudicing people's access to health and education.

Storytelling doesn't follow any magic recipe. And it is precisely because there are many ways to tell one story that collaborative filmmaking is a useful method to capture intricate social situations. It forces us to critically interrogate the tacit scripts that lie behind the surface of our stories. When Ashwin and I worked on how we could make visible the political significance of his coming out, we had to find subtle ways to include both the expected tale of a young man appropriating his homosexuality, and critical issues of peer pressure and social violence. When we decided to include the sequence with José in our documentary about social activism in Luanda, we selected the moments in his interview that made explicit links between the school initiative and a broader discourse about his sense of abandonment. The final section of this chapter develops this theme further. Once we accept that individual stories of young activists can become broader political narratives, what are the characteristics of these narratives? And what do they tell us about the labour of activism?

FROM WRITING TO LISTENING: WHAT COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH TEACHES US ABOUT YOUTH ACTIVISM

Inspired by Sara Kindon's (2003, p. 143) comments about the "transformative potential" of participatory video projects, the chapter has so far focused on the practical exercise of audiovisual storytelling. Examples from my experience in Cape Town and Luanda suggest that the creation of images and sounds requires an attentive dialogue between academic and non-academic partners. Either in the format of five-minute digital stories or in more conventional short-length documentary movies, the very nature of filmmaking encourages self-consciousness and critical reflexivity to guide the editing, from the initial selection of footage to their final setting out in narrative structure. The outcomes are complex apparatuses where individual stories become powerful narratives. Following Isin (2009), I call them "scripts". They articulate different layers of information, from intimate confessions to political critique, and are open to a virtually infinite variety of interpretations depending on the audience. I argue that embracing equivocal narratives rather than expected storylines mitigates the risk of a researcher unilaterally using the films as a window into "the" worldview of the

participants. The whole process develops a space of intersubjectivity where the dominance of the researcher is regularly shattered. A question persists, nevertheless. What is the impact of these temporary experiences on the entrenched social structure they claim to illuminate?

Community media interventions remind us that speaking up does not guarantee being heard, but rather depends on being “granted an audience.” ... To focus on listening poses the question of change in terms of learning new ways for the centre to hear rather than simply requiring the marginalized to speak up. (Dreher, 2010, p. 100)

Although my own experience of collaborative filmmaking does not exactly fit the definition of “community media interventions” used by Dreher, the films I present here share her aim to “expand, diversify or contest the range and types of representations available” (Dreher, 2010, p. 87). My projects are always developed in partnership with a community-based organisation “posing the question of change”. Logically, the values and vision of the organisation influence the script.

In the case of the workshop with Asekwa, the organisation backing our film project was primarily her football team. But the team itself was supported by an NGO specialised in HIV prevention. Our documentary reflects the discourse of female empowerment promoted by the NGO. It showcases the mentoring work provided by the players for the NGO and the banalisation of concepts such as “prevention curriculum” or “evidence-based life skills programme”. Although the scenario focused on their professional engagement on the pitch and for their team, the filmmakers eventually depicted their loyalty to the NGO as well. International staff at the headquarters of the NGO approved this presentation of their work. To them, the movie was a success. We had won the approval of our primary audience. But were we really able to operate a “rupture in the given” to paraphrase Isin (2009, p. 380) once more? Thinking back to this question, it seems to me that *RV United, the first female team to win the CocaCola Cup in Khayelitsha* eventually failed to trigger a reflection about the political vision of the NGO. During the making of the film, I had gained a lot of insight into the tensions that regularly surged between the headquarters and the mentors. The young women complained they were too tightly monitored: they wished they could have more time to grow as sportswomen and be less pressured in their activities as mentors. Without us realizing it, our film was implicitly loyal to what we understood to be the accepted narrative defended by the organisation but silenced the inner voice of the participants.

The same thing happened years later in Luanda, but this time, I was more cautious not to over-anticipate the expectation of the organisation that had commissioned us (Buire, 2022).

During the preparation of *Kakwaku's Stories*, we wrote a short outline of the movie that affirmed the institutional character of our film: it was meant to present the political agenda of the organisation and contribute to its marketing strategy. However, as the project developed, it became clear that the six young filmmakers did not share this propagandistic objective. They were more interested in a documentary approach. Three months after the leaders of the organisation had tasked us with the production of a propaganda film, we delivered a contemplative documentary built around sequences of children and young people dancing and playing on the street. To the formal interview given by the organisation spokesperson, Yepuka's poetic call for happiness through dance responded (Figure 11.2).

What happened there? Did I bluntly betray my partner? Yes, I deliberately let our film drift away from its initial objectives. But by doing so, I believe I respected the choices of my co-filmmakers. Claiming a space to dance in an urban fabric structurally deficient in public



Figure 11.2 Screenshot from *Kakwaku's Stories* (1'08")

space is *also* a political act. Although it was not our intention, our film subtly disrupted the ascendance of the executive board above the footsoldiers who had been assigned to the workshop. With *Kakwaku's Stories*, Yepuka and his colleagues uncovered a type of narrative that was not planned by the organisation. They experimented with a form of political voice that is unusual, untamed, and largely unexpected.

This example brings our attention to what it means, concretely, to attend to the “different voices and ways of knowing” defended by Sousa (2021). Of course, the film itself is a format that exceeds usual academic standards. It has the potential to make the stories we tell about ourselves richer and more complex, but only if we also actively interrogate our usual politics of listening. “Just as speakers must reflect on how to speak (and what to say), listeners must be self-conscious about how they listen (and what they hear). Taking responsibility for listening, as an active and creative process, might serve to undermine certain hierarchies of language and voice.” (Bickford, 1996).

The dialogical nature of collaborative filmmaking is a first step towards a more active and more reflexive practice of listening. As shown in the example of Asekwa’s mentoring programme, tropes imported from the NGOs easily colonise the imaginary of their volunteers, and we reproduced them in our movie.

The same thing happened during the workshop with Ashwin. Here is what one of his colleagues says in his video:

My best friend and my girlfriend were shot dead. I felt that my life came to an end. It was broken into pieces. I was indoors for two months. I did not speak to anyone. [...] My friend Shahud asked me to join them in the Youth Café. Ever since that day, they became my other family, and they helped me be stronger and keep me on the right tracks. (extract from *Tyrone's Story*)

Tyrone, just like Asekwa and her partners in the documentary, adopted the vocabulary of his organisation in his own story. However, the reproduction of this official “voice” does not automatically prevent a genuine struggle from being heard.

In the case of Ashwin and Tyrone, the politics of listening became explicit during our check-out session, when, after working on the making of their own story for weeks, the five participants became attentive listeners to each other’s stories.

Tyrone confessed that he didn’t expect to feel so emotional watching Ashwin’s story. So far, he had focused on his story, that of a former gangster who reconstructed himself through martial arts and community engagement. Accustomed to diffused homophobic stereotypes, he didn’t feel concerned by a story about being gay.

As a semi-external observer of the process, I had seen some indications that Tyrone and Ashwin’s stories shared similarities. The iconic figure of the redeemed gangster echoed that of the young gay man flourishing after coming out to his peers. Both spoke of peer-pressure and self-affirmation, of stereotyped masculinities, and of growing up in a context of structural violence and generalised scarcity. But these links remained analytical. In terms of lived experience, Ashwin and Tyrone didn’t have anything in common … until they both participated in our Digital Story workshop.

Week after week, they had shared their practical difficulties: how to take a good picture on the street, how to choose a visual transition between two images, how to calibrate your flow on a voice recorder. When that last session came, Tyrone and Ashwin had built a special relationship, and Tyrone was himself surprised that he felt so many commonalities with a gay man.

This episode shows that careful writing leads to engaged listening. Because each participant cares so deeply about how to convey his or her ideas and emotions in the film, he or she also becomes more aware of what others hear. The quality of the relationship within our workshop eventually created a safe space where each participant was free to explore the scripts that shape his or her own worldviews. In some instances, the clichés served as crutches to follow one’s path in moments of doubt, hardship, or even grief. In other instances, the clichés were, on the contrary, bravely rejected. Girls play soccer. Boys dance on the street. Our films reveal that not only are the voices of youth activists shaped by the buzzwords of NGOs or by the political agendas of advocacy groups, but also that these young men and women develop their own ways to listen to these pre-written scripts and to challenge them when they feel the need to do so. Accepting these narratives of the self in all their complexity is essential, I believe, to approaching activism as a fragile labour that is constantly negotiated and appropriated.

CONCLUSION

I was driving Tyrone back from his job, and he told me that several people came to shake his hand after the screening. He mentioned the words Claudia⁹ used: “We are very proud of you”, speaking on behalf of the Youth Café. He then linked this to the fact that he had never received much congratulations or encouragement from his father, but that recently, he told his father what he is doing and his father said he was proud of him. “I don’t know how to use this proudness”, Tyrone said. (excerpt from fieldnotes 04/09/2015)

This last excerpt of my fieldnotes, written a few days after our first public screening at the Youth Café is an indication of how difficult it is to measure the broader impact of this kind of participatory research beyond the time of the workshop itself.

In terms of pure academic knowledge, I certainly gained a lot of insight into how abstract concepts of activism and citizenship are discussed and enacted in different contexts. The process was not mere extraction or cold observation. I deliberately challenged youth activists to translate their ideas and emotions into images and sounds. Together, we produced videos that are now used by their organisation for public relations purposes and shared with a wider public online. But to us, as I demonstrated in this chapter, the films are also a trace of these privileged moments of personal introspection and mutual listening.

If I am honest and critical about the method itself, I must say that the general process of writing, shooting, and editing the film is never simply centred on what my co-filmmakers want to say. The power balance in our relationship remains tilted in my favour. But that doesn't mean that I am fully in control. In fact, none of us knows exactly where the process will take us, and the final product is a result of our discussions and successive choices along the way. Collaborative filming necessarily implies the possibility to experiment, when taking pictures and recording sounds, when editing, and when interpreting the films afterwards.

The chapter doesn't pretend to offer an exhaustive view of either what youth activism looks like on the ground or how the very word of "activism" is appropriated by the young men and women I work with. In fact, those questions were never asked in that way. The analysis does not happen during the workshops, even if I keep notes of particular conversations or important points of debate. The various experiences recounted here, however, point in a common direction. They all highlight the importance of *listening*, of *self-consciously* and *reflexively* listening to what our partners say.

In many ways, collaborative filmmaking suspends the time of the interpretation and forces all participants, academic and non-academic alike, to "join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (Haraway, 2013, p. 193).

I opened this chapter with excerpts from Ashwin, Yepuka, and Asekwa to illustrate the labour of activism as being first and foremost about the ability to claim a space to think and act for oneself, while reflecting on one's position in a broader social situation. Tyrone's touching confession about the unprecedented expression of care and proudness he experienced at the time of the workshop provides a good closure to the chapter. It illustrates the intrinsically dialogical nature of the affirmation of the self. To quote Donna Haraway (2013) again, "the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly" (p. 193).

Far from being a lesson about how to make a movie about youth activism, this chapter is an invitation to explore the many ways young people "stitch together" the fragments of their aspirations and of their disillusionments, of their optimism and of their deadlocks, of their ability to speak and of their willingness to listen.

NOTES

1. Under the guidance of Lynn Staeheli (principal investigator of the project), YouCitizen explored the meaning and experience of citizenship for young people in societies with histories of conflict and division (www.youcitizen.org). It was funded by the ERC under the Advanced Grant 295392: "Youth Citizenship in Divided Societies: Between Cosmopolitanism, Nation, and Civil Society".
2. In South Africa, the final dismantlement of apartheid took place with the general elections of 1994. Young people born since that date are called "born-frees". In Angola, the civil war ended in 2002.

- The young people I worked with between 2019 and 2022 represent the first generation who didn't grow up in a context of warfare.
3. We called these slideshows "digital stories" and published them on the project's website: <http://youcitizen.org/videos/vimeo-south-africa>.
 4. The documentary is entitled "RV United, the first female team to win the CocaCola Cup in Khayelitsha" and is available online: https://vimeo.com/189078576?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=39302248.
 5. The documentary is entitled "Kakwaku's stories" and is available online: <https://youtu.be/1jcQnF-cQdM>.
 6. Although they originate in the infamous segregationist policies of apartheid, racial categories remain heuristic indicators in the divided geography of South African cities.
 7. "The main aim of RLabs is to create environments and systems where people are impacted, empowered and transformed through HOPE, Innovation, Technology, Training and Economic Opportunities." (<https://rlabs.org>).
 8. The documentary about female football explored the same research question that Ashwin's workshop considered: how do young South Africans imagine and enact their own idea of citizenship? The research project behind the film made in Luanda adopted a more frontal take on the political and focused on unprecedented youth-led mobilisations across the city.
 9. Not her real name.

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PART IV

THE NATURE OF YOUTH ACTIVISTS' LABOR

12. Keeping the store in order: an ethnography of youth activism's everyday work

Ilaria Pitti

When asked to define his role in the Black Panther Party, David Hilliard,¹ one of the key members of the Black power political group, used to say that he was a “good store-keeper”, depicting himself not as the leader of the movement, but as the person in charge of keeping things in order. Borrowing Hilliard’s words, this chapter focuses on strategies of “storekeeping” developed within social movement organisations (hereafter SMOs), and it is concerned with the internal work that ensures complex organisations’ functioning and adaptation to change.

The chapter develops from the premise that the on-going complexification of social movements’ repertory and fields of actions – fostered, amongst other things, by younger generations’ specific political cultures (Kennelly, 2011; Milburn, 2019; Pickard and Bessant, 2018) – implies a closer look at the internal life of these collective actors. In this perspective, it analyses the story of an Italian youth SMO to discuss how a “differentiated yet integrated” strategy of action is elaborated by the involved activists to “keep their store in order” while engaging in multiple fields of action.

Within the studied youth SMO, forms of institutionalised participation (e.g., involvement in the local elections, creation of an NGO) and initiatives aimed at directly providing a variety of services (e.g., self-managed shelter for migrants and a kindergarten) develop along with the classic practices of protest politics, such as demonstrations and riots.

Discussing each of these forms of political engagement as different roles that activists needed to perform in the public arena, the chapter highlights the organisational challenges rising from the combination of these public identities and analyses how this complexity has been solved, identifying recurring micro-mechanisms of internal management.

INVESTIGATING THE ‘EVERYDAY MANAGEMENT’ OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

This chapter develops at the crossroads of youth studies and social movement studies and focuses on the interplay between changes in young people’s ways of participating and in SMOs’ ways of political struggle.

Since the 1990s, research in youth studies has highlighted young generations’ progressive distancing from traditional political ideologies and the parallel diffusion of a pragmatic approach to politics (Tavener-Smith, 2014) amongst contemporary youth. Disillusioned by the grand narratives of the past, young people have acquired a strategic, outcome-oriented approach to participation, which would imply a greater capacity for accommodating “compromises” between radical long-term ambitions and “milder” in-between achievement (Dalton, 2011). Contemporary young generations’ approach to participation stems from a better

awareness of the world's complexity and a stronger acknowledgment of difference, which has led young people to be more conscious of the nuanced nature of politics (Rheingans and Hollands, 2013). This way of participating has also been linked to an increased awareness of the possibility of failure, which leads young people to develop a cautious approach to politics where they participate knowing they could be disappointed, and where they try to secure small victories in their everyday sphere while aiming at broader radical changes (Milburn, 2019; Vromen and Collins, 2010).

Social movement scholars have highlighted a parallel transformation of SMOs' approach to political struggle, which has been linked also to generational shifts in movements' demographics (Della Porta, 2015). Since the 2008 economic crisis, scholars have noticed a hybridisation of SMOs' repertory of action, which, next to the classic tools of movement politics (i.e., protests, riots, demonstrations, boycotts), includes more and more often also the classic tools of institutional politics and volunteering (Henriksen and Svedberg, 2010). Amongst others, Bosi and Zamponi (2015) have noticed how contemporary SMOs would intensively deploy forms of "direct social action"² by merging political ambitions and volunteering. Self-managed medical ambulatories, foodbanks, shelters for refugees and the homeless, job orientation services are just some of the examples of direct social actions enacted by many SMOs in an attempt to boost awareness on emerging social problems. Moreover, SMOs have started to get more involved in the formal settings of representative democracy. In so doing, they have sometimes blurred the boundaries between transgressive and institutionalised contention, creating "hybrid parties", which combine "the horizontalism of social movements and the efficiency of a party that aims to manage a share of state power" (Chironi and Fittipaldi, 2017, p. 296).

On the one hand, changes in SMOs' repertory of action have been interpreted as a strategic reaction to a process of fragmentation and complexification of political arenas, which require collective actors to deal with multiple centres of power at the same time (Jasper and Duyvendak, 2015). On the other hand, these transformations have been linked to the outlined changes in young generations' ways of being politically active: young people's outcome-oriented approach to politics would have encouraged SMOs to become more pragmatic (Kennelly, 2011).

Research has extensively analysed the socio-historical, political, and demographic reasons that have brought social movements to mobilise a broader repertory of action and the effects in terms of boundary-work and collective identity (Polletta and Jasper, 2001) that the adoption of different forms of struggle have on the relationship between them and citizens, institutions, and other collective subjects (Cherry, 2010). However, the challenges these recent changes in fields and repertoires of action imply for their internal functioning appear less explored in the literature.

The parallel processes of transformation noted by youth studies and social movement scholars are obviously emphasised when observing contemporary youth-led SMOs. By highlighting how young people participating in movement politics also show higher levels of engagement in institutional practices of participation and volunteering, quantitative studies have suggested a frequent overlap of multiple practices of engagement amongst contemporary youth (Lieberkind, 2021). At the same time, qualitative studies conducted in different youth movements (Kennelly, 2011; Luhtakallio, 2012; Rombalski, 2020; Swerts, 2015; Walther et al., 2020) have shed light on the variety of activities in which young activists engage. These studies have, in fact, suggested an increased complexification of youth activism that, in

seeking to achieve its objectives, would combine protest actions, cultural and social projects, and institutional forms of participation much more often and much more freely than in the past, producing forms of “liminal participation” (Pitti et al., 2023) that develop “in between” formal and non-formal political arenas. All together, these analyses signal a transformation of youth activism towards a more sophisticated and internally layered phenomenon that various scholars (Pickard and Bessant, 2018; Milburn, 2019) have interpreted as a proper generational change. Facing economic, political, and environmental crises, which directly impact on their present and future possibilities of life, contemporary young people would have become more radical in their claims but also more strategic in their forms of action, as demonstrated by their pragmatic combination of forms of participation that are understood as mutually exclusive by older generations of activists (Pickard and Bessant, 2018; Pitti, 2018).

Developing from these premises, this chapter seeks to contribute to the understanding of challenges produced by the contemporary pragmatic turn in youth activism, discussing the “organisational effects” of the combination of different styles of struggle. Hinging on the in-depth analysis of a case study conducted on an Italian youth SMO, the chapter intends to shed light on the complexity of the group’s repertory of action and on the everyday work through which this complexity is managed.

THE CASE STUDY AND THE RESEARCH

The chapter is based on research³ conducted between 2016 and 2018 on a youth SMO based in Bologna. Located in Northern Italy, Bologna is known for its lively youth political scene, which is nourished by the large number of students attending the local university, as well as by the city’s (leftist) political tradition, which ensures many opportunities of engagement and a political climate that favours activism (Pitti, 2018).

The story of the observed group begins in late 2012, when a group of young activists aged between 18 and 25 decided to occupy a large, abandoned building located in the centre of the city. The building, a former barracks, became the “headquarters” of the organisation, and, over the following five years, it was transformed into “Lucha”, a *centro sociale* (social centre)⁴ where different projects were developed for and with the local inhabitants.

Specific attention will be paid to the analysis of the SMO’s different practices of engagement below, but it is worth specifying that the young activists became involved through a particularly broad repertory of action. While the SMO was involved in the local political scene through demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, and riots, within Lucha, activists developed a series of social projects such as a self-managed shelter for migrants, a weekly farmers’ market, a micro-brewery, an organic garden, a pizzeria, a library and a study room, a bike-repair shop, and a kindergarten, along with seminars, workshops, and cultural events (e.g., concerts, art exhibitions). This vast repertory of action distinguished Lucha from the other *centri sociali* of the local political scene, but it was also in line with the broadening of SMOs’ forms of participation noticed in other youth-led SMOs and political squats across the country (Bosi and Zamponi, 2015) and the continent (Della Porta, 2015; Diani and Pilati, 2011).

The broadness of the repertory of action of Lucha’s activists was sustained by the participation in the organisation’s activities of a vast number of young people,⁵ mainly students aged between 18 and 30, as well as by the involvement of local inhabitants and local civil society organisations who, over the years, showed their solidarity with Lucha and sought to defend

the activists from the menace of eviction they were facing. Calls for volunteers were launched in 2015 and 2016 to recruit new activists for the projects, and a committee of the neighbourhood's inhabitants was created in 2016 with the aim of defending Lucha and the building as "commons".

Despite the solidarity and popularity that the social centre has achieved over the years, Lucha's relationships with local political institutions and police authorities have been marked by strong contrasts due to the "illegal" position of the *centro sociale*, which was evicted in August 2017. After the eviction, a demonstration was organised, and more than 10 000 people gathered in the streets of Bologna to ask for the reopening of Lucha. On this occasion, other social movements, but also politicians, academics, artists, and religious authorities expressed their solidarity. The authorities refused to consider the possibility of maintaining Lucha within the occupied buildings, but the support showed to Lucha forced the Municipality to grant the group a new space.

The research conducted in the social centre has been realised through a combination of ethnography, biographical interviews with the young activists, and semi-structured interviews with other people participating in Lucha's activities.⁶ For what concerns the participant observations, I entered the field in early 2016, starting to volunteer in one of the projects based in Lucha and progressively becoming involved in all the activities of the social movement. Despite making my role as a researcher explicit to the activists, I was perceived and involved in the group as an activist from the very beginning. The entrance in the field was eased by my personal characteristics – that were similar in terms of age and lifestyle to those of the activists – as well as by Lucha's characteristics: the movement's policy in relation to recruitment was, in fact, largely open to the involvement of new members. As for the biographical interviews, these were carried out with 10 activists and focused on an analysis of their paths of political involvement and on their practices of engagement within the observed SMO. The interviewees were young men (5) and women (5) with an established role in Lucha's story and a central position in its internal hierarchies (e.g., projects' spokespersons). Some of them (6) had previous experience in movement politics, while for others (4) Lucha was their very first experience of activism. Aged between 20 and 27, the interviewees were university students (4), (newly graduated) jobseekers (4), or employed in part-time or precarious jobs (2). The central role of these interviewees in the SMO's internal structure allowed for the collection of rich insights on the strategic choices of the movement and on the organisational tensions they produced. However, it is obvious that the interviewees' point of view was not immediately representative of the perspectives of all people involved in Lucha, as the same organisational dynamics and tensions are experienced differently by, for example, experienced and non-experienced activists or by activists and users of the services.

The collected materials have been explored applying a grounded theory method (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) to let the relevant categories and labels emerge from an inductive analysis of the data.

The following paragraphs will provide an in-depth analysis of the observed organisation considering, first, its repertory of action and, secondly, the mechanisms of differentiation and integration through which the coherence of the group's political strategy has been assured.

Table 12.1 Clusters of political actions

Protest politics	Institutionalised struggle	Direct social actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation of buildings • (Un)authorised demonstrations • Riots • Sit-ins • Street blockades • Strikes • Sabotages • Etc... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founding of a local party and successful participation to the local election • Founding of an NGO • Founding of a union • Legal bargaining with the municipality over the building's ownership and use (i.e., through the law on commons) • Etc... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter for migrants and refugees • Kindergarten/Kids' corner • Summer camps for children • Organic garden • Organic pizzeria • Micro-brewery • Weekly organic market • Carpentry • Second-hand shop • Bike repair shop • Library and study room • School of Italian for migrants • Medical, legal and job helpdesk for migrants • Music events and movie screening • Etc...

A COMPLEX MACHINE: STRATEGIES AND FIELD OF ACTIONS

A G7 meeting on environment is scheduled for this week in Bologna. Lucha is one of the main actors in the organisation of the mobilisations against the meeting. A “call for action” aimed at collecting ideas for innovative forms of mobilisation has been launched in May when a first public assembly has been organised. [...] For this week Lucha’s activists have planned several other initiatives: open assemblies, debates, cultural sabotages, workshops, critical masses, flash-mobs, seminars, and cultural events. [...] A series of unauthorised demonstrations and flash-mobs have been and will be organised in the city. During the first day of the meeting, activists plan to invade and block the city’s highway with their bikes. Activists from all over the country are hosted at Lucha and participate in the preparation of the main demonstration, that is scheduled for the second day of the meeting. The group has organised also seminars, concerts, workshops on self-production and an activity for children in the social centre’s organic garden [...] Within the local municipality’s council, Lucha’s elected representatives have asked the local authorities questions on environmental issues, such as air pollution and urban planning (Fieldnote, June 2017).⁷

The fieldnote exemplifies the complexity of Lucha’s political strategy. During the years of the research, it was, in fact, possible to observe the activists engaging through a myriad of different forms of participation in their attempts to defend their presence within the occupied building and advance their political claims. These activities can be clustered under three broad categories of political actions (see Table 12.1) that activists used in a combined way.

The first cluster of actions refers to what the literature commonly refers to as “protest politics”. This cluster of participation includes different forms of involvement aimed at claiming or contesting something through episodic, public, collective (sometimes violent) confrontations. In the case of Lucha, the practices pertaining to this cluster consisted mainly of the occupation of the building and in a series of demonstrations, riots, flash-mobs, sabotages, and sit-ins that were regularly organised over the years to address different emerging political struggles.

The second cluster refers to practices of “institutionalised struggle” through which the group has attempted to enter the institutionalised processes and spaces of democracy with the aim of setting the agenda instead of just reacting to the institutions’ decisions. These actions,

which consisted, for example, in standing for the local elections or founding an NGO are distinguished by a shift in focus of the action. As explained by Sara (25, F, 2017), using these practices the group “wanted to move from the passive role of those who ask for something to the authorities to the active role of those who propose a solution.”

The third cluster of actions adopted by the group consisted in different kinds of “direct social actions” (Bosi and Zamponi, 2015). This cluster includes a large repertory of practices aimed at creating an alternative, just, practical, enduring solution to a specific issue through public, collective, permanent, or recurring actions. The homeless shelter, the kindergarten, the Italian school for migrants, the self-managed library were examples of practices of participation aimed at solving an emerging problem (i.e., lack of affordable, accessible, and effective services) through the people’s own forces enacted by the social centre’s members. The organic pizzeria, the brewery, the second-hand shop, the music events and the weekly organic market can be included in this cluster too, since, through these activities, the activists sought to make more accessible and affordable a series of services usually offered by the market or the public institutions. As explained by one of the activists, the goal of these actions was “to create something different and alternative to what the public institutions and the market offer us by placing the ideals of reciprocity and individuals’ sovereignty at the centre of our projects” (Mirko, M, 23, 2018).

At the time of the research, Lucha’s activists were using these three clusters of action in combination. However, in terms of their development, it is worth specifying that, while protest politics were there from the very beginning (i.e., Lucha’s story starts with a demonstration and the occupation of the abandoned building), direct social action and practices of institutionalised struggle came later. More specifically, direct social action started about one year after the occupation: requiring a physical space and specific tools (e.g., a board for the school, an oven for the pizzeria) to be enacted, all these actions could develop only after the renovation of the premises and the collection of some basic material resources (acquired initially through the support of other *centri sociali* and later through self-funding activities). Practices of institutionalised struggle were the last to be enacted and started in 2015: next to material resources (e.g., those needed to sustain a political campaign or the NGO), these practices required non-material resources in terms of political visibility, networks, and recognition that Lucha acquired over many years and largely thanks to its social projects.

Indeed, these clusters of actions and the related styles of struggle must be considered as complementary elements in Lucha’s strategies of political engagement. They corresponded to different internal and external functions and provided the organisation with specific material and immaterial resources. All three clusters were, in fact, essential in the social movement’s strategy: not only did each kind of action answer specific needs Lucha had and contribute to achieving specific goals, but each one also mitigated the risks and pitfalls of the others (Piazza, 2013).

For example, direct social action has proven to be not only a good means of propaganda for the group – giving the activists the possibility of concretely showing to a vast public that things can be done in a different way – but it has also been a useful tool to recruit and train new activists inasmuch as the thresholds of participation (in terms of needed skills and risks) were lower for these activities than for the ones characterising contentious and institutionalised struggle (Gallo-Cruz, 2012). Moreover, these practices were self-funding, which made the other strategies sustainable: the profits made through the pizzeria and the micro-brewery were, in fact, often reinvested to cover the costs of political campaigns.

The latent political nature (Ekman and Amnå, 2012) of direct social action was a mixed blessing for the group. On the one hand, the non-explicit political nature of these practices eased the involvement in the social movement of many (young) people who shared a negative understanding of politics and activism. On the other hand, their latent political nature limited these practices' impact and visibility in the political debate, since these activities were often misunderstood as forms of benevolence or leisure (Diani and Pilati, 2011). Participation in institutionalised forms of struggle, in this perspective, proved useful not only to enter the institutional sphere and set the political agenda, but also to reintroduce an explicit political element in the social movement's collective identity (Snow and McAdam, 2000).

However, being involved in the public scene only through direct social action and through forms of institutionalised struggle would have led the organisation to risk losing its radical nature. The confrontational element entailed in practices of protest politics served, in this perspective, not simply to raise awareness on a certain issue, but also to mark the difference between the shelter for the homeless and an NGO advocating for human rights or between the social movement and any other political party (Cherry, 2010). In other words, these practices allowed the group to claim back and reinforce a radical self-representation that placed it in a specific network of actors (that of the autonomous left) and allowed it to access the corresponding resources in terms of support and recognition (Hunt and Benford, 1994).

Although each cluster of action had its own specific goals, a generational narrative was used by the young activists to explain their decision to engage through protest politics, direct social action, or institutional struggle. Beyond the diversity of their practices, this reinforces the idea of being a doomed generation that fights to win back its future (Pitti, 2018), as shown in the following statement.

This is the story of a generation reclaiming the future it has been robbed of. This is the story of all those people who are tired of surviving and want to build a life worthy of being lived. [...] This is the story of a generation that wants to open spaces where experimenting with new practices, languages, and ways of living in the city [...]. This is the story of those who have always been excluded from decision-making processes and who want to get back those rights that cannot be denied using the crisis as an excuse. [...] This is the story of a generation wanting to create its future [...]. (November 2012)

As summarised by one of the interviewees, Lucha's "capacity [...] to avoid definition and discover itself in diversities" (Interview with T., 27, M, 2016) has proven to be an effective strategy that, over the years, has allowed the social centre to be seen unanimously as an important "political laboratory" in the local public scene. Even Lucha's detractor could not, in fact, dismiss the social centre's impact on the political scene of the city.

However, although essential for the realisation of the observed group's political strategy, the combination of the three clusters of political actions was not always smooth.

In the following paragraphs, beyond presenting the tensions emerging from the combination of these different strategies of political struggle, the analysis will look at the organisational mechanisms through which Lucha's activists have kept their "store" in order.

MECHANISMS OF ORGANISATIONAL DIFFERENTIATION AND INTEGRATION

Although integrated in an overall political narrative, the three clusters of action depicted in the previous paragraph remain three very different ways of being in the public scene.

When using a certain cluster of action, in fact, activists of Lucha needed to adopt the socially defined identities of the “hard-core militants”, the “good-willing volunteers”, or of the “expert politicians”. Playing these three roles at the same time, activists were in the tricky situation of managing the coexistence between different public roles distinguished by specific and sometimes conflicting expectations and norms of behaviours (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012).

As “hard-core militants”, young activists were expected (first and foremost by other radical social movements) to be intransigent in the defence of their values and to be partial, that is, to stand always on the side of other radical-left political groups in the event of a clash with the authorities. However, being a good expert politician means also being able to compromise and accommodate solutions with those holding opposing views, while social expectations on solidarity often imply neutrality as a key quality for a goodwill volunteer (Henriksen and Svedberg, 2010).

From an external perspective, the adoption of these contrasting collective identities led Lucha to be, at the same time, praised as a good example of grassroots engagement and accused of being a dangerous form of “urban decay”.⁸ In other words, it led the activists to be considered too much or not enough intransigent, institutionalised, or neutral, depending on the perspective from which the *centro sociale* was judged.

From an internal perspective, the contemporary adoption of these multiple public identities has challenged the coherence of the group’s strategies of action, entailing much tension between the activists and a risk of “schizophrenia” in their strategies.

Lucha’s initiatives on migration have received a lot of attention at the local level and the bishop seems interested in meeting the migrants hosted in the shelter. [...] Laicism is a strong value for the group which has always tried to distance its activities from the neutral benevolence of religious NGOs. At the same time, from a strategic perspective, the visit of a religious authority could make a good point in Lucha’s bargaining with local institutions over the squatted building [...]. Activists have different opinions on whether to open the social centre to the bishop or not: while people engaged in the shelter for migrants are generally open to this possibility, most of the hard-core militants disagree (Fieldnote, May 2017).

To cope with the challenges and tensions emerging from the combination of the three strategies of action, the group developed not only a collective narrative, but also a series of micro-mechanisms of management aimed at finding that perfect combination between “differentiation” and “integration”, which – in an organisational perspective – is needed to assure the adaptation of an organisation to its environment (Piazza, 2013).

It was possible to identify four main mechanisms of adaptation developed by the group. These mechanisms differ according to their function (differentiation vs. integration) and to their level (internal vs. external) (Table 12.2).

While mechanisms of differentiations aim at broadening the fields of action of the social movement organisation, mechanisms of integration develop to coordinate and give coherence to the group’s strategy of action. Mechanisms enacted at the “core level” interest only the internal apparatus of the organisation, while “peripheral” mechanisms concern the manage-

Table 12.2 Micro-mechanisms of internal management

	Organisational function	
Level	Differentiation	Integration
Core	Compartmentalisation	Steering
Periphery	Externalisation	Positioned Recruitment

ment of the external boundaries of the group in terms of relationships with other public actors and recruitment of new members.

The first of these mechanisms – “compartmentalisation” – refers to the creation of an internal structure that allows the activities enacted within the *centro sociale* to maintain a certain symbolic autonomy from each other.

Although a general assembly is held every Tuesday, decision-making within Lucha occurs mainly through smaller assemblies distributed during the whole week. Each activity (i.e., the shelter, the pizzeria, the union, etc.) has its own assembly and other assemblies are organised for specific events. There is also a weekly assembly and a group chat of the “attivo” that mainly involve hard-core militants [...] Decisions are usually taken within the small assemblies and reported to the general assembly, that is a space of coordination [...] Beyond Lucha’s website and Facebook page, each project has its own Facebook page and social media accounts (Fieldnote, April 2016).

This structure eased the distribution of the activists between the different activities and the related public roles of hard-core militants, professional politicians, and goodwill volunteers. Within the group, in fact, it was possible to see that activists could engage in different “careers”, acquiring expertise in their field of action. While each new member was socialised to the political perspective of the group (i.e., values, key-references, etc.) through the general assembly, one’s preferences or abilities for a specific strategy of action were nurtured, refined, and trained within each specific project.

Micaela has graduated in international cooperation and has previous experience in working with migrants. Over one year of involvement as a volunteer in the shelter for migrants, she has been made progressively responsible for different tasks, trained in laws regulating migrants’ welcoming in the EU, and introduced to representatives of some local NGOs working with the homeless and refugees (Fieldnote, May 2016).

Compartmentalisation did not prevent activists from participating in other activities, but defined their primary role and field of engagement. From a certain perspective, compartmentalisation consisted in boundary-work played internally to the organisation between its different components, rather than between Lucha and external actors.

Although transfers from one role to another were possible, these normally occurred only at the beginning of one’s path of involvement in the group, becoming extremely difficult or impossible in later phases. Protest politics, institutionalised struggle, and direct social action are, in fact, styles of political action that mostly speak to different audiences, and specialising in one of the careers implies (symbolically and practically) compromising oneself in the eyes of one of the other audiences. Obviously, the possibilities for a hard-core militant who has experienced problems with the law to successfully be perceived as a trusted politician in an electoral campaign are limited, but the opposite is also true: being too much involved in institutionalised forms of struggle or in volunteering can hinder one’s respectability in the hard-core militancy scene.

The risk of fragmentation of the activities deriving from the compartmentalisation of the group was avoided not only by means of the general assembly, but also through micro-mechanisms of integration aimed at assuring the smooth coordination of the different compartments of the movement.

Within each project, activists with more experience or more time and energy to invest acted as “managers”, controlling the activities, checking the coherence of the project with the general strategies of the SMO, reporting on the activities in the general assembly, and creating “bridges” between different ongoing projects for specific events. Although emerging as key actors, these activists did not have an explicit leadership role. Their role was mainly aimed at assuring the efficient and coordinated functioning of their specific project and more focused on *how* things should be done rather than on *what* should be done.

In moments of crisis, when the group was called on to face a particular risk or critical event, the organisation was kept in order through the temporary creation of “steering committees”, composed of members representing the different identities of the movement. While the political strategy of social movement was defined in the general assembly, steering committees were responsible for dealing with the more practical aspects of the matter and were formed as “specialised task forces”.

After five hours of discussion, the assembly has decided that two migrants hosted in the shelter must leave the social centre because they have been involved in an episode that could place the whole occupation at risk. However, the assembly has also decided that they should be helped in finding an alternative place to stay because they are at risk of repatriation. [...] While Margherita – one of the more experienced volunteers of the shelter – will explore if there are spaces in public dormitories, Tiziano – a militant with a long involvement in social movements – will check for solutions with other political groups. (Fieldnotes, July 2017)

On those occasions when it became too risky or impossible to keep the three identities together, Lucha’s activists relied on a mechanism of differentiation consisting of the “externalisation” of one of the three identities through the involvement of other actors who were made temporarily responsible for one of the three public roles.

Activists know that police authorities have increased the level of attention on them, so they are discussing whether, during today’s demonstration, they should agree on a clear division of tasks with the activists of another social centre “La Casa”, letting them be at the fore of the demonstration and deal with the police in the event of clashes. While Lucha is under threat of eviction, La Casa is a social centre recognised by the Municipality: in case of problems with the law, personal risks for the activists remain, but the space is safe as the agreement with the Municipality cannot be revoked (Fieldnotes, June 2017).

These external actors could be other social movements, as well as local NGOs, committees, and political parties near to the group that, in case of need, intervened, playing the role(s) that Lucha could not handle. The mechanism of externalisation was frequently used in relation to actions pertaining to the cluster of “institutionalised struggle”. In fact, occupying the former barracks illegally often limited Lucha’s abilities to engage directly and officially in legal bargaining with the institutional actors.

In the attempt of keeping the barracks, the activists are trying to use the municipality’s new law on commons. As they have illegally occupied the building, they cannot directly claim for the recognition of the barracks as commons. On this aspect, the relationships with the municipality are handled

through a committee of citizens which is mainly composed of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and which is not formally connected to the *centro sociale*. However, the committee meets in Lucha's barracks and the activists are involved in it as "individual citizens" (Fieldnote, September 2016).

A last mechanism of integration was developed to give coherence to the group's actions and concerned the procedures for recruitment of new members, which occurred through what could be defined as a "positioned recruitment".

In organisation theory, "positioning" refers to the definition of the position of an organisation's activities in relation to what other similar actors provide and it has to do with the definition of an organisation's distinctiveness (Weber and Brayden, 2014). Positioning helps an organisation's integration, defining the conceptual and practical boundaries between it and the surrounding environment. Positioning implies the development and communication of a narrative explaining why and how a specific organisation distinguishes itself from what is already there.

The other actors that Lucha had to relate to were first and foremost other SMOs active within the scene of the city, but more generally Lucha's activists needed to find a way to distinguish themselves from what they define as the "classic Italian tradition of political movements".

We conceived this new occupation literally as a laboratory [...]. This means that we did not create just another social centre according to the classic Italian tradition of political movements. Yet we are completely a part of this tradition. [...] We searched for a practice that is at the same time radical and has a large consensus. [...] We think that this is a very important change: we tried to move closer to the people, to find a new space between radical activism and the people (Interview with Massimo, October 2016).

Deciding to place the experience of Lucha in between "radical activism" and "the people", the group had to develop a strategy of recruitment able to reflect this specific positioning.

While some activists transitioned to the group from other radical political experiences, a large part of the members participating in Lucha were recruited through "open calls" that – in their language and goals – were mostly targeted at "the people". However, these calls were shared primarily through radical channels such as on the websites and social media of Lucha and other groups sharing a radical perspective on political engagement.

Although assuring a certain openness, this positioned practice of recruitment also limited the risk of intercepting people who would not agree with the most controversial aspects of Lucha's political strategy.

"Did you know what you were going for when you went to the first assembly after the call?" I ask Samuele, one of the new members that has no previous experience in political activism. "Yes and no. I mean ... The call talked about social projects with migrants, but I found it on the website of [name of another social centre of the city] ... I imagined I wasn't going to a meeting of a simple NGO" (Fieldnotes, August 2016).

All together, these organisational mechanisms helped Lucha activists to maintain a certain coherence and coordination while experimenting with different public identities. Their ability to play on different fields of political struggle proved to be a successful and effective strategy for the group, which, despite the eviction, has strengthened its presence in the city and obtained a new space for its activities.

CONCLUSION

Through the presentation of a qualitative study conducted on an Italian SMO, this chapter has primarily intended to shed light on the complex nature of contemporary youth activism.

Beyond its more spontaneous aspects, youth activism is, in fact, a structured and layered form of social organisation, which deploys a broad and always changing repertory of action.

The present research has tried to connect this complexity to changes in the younger generation's political approach to politics, shedding light on the processes leading a group of young activists to combine different and sometimes contrasting forms of participation. Moreover, the chapter has attempted to look at this complexity from an internal perspective, analysing (youth) activism as a machine in need of constant maintenance that, in order to adapt to its environment, must both differentiate and integrate its internal structure. The analysis has highlighted how this balance is achieved not only through the elaboration of a political strategy or a public narrative able to give coherence to the young activist's action at the external level (Polletta and Jasper, 2001), but also through internal organisational arrangements that are often overlooked in the existing research on youth activism.

In this light, the chapter argues for greater attention in studies on youth activism to the "everyday work" and everyday management of youth movements. This appears necessary to deepen our understanding of how the more spontaneous aspects of youth activism are transformed in (efficient) management strategies and combined with routines that allow the maintenance of certain form of collective action over time, as well as to shed light on the impact of internal organisational structures and dynamics on youth political initiatives' "successes" and "failures". Moreover, if we assume that young activists bring into SMOs their values and ideas of politics, the integration of a research approach focused on everyday strategies of internal management also has the potential to contribute to better linking research on young people's participation and research on social movements by revealing the connecting mechanism between young people's ideas of participation, citizenship, and democracy and SMOs' strategic choices (Piazza, 2013). Finally, looking more closely at the "organisational repertoires" (Clemens, 2005) deployed by activists appears much more relevant in a context where "strategic action fields" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012) constantly multiply and blur (Eliasoph, 2013), posing new challenges to youth-led political initiatives. An analysis of activists' everyday work of management, in this perspective, appears able to shed light on the strategies that they elaborate while dealing with the challenges brought by the new political scenario.

Far from being conclusive and complete, this chapter stresses the need to pay more attention to young people's work in SMOs to develop a more complete understanding of collective forms and experiences of youth activism. On the one hand, this implies the need for more studies focused on the "everyday life" of political groups, whose functioning, strategy, and achievements cannot be completely understood through the mere analysis of public events. On the other hand, paying attention to the organisational management of youth activism means understanding the political/strategic and the organisational sphere as two separated but connected levels of study and looking more closely at the frictions emerging between them. The development of further studies on these lines of analysis would allow research to better understand what goes on "behind the stage" of young activists' public performances.

NOTES

1. The episode is reported by Ericka Huggins in an interview released for the documentary “The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution” (2015).
2. According to Bosi and Zamponi’s (2015) definition, the term refers to a series of “forms of participation that ignore or circumvent the traditional state-addressing of action [focusing] instead on a self-changing society as part of everyday politics” (p. 369).
3. The research has been conducted within the framework of a European research project Youthblocs. Youthblocs received funds from the European Commission through the Horizon 2020—Marie Skłodowska Curie Programme (MSCA – IF – 2015 – Grant Agreement no. 701844).
4. In Italy, the term *centri sociali* refers to a very specific kind of political experience. Social centres are usually abandoned buildings that are re-appropriated through occupation and turned into self-managed and counter-cultural spaces where political and social initiatives are proposed. The buildings are not just squatted in and used as temporary accommodation by the occupants, but they are turned into spaces open to the community. For a story of Italian social centres, see Ruggiero (2000) and Genova (2018).
5. Up to 150 people were actively involved in Lucha.
6. Aiming at analysing internal organisational dynamics, this chapter considers only the ethnographic notes and the 10 biographical interviews conducted with Lucha’s core members. However, the research material also included 15 semi-structured interviews with individuals differently involved in Lucha’s activities, such as newer SMO members, local inhabitants engaging in the neighbourhood’s committee, migrants hosted in the homeless shelter, and other users of Lucha’s services.
7. Research materials (interviews and fieldnotes) have been collected in Italian and translated into English for the purpose of this analysis.
8. Although abandoned for 20 years, the building was not considered an example of urban decay before being squatted in by the activists. This critique was addressed to the SMO’s activities, which, according to Lucha’s detractors, were threatening the neighbourhood’s appearance and peace. Actually, even the most criticised activities (concerts) were organised following the municipality’s norms.

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13. Coming out in solidarity: the Non-Stop Picket of the South African Embassy as a space of support and experimentation for queer youth

Gavin Brown

For nearly four years, beginning on 19 April 1986, the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group (City Group) maintained a continuous Non-Stop Picket outside the South African Embassy in London. The Non-Stop Picket attracted the participation of hundreds of young people from London and across the world. Many – possibly a disproportionate number – of those young people were LGBT. In this chapter, I explore how and why so many queer youth were attracted to the Non-Stop Picket. In doing so, this chapter explores how my recent work on the Non-Stop Picket and transnational solidarity (Brown, 2019; Brown and Yaffe, 2016; 2017) connects with my longer-term interest in the geographies of sexuality (Brown and Browne, 2016).

Drawing on interviews with over 80 participants in the Non-Stop Picket and City Group's archive, this chapter explores three aspects of the Non-Stop Picket's sexual politics. First, having provided some context to how the Picket's location, organisational methods, and political perspectives helped attract many LGBT participants, I examine the group's conscious effort to build solidarity with LGBT+ anti-apartheid activists in South Africa. Second, I explore how City Group contributed to radical lesbian and gay activist projects in London at the time (including ACT UP). Finally, I conceptualise how the intensity of the interpersonal connections made on the Non-Stop Picket fostered a queer ethos for its social and political life. The semi-structured interviews that this chapter draws on were conducted between 2011 and 2014. The participants spanned close to a fifty-year age range (late thirties to mid-eighties), though the majority had been children, teenagers, or in their early twenties when they participated in the Non-Stop Picket. As I discuss later, I was also a teenage participant in the Picket. While I cannot discount that this has skewed my analysis, I believe that 30 years' distance from the events allowed a more critical reflection on the Non-Stop Picket than if I had researched it at the time. Certainly, my status as a former Picketer encouraged many participants to engage with the research and provided me with insights into how to ensure that the diversity of experiences and opinions within the group were reflected in the research.

The Non-Stop Picket was a colourful, lively, and noisy presence outside the South African Embassy. Its location in Trafalgar Square in central London meant that there was a constant flow of people passing by, and the group encouraged interested members of the public to stop and get involved. This location, and its changing social dynamics day and night, helped the Picket to attract a very diverse group of participants.

The Picket was sustained as a non-stop protest by dividing the day into three- or six-hour shifts, which individuals and groups pledged to attend on an on-going basis. In addition to this formal shift structure, due to the Picket's constant presence, many supporters also turned up at other times, knowing that they would find friends there. Some shifts survived with just

a handful of regular picketers, but the Picket's size grew at the weekends and for special events.

Over time, picketers became very attached to those few square metres of pavement, which came to function like true public space – a commons that was a resource available for all to draw on; and, in many ways, a *queer* commons, not just for the visible presence and solidarities between queer bodies, but for the ways in which the practices of the Picket *queered* the norms and expectations of appropriate behaviour in (British) public spaces. I elaborate further on this point later in the chapter.

The embassy, South Africa House, was chosen as the focus for the Non-Stop Picket as protests there were an embarrassment to apartheid's representatives and supporters in Britain. The Picket was not just a symbolic protest; it actively sought to disrupt the diplomatic work of the embassy.

Time spent on the Non-Stop Picket was (normally) time spent engaged in political work – asking passers-by to sign a petition against apartheid and make a small financial donation to anti-apartheid campaigning. While some of the funds raised helped the Non-Stop Picket to function (including printing costs, legal fees, and necessary equipment), £1000s were donated to South African political movements. Through speeches, songs, and its visual displays, the Non-Stop Picket sought to educate the British public about apartheid and to encourage them to take action to break British links with the apartheid regime.

For a complex set of reasons (which are beyond the scope of this chapter, but which are explored in depth in Brown and Yaffe, 2017, pp. 25–32), City Group had been 'disaffiliated' from the mainstream, 'official' national Anti-Apartheid Movement in 1985. Two of the main points of contention underlying their disaffiliation are central to the stories and the analysis that I offer in this chapter. First, the group was committed to (what it called) 'non-sectarian' solidarity with *all* anti-apartheid tendencies in South Africa and Namibia. In practice, this meant that they did not limit their solidarity to the African National Congress (ANC), who forged a multi-racial alliance to oppose apartheid, but also worked with Pan-Africanists and people from the Black Consciousness tradition, who believed the struggle should be led by Africans (Skinner, 2017). This meant that the Non-Stop Picket ended up campaigning for political prisoners in South Africa who were overlooked by the mainstream Anti-Apartheid Movement (Fieldhouse, 2005). Second, City Group and its supporters were committed to using non-violent direct action to draw attention to, challenge, disrupt, and reforge Britain's political, economic, and cultural links with apartheid South Africa. This challenged the more institutionally-focused campaigning of the national Anti-Apartheid Movement, whose leadership was suspicious of people and tactics they could not control (Fieldhouse, 2005, pp. 218–26). There was frequently a camp theatricality to these direct actions which 'queered' some of the more staid tactics and organisational methods of the British Left. I explore next how and why the Picket attracted so many queer youths and consider how over time this further shifted the social and political culture of the group and their protests.

THE PICKET AS QUEER SPACE

On 14 March 1987, 5000 people marched six miles across London on the 'March for Mandela' called by City Group. The participants in the March for Mandela were described by Carol Brickley, City Group's Convenor, in her speech on the day as 'Thatcher's rejects'. In many

ways they were – the demonstration included contingents of miners from Hatfield Main National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) branch, migrant rights activists from the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign and other anti-deportation groups, radical lesbian and gay activists from the Wombourne 12 Defence Campaign, and students fresh from an anti-apartheid occupation at the London School of Economics. Brought together by the impassioned speeches of City Group activists and the persuasive argument of the group's letters and propaganda, those attending the demonstration represented a temporary coalition of those who had been either marginalised, repressed, or radicalised by eight years of Thatcherism. Despite high levels of youth unemployment in the 1980s, most young people in Britain at the time were able to find employment, and rents were low enough that many could afford to live independently from their parents, if they chose to. This enabled a minority of young people to engage with a wide range of political causes.

The celebration of non-stop picketers as ‘Thatcher’s rejects’ was not coincidental. City Group routinely linked opposition to apartheid in South Africa to active anti-racism in Britain and believed that it was politically necessary to build anti-apartheid and anti-racist solidarity amongst those who had least to gain from the policies of the Thatcher government. To do this, the group organised through several sub-groups designed to build support amongst specific constituencies – there was a youth and students’ group, a women’s group, a black and anti-racist group, and a lesbian and gay group (using the terms most common at the time, but which included bisexual, trans and gender nonconforming members). The lesbian and gay sub-group served as a support group for LGBT+ picketers; actively sought to build support for the Non-Stop Picket amongst other LGBT groups and individuals; and led campaigns in solidarity with queer South African opponents of apartheid. It is worth remembering that the Non-Stop Picket took place at the height of the AIDS crisis and moral panics inspired by it: Section 28 (which banned the ‘intentional promotion of homosexuality’ by local authorities) became law at this time, and the age of consent for gay men in the UK was still five years higher than for heterosexuals.

If City Group’s leadership consciously sought to organise those rejected and sidelined by British society, many of the individual picketers we interviewed also reflected that they had been ‘misfits’ at the time and were looking for a place to belong. The Non-Stop Picket’s practice of offering a welcome to potential new supporters attracted a significant number of LGBT young people. Nicole was 16 when she joined the Non-Stop Picket and argued that, ‘it showed me that I wasn’t different. I was actually quite normal, and it was perfectly fine to spend time thinking about politics, wearing sad old clothes, and not bothering with boys!’ (Nicole, 28 November 2011).

I was also one of those queer misfits who joined the Non-Stop Picket. I was 16 when I joined, and by the time I was 18, I had joined City Group’s committee as the Lesbian and Gay Organiser. While City Group’s main leadership posts (Convenor and Deputy Convenor) were held by older, more experienced activists, many of the other committee posts were held by teenagers and young adults who had gained political experience through the Non-Stop Picket (or City Group’s earlier campaigns). I was initially drawn to the Non-Stop Picket by my political commitment to opposing apartheid, but one of the reasons I stayed was that I found a supportive group of peers there. I had walked past the Non-Stop Picket and signed their petition several times before I was persuaded to stay and spend some time there. My decision to return (the next day) was probably shaped by the fact that most of the other picketers on that first shift were other young gay and bisexual men my age or a little older. Here’s how

I described the experience in an unpublished interview with my colleague, Helen Yaffe, contextualising that I joined the Picket a few weeks after coming out as gay, first to some school friends and then my parents.

Yeah, I mean I hadn't had a massively bad reaction at school. Those school friends that I did come out to were okay about it, but it wasn't a particularly supportive environment. I didn't consciously know of any other sort of gay kids at school. I discovered that quite a few of them were gay in subsequent years, but at that stage didn't really know who my peers were in that group. My parents were trying to be supportive but were completely bewildered and things were quite tense at home.

So, I'd come out in the context of the height of the AIDS moral panic, at the height of Section 28 going through. Coming out was a political act for me as much as anything else and so it was incredibly empowering to be around other young lesbian and gay people or other young people who were politically involved who were sort of questioning or experimenting with their sexuality and to have that peer support and to have not just our sexuality, but also a sort of common political focus in common. But, actually, it went beyond sexuality – here were a group of young people that I felt I had a lot more in common with than most of the people I was at school with. (Gavin, 4 July 2013)

That inclusive, queer-friendly space also made the social networks articulated through the Non-Stop Picket a supportive, polymorphous environment for young people who were questioning or exploring their sexuality. In addition to those young picketers who were already 'out' about their sexuality at the time, or who came out on the Non-Stop Picket, we interviewed several people who had intense homoerotic or homoromantic relationships with other picketers during that period but have been predominantly heterosexual ever since.

Ben was only 13 when he started attending the Non-Stop Picket at weekends, tagging along with his older sister and her friends, whose participation slightly predated his own. Although he was not particularly open about his sexuality at the time, he acknowledges that the autonomy and respect given to teenage participants in the protest made it a welcoming place for him to be himself.

But what was so interesting actually was the amount of autonomy and respect that even as teenagers you got from other people being there; there was something quite amazing about. ... At that age when you're trying to be taken seriously as an adult, even though you're 13/14, actually the Picket was one of those places that really talked about that. And I don't know if that had anything to do with it but it really felt, you know, there were lots of young people on it who were, you know, I was one of the Picket organisers for the Non-Stop and for the weekend Picket, and we'd go and have responsibility for collecting stuff and the money and the this and the that, and that was amazing to have that sort of responsibility. But by the time, at its height I was doing nine-hour shifts on Saturday, and that partly because of the place and people were taking me seriously and I think that may well have had something to do with what I was trying to become more, you know, as much as the politics, although the politics was very important. (Ben, 15 August 2013).

Ben's experience highlights how young activists carve out a space for themselves at the meeting point of children's and adult lifeworlds (Kallio and Häkli, 2011) and use these experiences to navigate the transition to adulthood on their own terms. As a number of previous studies of youth activism have highlighted, it is important not to read youthful political engagements through a normative lens of adult political engagements, and to recognise that young activists often craft their own sense of political empowerment by emulating their near-peers rather than adult activists (Giugni, 2008; Gordon, 2008).

The Picket's location in the heart of the West End (and Trafalgar Square's role as the hub of the London night bus system at the time) also facilitated queer participation and presence in other ways, as Graham described:

I live at the Elephant [and Castle in South London], and often walked home from clubbing in the West End. I knew about the Picket, and was happy to join it, especially in the small hours when I could get some fresh air before walking home. I never questioned why there were so many gay men there, until someone told me years later it was a cruising site. I had naively assumed that the gay community was merely in solidarity with the South Africans, and never thought about it further. (Graham, 13 January 2014)

These stories suggest that the Non-Stop Picket could be thought of as a 'queer space', defined by Ingram et al. (1997) as a space that 'enables people with marginalised (homo)sexualities and identities to survive and to gradually expand their influence and opportunities to live fully' (p. 3). In part, such spaces make queer people visible (to each other), and through those connections subvert heteronormative expectations. We see this in the ways in which queer youths found each other on the Picket, felt less isolated, and recalibrated the sense of misfitting they had experienced at school, home, or in other areas of their lives. But this sense of connecting in a place that operated by other rules can also be seen in Graham's realisation that, late at night after the clubs closed, there was low-key cruising occurring on and around the Non-Stop Picket. Cruising sites have been described as a form of 'queer commons' (Millner-Larsen and Butt, 2018), because they tend to be public or interstitial spaces that anyone can access. The ways in which the Non-Stop Picket used the pavement outside the embassy made it truly a public space and, thus, a form of commons that anyone could access, participate in, and shape without asserting (individual) ownership over it. That queer youths and others made specific uses of that commons to meet their own social and political needs also made it a queer commons. While the Picket was created to serve a directly political purpose, its participants also adapted it for their own social needs.

The Picket's anti-apartheid solidarity was a transnational expression of care for those resisting apartheid and settler colonialism in Southern Africa, but the picketers created and sustained cultures of care for each other in the process, and one group who benefited from this were queer youth who supported and learned from each other and their near peers. That care took many forms, including validating people's sense of identity, giving them space and encouragement to explore and experiment with their sense of self, having a support network that helped overcome a sense of isolation, protecting each other from homophobic and transphobic abuse, and introducing each other to queer cultural practices (Brown and Yaffe, 2017). Just as women's unwaged care work in the home and community is frequently undervalued, so too is the care for people and planet that activists do, and the ways their care for each other can sustain people's engagement in working for social change (James with Lopez, 2020).

INTERSECTIONAL SUBALTERN GEOPOLITICS: PRODUCING QUEER GEOPOLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

City Group's commitment to 'non-sectarian' solidarity meant that the Non-Stop Picket often campaigned for those South African anti-apartheid prisoners who were overlooked by the

mainstream Anti-Apartheid Movement (in Britain and internationally).¹ This included two high-profile gay prisoners: Ivan Toms and Simon Nkoli.

Ivan Toms was a white doctor who had served as a medic in the South African Defence Force in Namibia during his national service (Toms, 1994). On returning to civilian life, he set up a clinic in the Crossroads squatter camp near Cape Town. Having witnessed the army being used to evict the settlement in 1983, he helped found the End Conscription Campaign and publicly declared that, motivated by his Christian faith, he would refuse to serve subsequent reservist duties. In 1988 he was jailed for nine months for his stance.

Simon Nkoli was active in the United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Students. He also helped found the first black gay organisation in South Africa. In 1984 he spoke at several rallies in support of the rent boycotts in the Vaal townships. He was subsequently arrested and charged with treason – one of the defendants in the Delmas Treason Trial. He refused to hide his sexuality or his history of gay activism during the trial (to the discomfort of some of his co-defendants) (Nkoli, 1994). He was acquitted in 1988 and visited the Non-Stop Picket during a visit to Europe shortly after his release.

City Group's campaigns for Simon Nkoli and Ivan Toms were used to draw LGBT organisations and individuals in the UK into anti-apartheid activity. In December 1986, Simon Nkoli received over 150 Christmas cards from (mostly) gay anti-apartheid campaigners in Britain and the Netherlands (Nkoli, 1994, p. 255), and this level of support helped persuade his co-accused that his homosexuality did not make them all more vulnerable. However, Simon was also adamant that international support just for himself, making him a special cause due to his sexuality, was not helpful and could do more harm than good – he wanted the international gay community to stand in solidarity with *all* the Delmas 22 defendants (de Waal and Martin, 2007).

These international campaigns also helped add legitimacy to the emerging network of lesbian and gay activist groups in South Africa, which were beginning to organise non-racially and explicitly align themselves with the mass democratic movement against apartheid (Hoad et al., 2005). In doing so, they contributed to redefining a more intersectional way of understanding the geopolitics of anti-apartheid solidarity and the place of LGBT people in relation to the national liberation struggle.

Geopolitical analyses of the anti-apartheid struggle often frame its democratic and decolonial imperatives within the framework of Cold War geopolitics (Westad, 2005). The close alliance between the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party, as well as the ANC's reliance on the Soviet bloc and its allies for military training and provisions, certainly meant that (along with other liberation struggles in the region), the anti-apartheid struggle was presented by both the apartheid government and significant sections of its opposition as a Cold War proxy conflict.

I argue that the experiences of both Ivan Toms and Simon Nkoli offer other insights into how South African activists understood and contested these dominant geopolitical framings, offering in their place a subaltern and queer geopolitical perspective (Sharp, 2013). Both were supporters of the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front (UDF), but their understandings of the problem of apartheid and how to overcome it were never restricted to a Cold War framework. For both, their sexuality and their religious faith played a role in informing and shaping their political activism (Nkoli, 1994; Toms, 1994). A disproportionate number of white South African war resisters were gay – precisely because their sexuality brought them into conflict with the highly militarised masculinities expected of white men under apartheid. When Ivan

Toms refused to report for his call-up, he (and the wider End Conscription Campaign) was subjected to a torrent of homophobic harassment (Toms, 1994). Ivan was clear that he wanted to link his experience of oppression as a gay man to his decision to refuse to serve in the army, but the End Conscription Campaign was nervous of making this link too publicly, fearing it might undermine the broad-based support they were building. In the end, Ivan was persuaded to downplay (but not completely closet) his sexuality in the campaign. Nevertheless, the prosecution made the issue public during his trial.

Simon Nkoli was part of the generation of South African activists who came into the struggle in the wake of the 1976 Soweto School students uprising, during which time he was detained for three months, aged 15. In 1983, Simon joined the (predominantly white) Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) and, through them, formed the ‘Saturday Group’, which was one of the first black gay organisations in Africa and concentrated its activities in the black townships where their members lived (Gewisser, 1994). After his release, he formed GLOW – the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand, a black-majority group which, along with the Organisation of Lesbian & Gay Activists in Cape Town, was an LGBT organisation that was explicitly aligned to the UDF and the anti-apartheid struggle (Gewisser, 1994).

Although his anti-apartheid activism preceded his involvement in gay activism and community building, Simon’s experience of the racism of white GASA members towards the few black gay people who participated in their events galvanised him to think more intersectionally about how his sexuality shaped his wider politicisation and opposition to apartheid (University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections, 2012). When he was on treason trial, GASA refused to support or defend him because he had not been arrested for crimes related to his sexuality. He challenged their compartmentalisation of a gay rights politics as being distinct from the anti-apartheid struggle, and championed the idea that there could be ‘no liberation without gay liberation’ (Martin, 2020). In the speech that he made at the start of the first gay pride march in Johannesburg, Simon said,

This is what I say to my comrades in the struggle who ask me why I waste time fighting for moffies. And this is what I say to white gay men or women who ask me why I spend so much time talking about apartheid, when I should be fighting for gay rights. I am black *and* I am gay. I cannot separate the two parts of me into two secondary or primary struggles. They will be all one struggle. (Ditsie and Newman, 2001)

His intersectional analysis of apartheid, and the strength he drew from transnational black (gay) popular culture helped reframe sexual politics in South Africa, but it also shaped the contribution queer solidarity activists in the UK could make (and how they understood their analysis).

City Group members worked closely with the veteran gay activist Peter Tatchell (who was a sponsor of the Non-Stop Picket and a City Group member) around the cases of Ivan Toms and Simon Nkoli (Carolin, 2022; Tatchell, 2005). When Tatchell decided to challenge the ANC to clarify its position of LGBT rights, he consulted Norma Kitson for advice on which senior ANC leaders to approach for a (potentially) open-minded and positive response.

After I interviewed Ruth Mompati, she made those horrendous homophobic comments, I approached Norma and David Kitson to ask who in the ANC leadership I should approach to try and promote change towards LGBT rights. They suggested Thabo Mbeki on the basis that they saw him as one of the most liberal minded ANC leaders. That he’d lived in Britain and been exposed to the Gay

Rights Movement, and that he was very persuasive and influential within the ANC. (Peter Tatchell, 19 December 2013)

Subsequently, City Group activists used their influence with members of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) to press the PAC leadership on this issue too – albeit with markedly less success.² It seems, in this context, that the subaltern geopolitical perspectives offered by Ivan Toms and Simon Nkoli, while challenging the dominant geopolitical perspectives of the ANC, were also easier to frame in relation to those perspectives – in which, according to the opening lines of the Freedom Charter, ‘South Africa belongs to all who live in it’. At his funeral, echoing the call and response of the anti-apartheid slogan ‘Amandla! Ngawethu!’ [Power to the people!], it was said that ‘Simon gave power to the people, and he gave power especially to lesbians and gays’ (Ditsie and Newman, 2001).

QUEER DIRECT ACTION AGAINST APARTHEID

City Group members regularly took direct action against apartheid’s representatives and supporters in Britain, actively trying to disrupt political, economic, and cultural links between Britain and South Africa. The group’s members were also prepared to risk arrest defending their right to protest against apartheid (in the ways they thought were most effective).

One of the people who accumulated the most arrests during the Non-Stop Picket was a gay man – the group’s Treasurer, Richard Roques. The visible presence of a gay man in the group’s leadership and Richard’s refusal to be cowed by repeated arrests seems to have inspired many other LGBT picketers to take direct action. This might also have been aided by the camp theatricality that was needed to pull off some of their direct actions – ‘dragging up’ as cricket fans to facilitate pitch invasions at cricket matches to protest Mike Gatting’s rebel cricket tour of South Africa in contravention of the international sports boycott, or the time a group of women (aged between 16 and 70, several of them queer-identified) dressed as a class of convent girls and nuns doing a ‘geography project’ in order to gain access to the offices of South African Airways, before occupying it.

When South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha visited London in 1989, three queer activists (two of them young gay/bi men) were arrested after they jumped police barriers and ran towards Botha as he entered the embassy, with the intention of handcuffing themselves to him and carrying out a citizen’s arrest.

[We] did innovative things. I remember myself, Dom and [Maureen] attempting a citizen’s arrest on Pik Botha during a visit to UK (in relation to an arms smuggling trial). We did our research and found that visiting foreign ministers don’t have diplomatic immunity. He visited the South African Embassy and used the side entrance on Duncannon Street, to try and evade our protests. The police had created a sterile area with barriers. We jumped over the barriers and ran towards him – I got within a foot. It was worrying, as I recall his security reaching under their jackets … I got grabbed by policeman who started smashing my head against Embassy wall saying, ‘calm down!’ (Andy Privett, 12 March 2012)

City Group’s newsletter from June 1989 reported the action in the following terms:

In a caring, sharing kind of way, the Met had decided to barricade Duncannon Street from pedestrians. At 6.40 pm, nine demonstrators from the 100 strong Picket, jointly called by City AA and the AAM, jumped over the barricades and tried to make their way towards Botha and [British Foreign Minister,

Geoffrey] Howe as they left through the back door. Immediately the police jumped on top of the demonstrators, throwing them to the ground, sitting on top of them and smashing them against the wall. Six were released at the time but the cops decided to arrest three gay demonstrators – Maureen Oliver, National Coordinator of OLGA, Dominic Thackray, RCG member and Youth & Students Organiser of City AA, and Andrew Gardner,³ City AA member.

All three of us sustained heavy bruising and cuts to our arms, shoulders, face, and legs. Two of us were charged under Section 4 [*sic!*] of the Public Order Act. At the time Inspector Read informed us we would be charged with Attempted Murder [even siccer!]. . . .

A few years ago, four white South Africans were arrested on arms smuggling charges. They were given bail and fled back to racist South Africa. Pik Botha publicly stated that under no circumstances would he return them to face the British courts. We merely wanted to make a citizen's arrest of Botha for his part in a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. (Sacre, 1989)

Many activists were prepared to risk arrest because they knew that their friends and supporters would attend the police station to greet them on their release, and the group would offer full and effective legal support to them (see Brown and Yaffe, 2017, pp. 126–46). There was also something about the intensity of the bonds between picketers that built trust and daring amongst them, as this quote from Andy Privett – one of those detained for attempting to arrest Pik Botha – exemplifies:

Wow! Over time, with that level of commitment to something, it becomes essential to your lifestyle. That shared experience – not just being on NSP, but all that went with that – when you've been in a cell with someone, in a police van, or dragged off by the police with a group of people, your perspective and relationship transcends friendship – it's comradeship (and I use that term specifically). (Andy Privett, 12 March 2012)

City Group's solidarity was not only directed towards those resisting apartheid in Southern Africa, but also faced inwards in the support it offered to participants in the Non-Stop Picket. Legal support – whether in the form of collecting evidence at the time of an arrest, waiting at police stations for arrestees to be released, or providing lawyers to defend them in court – was understood as political work. It was also care work, and that ethos of caring for other picketers, as a political act, became embedded in the everyday life of the Picket. Through their common attachment to the anti-apartheid cause and those few square metres of pavement that had been (re)claimed for the Picket, queer picketers found and supported each other.

ACTING UP IN LONDON

City Group took anti-apartheid activism into gay spaces, both to mobilise more support for the Non-Stop Picket and to articulate how different political struggles might be linked. For example, City Group's choir regularly performed in the cabaret tent at Gay Pride (as it was called then) in London throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. The Non-Stop Picket was also sponsored by several high-profile gay politicians and celebrities; and there were some lesbian and gay groups, such as Wages Due Lesbians (James, 2021) that frequently spoke at larger rallies on the Non-Stop Picket. These engagements with the social and political infrastructures of London gay life created opportunities for multi-sited, intersectional solidarity in London.

By chance, City Group rented office space in the same building as several high-profile lesbian and gay campaign groups and NGOs. Regular interactions in the building's canteen and corridors with key activists from the Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action (OLGA)⁴

drew supporters of that group into anti-apartheid activism and a commitment to sustaining the Non-Stop Picket. As I recalled in my interview with Helen Yaffe:

I think the office was really interesting and Panther House was really interesting, because we made lots of productive connections with other groups that had offices there as well and in particular I got to know the people from the OLGA office, the Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action office, who were sort of well not just down the corridor, but they were in the same building, we spent lots of time chatting to them. We got them committed to City Group, and in part that's where the regular lesbian and gay Picket shift came from. It was a vehicle for them to make a commitment to the Picket. ... But those were really productive cross-fertilisations of campaigning techniques, of sharing sort of contacts and tactics with other campaigning groups in the building. (Gavin, 4 July 2013)

However, these links also drew a layer of City Group's LGBT activists into the newly formed AIDS activist coalition – ACT UP London (and later into the Outrage! direct action group around Peter Tatchell). This connection was further reinforced by the involvement in ACT UP of a couple of gay men who had previously been involved with City Group but drifted away from the Non-Stop Picket for personal and political reasons (as Dominic notes below). Not only did they draw current City Group members into the orbit of ACT UP, but through this collaboration they rekindled their own commitment to the Non-Stop Picket.

City Group's experience of taking inventive, non-violent direct action (and its highly developed mechanisms for offering arrested members legal support) emboldened some constituencies within ACT UP London to take more risky, high-profile direct actions. ACT UP London had announced their existence by catapulting condom packs over the walls of Pentonville Prison. Once City Group members (and others with more experience of direct action) joined, the group's actions became more daring – locking on to the doors of the Department of Health, blocking the road outside other government offices, and chaining themselves across Westminster Bridge, within sight of Parliament, on World AIDS Day 1989. Here, Dominic, who participated in several of these actions, describes how he got involved with ACT UP, encouraged by a black gay man, Kayode, who had previously been very involved with City Group and the early months of the Non-Stop Picket.

Yeah, I was involved with ACT UP actually. ... Yeah, ACT UP was basically Kayode got back in touch, because he'd been involved with ACT UP from like early doors and it was still early days and Kayode said like, you know, should come along and it was nice to see him, we hadn't seen him for a long time, so we went along and we got involved with that and ACT UP people started coming to the Picket a bit and like who was it? It was me, Richard, Gavin, maybe a couple of others, and then ACT UP was kind of new, so Kayode who was sort of helping set that up, asked me a couple of times if I would like to chain myself to whatever, because like other people were nervous of doing it. So there was kind of a little bit of I don't mean to put myself at the centre of everything that happened, but there was a little bit of a sort of whatever the word is, you know, there's the connection and really it was Kayode, and then because they were sort of relatively inexperienced activists, but much more respectable than us theoretically, because it was about AIDS, that's definitely charity, it's not politics, although it was. Anyway, that there was the connection between the two, but there was also a certain amount of hostility from some people, so yeah, we were involved in ACT UP and we did their stuff and some of them came and did some of ours. (Dominic, 3 April 2013)

Ben, whom we met earlier, was too young to get involved with ACT UP in this period (as their weekly meetings were on school nights and he was at school when most of their protests occurred), but in his interview, he reflected on how the experience of being on the Non-Stop

Picket when he was barely into his teens empowered him to go on and get very involved in gay direct action campaigning as an older teenager a few years later.

I think I just became hugely politicised. And that maintained after the Picket. I was doing Outrage and sort of ... I'm not hugely active now, but certainly with Outrage I was probably the most political, all the meetings and then we used to do, we'd invade the Daily Mail, Michael Portillo's press conference we did, all sorts of – actually I felt very confident in that, and also being a spokesperson for them and going on BBC and whatever, and being a spokesperson for Outrage at one stage, very confident in that political arena, needing to know your stuff ... [it] really taught me to own that political face, and not just to hold opinions privately, but actually to have a voice, to actually take some space with that. (Ben, 15 August 2013)

In summary, I have argued that City Group made connections with radical lesbian and gay groups to enhance its anti-apartheid activism, and these connections built reciprocal networks of solidarity amongst activist networks in London. This, in turn, helped queer and questioning teenagers (and young adults) on the Non-Stop Picket to build stronger gay networks. They might have come out on or through the Non-Stop Picket and found queer friendship networks there, but the connections they made through ACT UP and Outrage! brought them out more fully into London gay life.

SOLIDARITY AS QUEER TRANSFORMATION

Dave Featherstone has written about how (political) solidarity is ‘a relation forged through political struggle which seeks to [be transformative and] challenge forms of oppression’ (Featherstone, 2012, p. 5). In the examples presented in this chapter, the desired political transformation was not just focused on ending apartheid. The social solidarity forged on the Non-Stop Picket between its participants was transformative of socio-sexual relations – it offered support to LGBT youth at a time when the AIDS panic was intensifying, and state-sanctioned homophobia was on the rise – which, in turn, suggests lessons for contemporary queer youth activism. The close bonds of friendship, collective care, and comradeship developed on the Non-Stop Picket, and intensified by the ‘non-stop’ temporalities of its pace and duration, allowed young picketers (and others) to experiment with their sexuality in a supportive environment. The location, form, and organisational methods of the Non-Stop Picket all played a part here. The Picket’s continuous presence outside the embassy allowed it to function as a commons that was an open resource for all. While many picketers benefited from the forms of communality fostered through that space, it took on particular significance for LGBT youth, as it functioned as a *queer commons* that rewrote the rules of appropriate behaviour in public, and affirmed queer relationships and identities in the process. That queer communality enabled queer youth to come out, and others to experiment with the boundaries of their sexuality. The same ethos of care that helped young queer misfits belong and support each other through coming out, and the heartache of unrequited crushes, also empowered them to be more daring and resolute in their activism, and to become the adults they wanted to be.

The work of City Group’s queer activists to build solidarity with gay anti-apartheid prisoners extended networks of solidarity in London and allowed new and transformative articulations of solidarity (between anti-apartheid and LGBT politics) to form. As young queer picketers reached out to LGBT groups in London to get them involved in the campaigns for Simon Nkoli

and Ivan Toms, reciprocal networks of solidarity were built on the streets of London and queer picketers brought their organising skills and direct action ethos to queer and AIDS activism. But these campaigns, and the networks they fostered, also opened space for articulating lesbian and gay rights as a form of subaltern geopolitics, which shifted geopolitical understandings of the struggle against apartheid from being viewed singularly in terms of the global Cold War or anti-imperialism. It challenged the worldview of the ANC and amplified claims for LGBT rights to be incorporated into the national liberation struggle and the (imagined) foundations of non-racial democracy in South Africa. Emboldened by transnational gay solidarity, this period opened cracks for (mostly young) LGBT South Africans to claim their place within the national liberation struggle.

This tangible sense of helping to shift the terms of the debate in South Africa also fed back into the political empowerment that an involvement in anti-apartheid solidarity had for the LGBT youth who stood on the pavement outside South Africa House in London for those four years. Many of the young queer picketers whom I interviewed in their adult years recalled that their time on the Non-Stop Picket had allowed them to experiment with the types of adults they wanted to become as well as the self-belief and support networks to achieve this as they made the transition to adulthood on their own terms and through their youthful activism.

NOTES

1. See Kraak (2005) for a discussion of how gay South African exiles were marginalised and silenced within ANC and Anti-Apartheid Movement networks in London.
2. See Gewisser (1994, p. 71) for a discussion of how the PAC and Black Consciousness organisations responded to debates about lesbian and gay rights in South Africa in the early 1990s.
3. This was the name Andy Privett (quoted above) used at the time of the Non-Stop Picket.
4. Not to be confused with the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists, also known as OLGA, in Cape Town who were the South African progressive gay organisation that Ivan Toms was associated with.

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14. Racism and youth climate activism: what can we learn from racism allegations about the image exclusions of black women activists?

Brendon Barnes

What happens when black youth climate activists make racism allegations against white liberal media and climate change movements? Racism is a central feature of black women's climate activism, but rarely do they publicly call out racism, especially against organisations that espouse liberal and inclusive values. However, in 2020 and 2021, three unconnected black women youth climate activists, Vanessa Nakate, Elise Yarde, and Tonny Nowshin, from different parts of the world and in separate incidents, had all or part of their images excluded from reporting on their climate activism, while their mostly white counterparts' images were left intact. Described in more detail below, the activists accused the organisations of racism on social media. The accusations were followed by the organisations' denying overt racism, explaining what "really" happened, and delivering "apologies" and repair actions of sorts.

Although important work focuses on racism and climate change (Sealey-Huggins, 2018; Tilley et al., 2022; Williams, 2021), much of this is around extending our understanding of racism, climate change, and activism. Very little work focuses on what happens in "real-time" when and after black youth activists make allegations of racism. In this chapter, I attempt to partly address this gap by reflecting on the three racism allegations and their aftermath. Although I had studied racism and undermining of black youth environmental activists before, the contestation was often subtle. The case studies here stood out, given the direct accusation of overt racism. I studied the nature, form, and sequencing of the events, including the racism allegations, the denial of racism, the apologies, and a plethora of (social) media commentary in between. The exclusions not only reignited discussions about racism and youth climate activism but also drew attention to racism within the media and climate activist organisations. I describe some of this work's findings, outline the methodological approach, synthesise cross-cutting themes not well discussed in existing publications, and present ideas for future work. Importantly, I reflect on what this might mean for our understanding of racism and black youth climate activism in liberal, white-dominated spaces.

The starting point for this work is that black youth activists experience many forms of racism in their living environments, work, and activism (Abimbola et al., 2021). For example, activists may experience disproportionate environmental ill-health burdens and inadequate responses following environmental disasters in their living environments (Bullard and Wright, 2012). They experience undermining and erasure (Malowa et al., 2020), extreme violence (black activists in the global South experience disproportionately high levels of murder) (Menton and Le Billon, 2021), and strategic litigation that they cannot afford. Many black and indigenous youth are forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands for conservation and "development" initiatives without reparation (Barnwell et al., 2021). Sadly, too, they confront racism *within* global youth climate movements (Sharma, 2019). Various factors collude to undermine

their rightful place in environmental and climate activism. They are underrepresented in media reporting (Feldman and Hsu, 2007; Finney, 2014), and when they are included, they struggle to legitimate their activism. For example, despite extensive activism and protests on the ground, such as in my native country South Africa, there is a strong opinion that black youth are not interested in environmental and climate activism.

When they do feature in media accounts, black youth tend to be represented as “problems” or in need of saving, especially when protests (that are disruptive and sometimes violent) deviate from the image of the non-violent white youth activist that has come to dominate our ideas of youth climate activism (Barnes and Milovanovic, 2015). In addition, as we will see in this chapter, black youth activists are often undermined after making racism allegations in the climate and environmental space. However, many black youth climate activists endure racism in silence and find it challenging to have their voices heard. We can speculate as to why this might be the case. Perhaps it relates to the longstanding expectation for black people to be silent in the face of atrocities (Broussard, 2013). Perhaps there is a need to blend into white, supposedly colour-blind spaces for the sake of the bigger problem of climate change, not to disrupt normative practices, and, as we see in this study, the difficulty of introducing racism allegations and being believed. We could also speculate about why these activists chose to make the allegations now. Perhaps it was influenced by the powerful societal anti-racism sentiments at the time; for example, all three made broad reference to the Black Lives Matter movement.

However, my concern is not why activists are silent or vocal about racism (although this is a critical question) but rather what happens when black youth activists break their silence and call out racism. How do the allegations unfold? How do the accused respond? What assumptions shape the allegations and responses? What does this say about white liberal media and youth climate movements? What can we learn from this for black young women and climate activism? The following section describes the three case studies of this chapter in more depth.

THREE CASES OF RACISM ALLEGATIONS AND THEIR AFTERMATH

Vanessa Nakate is a Ugandan climate activist who began protesting outside the Ugandan parliament in 2019, initially as a lone activist but later joined by other activists. She has had many achievements in a relatively short period. She was invited to a high-profile engagement at the World Economic Forum with three other activists, including Greta Thunberg, in Davos, Switzerland in early 2020. The Associated Press released a press statement including a photograph of the activists. However, Vanessa, the only black activist, was erased from the image. The released image included only the white activists. The only remnant of Vanessa was a piece of her coat. Vanessa took to X (formerly Twitter) to voice her disapproval. Her main point was that her erasure was not just an individual concern but represented the erasure of an entire continent from mainstream climate discourse. In her words, “You didn’t just erase a photo, you erased a continent: But I am stronger than ever” (Nakate, 2020). The Associated Press initially denied the racism and indicated that the erasure was for compositional reasons: there was an unsightly building behind Vanessa, and the only way to remove it was to remove Vanessa from the picture. The Associated Press later apologised, had town hall meetings to discuss racism

and reporting, and sent their staff for diversity training. Fridays For Future organised an event about racism and its disproportionate impacts on Africans.

Interestingly, rather than receiving widespread empathy with her claims of racism and erasure, Vanessa was met with scepticism; she had to work hard to prove that her claims were indeed racist. She also experienced widespread vilification because of her claims, particularly from the African press and commentators. Please see Nakate (2020) for Vanessa's initial allegation.

In May 2020, Tonny Nowshin, a German climate activist, had her picture excluded from a Greenpeace Germany tweet about a protest against a coal-fired powerplant in Germany. Several images were selected for the tweet, with only white activists. Tonny's images were entirely excluded in the tweet. According to her, she was standing right next to the white activists in one image, but she was excluded, just tagged. Tonny replied in a lengthy opinion piece in June 2020, explaining that she was made invisible. She drew parallels with Vanessa Nakate's case but pointed out that this time, the erasure, unfortunately, came from people within the climate movement. She mentioned that Fridays For Future took over a week to support the Black Lives Matter movement. In addition, Fridays For Future also liked a post criticising police violence and structural racism. She pointed out the failure of white activists to recognise their privilege and for climate movements to take racism seriously. Greenpeace replied with a lengthy explanation and apology. Somewhat tone-deaf, they explained that they included one photograph to include two more famous activists. Continuing in this tone, they indicated that they had not deliberately cropped Tonny or anyone else out, referring to Vanessa Nakate's incident. In this way, they could not have been racist; they simply chose photographs that did not include Tonny, which they admit was a mistake. They mentioned, however, that Tonny's picture could be found in an online database that was made available to the media. They said they were grateful to Tonny for raising the issue and would "deal" with their unconscious racism. Please see Nowshin (2021) for the initial allegation.

In October 2021, Elise Yarde, a black woman activist with Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK, was featured in an article by The Guardian alongside 20 other activists, in a piece called "The Wrong Side of the Law, the Right Side of History: The Activists Arrested in the Name of the Planet". Elise had a placard with "climate inaction=racism" on it, but this picture was not included in the Saturday magazine cover story. Instead, an image of her in handcuffs was used. XR UK wrote on X (formerly Twitter), "Hey @Guardian @GdnSaturday @GdnReadersEd, well done for the article on climate activists. But how come there's 19 people with placards and 1 without? You know, the 1 black person, Elise Yarde. Don't you like what she has to say?" In a series of X (formerly Twitter) posts, Elise explained in response to the post that she was disappointed that she was the only black person in the article and questioned why The Guardian did not want to talk about racism. Elise made three claims: that treating black people differently from white people was racist, that omitting her sign (that focused explicitly on racism) as the only black person was racist, and that not printing the placard to avoid offending white middle-class readership was racist. She went on to say that ignoring emissions means that millions of black and brown people will die, and to rectify the situation, The Guardian should print an article and discuss the message. On 17 December 2021, The Guardian published a brief correction stating that they regretted that Elise Yarde was not pictured holding her placard saying climate inaction equals racism. Elise then wrote an article for The Guardian explaining the importance of her message on 13 January 2022. Please see Yarde (2021) for the allegation.

RACISM ALLEGATIONS AND YOUTH CLIMATE ACTIVISM: THEORETICAL RESOURCES

Racism can be understood from several theoretical lenses. This section briefly summarises the theoretical resources that framed this analysis and my thinking more broadly. The analyses were particularly influenced by the discursive nature of race interactions; scholarship of intersectionality; denial of racism; and talk-in-interaction. An important starting point for this analysis is that, far from bad white individuals who act in overtly racist ways towards black activists (although we should not be too quick to dismiss overt racism), racism is often more complex and even more difficult to “prove”. An important framing of this work is the link between structural racism and individual (experiences of) racism – a point all three activists attempted to make. Here I refer to individual racism as overt racist and discriminatory acts by individuals towards black and other marginalised groups. Structural racism refers to the structures, systems, policies, expectations, and economic structures that reinforce the subjugation of black and marginalised people. I view climate racism as the manner in which historical and contemporary racism intersect with climate change to disproportionately impact black and marginalised people.

The activists argued that their experience of racism represented broader structural and climate racism. A growing body of literature has highlighted the relationship between structural racism and individuals’ experiences of racism (Sealey-Huggins, 2018), for example, how historical and contemporary racism, slavery, and colonialism continue to have a disproportionately negative impact on black people’s health, well-being, wealth, and social mobility. Thus, an individual’s racist experiences should not be seen as isolated but as part of a complex set of co-constituted systems and processes that structurally maintain the status quo. Recent work, for example, Williams (2021), has gone a long way to summarising the complexity of structural racism as it relates to climate change. What is less clear, however, is what happens when those who have experienced racism make the link between individual, structural, and climate racism.

Of course, racism cannot be viewed in isolation. Racism intersects with powerful assumptions about gender, class, and youth. Not only can these asymmetries be considered separately, but importantly for this discussion, they also *intersect* with racism (Mikulewicz et al., 2023). Thus, intersectionality, particularly feminist intersectionality, is an important lens for analysing racism (Ravera et al., 2016). Sexist assumptions, often contradictory, abound in climate change discourse (women as carers, with a natural inclination to protect the environment but deceitful, self-absorbed, emotional, malicious, and attention seeking), as do constructions about youth (for example, lacking knowledge, hope-filled, obedient, naïve, energetic but impetuous, dangerous, needing to be governed) (Feldman, 2020; Raby and Sheppard, 2021). In addition, activists in the global South often face additional geopolitical assumptions such as Africans, indigeneity, and ideas of “development”. Youth climate activists are often undermined when they disrupt conservative norms of how they should behave in line with gender, class, and ability. For example, a study on YouTube comments of Greta Thunberg showed the extent of sexism, constructions of youth, and ableism in undermining the activist (Park et al., 2021).

Black women activists have an additional burden of racism and racialised assumptions to contend with. For example, following her racism allegation, Vanessa Nakate was not only undermined because of her youth and gender but she was also undermined by her African

blackness, which included constraints on what she was able to say (Rafaely and Barnes, 2020). For example, it would be very difficult for African activists to give lessons about global issues because the global narrative is that Africa is in-need-of-help. After the “cropped out” incident, conservative interviewers suggested that she could not speak on behalf of all Africans at global events with white people when she has done very little in her backyard, Uganda. In one televised interview, an interviewer suggests “Don’t you think you should be fighting for climate change here [names a few local environmental issues] ... have you [thought about] that as opposed to fighting for Uganda’s climate change abroad?” (Rafaely and Barnes, 2020, p. 75). If she cannot speak on behalf of Uganda, how can she speak on behalf of Africans and blacks? Here the discourse of “local worth” not only conflates Africa with black but also suggests that activists have to prove themselves locally to speak on the world stage. I have yet to hear white activists like Greta Thunberg being asked to prove their local worth before speaking on global issues.

It is also possible to understand how subtle racism is at play in how allegations and responses unfold. Studies have shown that introducing racist allegations is often extremely difficult for the accuser and that a huge amount of emotional and discursive work goes into making the allegation. In many instances, rather than accepting the accusation at face value, the onus is on the accuser to *prove* the racism allegation. Allegations are frequently followed by racism denials, especially if the allegations are public and directed to organisations that espouse liberal values (Van Dijk, 1992). Denials frequently take the form of “we are not racist, but ...” and they go on to deny the allegations by drawing on racist assumptions to deny the racism (Durrheim et al., 2005). Importantly, much can be understood in the nature and form of the apology (if one is forthcoming), especially in what the accused apologises for, the reasons attributed to the allegation, and the degree to which the accused attempts to repair the situation (Augoustinos and LeCouteur, 2004; Cohen, 2020). Thus, racism can be analysed not only as a one-off event but as a sequence of “interactions” following the initial allegations. Importantly, it is possible to study these interactions in everyday talk, media, video interviews, and, as this work demonstrates, social media interactions.

The analyses were particularly influenced by the discursive understanding of racism (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Here, the focus is on how language is used in interactions. The assumption is that participants adopt different subject positions in interactions depending on the context (Wetherell, 1998). Language is not necessarily a reflection of “truths” (for example, this is racist and this is not), but participants take up different subject positions made available within broader discourses that shape what can be said and by whom. As with everyday interactions, activists adopt positions that are availed to them in online interactions. Broader discourses about what it means to be youth, women, African, and black shape what can be said and how. Of course, activists are not passive recipients of those subject positions but actively shape and resist positions to disrupt and fashion responses (Ahearn, 2010).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover any of these theoretical resources in great depth. I will return to theoretical insights later in the chapter, but for now, the point is that understanding racism allegations and their aftermath is complex and can be understood from several theoretical perspectives, depending on the questions being asked. This work has drawn on a few resources, but there are indeed many ways to understand and frame analyses of racism and youth climate activism.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter is based on a series of studies focusing on different aspects of racism among youth climate activists. It examines how racism allegations are introduced, how activists are undermined, and how apologies are framed. The work could be described as a comparative case study methodology (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2019). The work initially considered each case study separately but later adopted a comparative approach to the analysis. I worked with post-doctoral collaborator Daniella Rafaely on the Vanessa Nakate case study. I continue to work with graduate students on the data. The work forms part of a broader project that tries to understand racism and online undermining among black environmental activists. As mentioned, the three case studies differed from previous cases because the activists made direct racism allegations. The studies used qualitative multi-methods, drawing on available online sources.

No primary data, for example interviews with the activists, were collected. We used purposeful criterion sampling to collect the data. The criteria were that the material had to speak directly to the original racism allegation. For Vanessa and Elise, this was a X (formerly Twitter) post (Vanessa also included a video in her original X post), while for Tonny, it was a piece written for *Climate Change News*. Data were collected from each of the original racism allegations, interviews with news agencies about the racism allegations, posts by the activists in response to the allegations, apologies, and activists' responses to those allegations. For each of these data sources, *all* comments and threads related to the racism allegations were included in the data corpus. I collected posts, comments and threads concerning those posts, videos (created by the activists and of the activists in media interviews), comments on the videos, and websites. Initially, data scrapes occurred daily after each of the case studies but were reduced to weekly data collection after the initial comments slowed. The data collection ended in December 2022.

Depending on the research question and focus, different analytic methods were employed. Analysis methods included conversation analysis, discourse analysis, and thematic analysis. Verbal data were transcribed using Jeffersonian (Jefferson, 2004) (for discourse and conversational analysis) and Orthographic transcription methods (Clarke and Braun, 2013) (for thematic analysis), while social comments were captured verbatim. The analytic methods for each study are described in the summary of the findings below. Three studies have, thus far, focused on different aspects of Vanessa Nakate's incident (see Rafaely, 2021; Rafaely and Barnes, 2020; Barnes, 2021), and a fourth (Barnes, 2022) has integrated all three in a comparative case study while more work is still underway. The following section summarises the findings of the published studies.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

The onus is on the accuser to prove and defend racism allegations. Informed by the idea that introducing a racism accusation is often very difficult and that the onus is typically placed on the accuser to prove the truthfulness of the racism allegations, Rafaely (2021) focused on the difficulty of the introduction of racism accusations to the Associated Press by Vanessa Nakate. The paper used discursive psychology and conversation analysis to analyse an interview with a journalist about the "cropped out" incident. The paper demonstrated, in detail, how Vanessa draws on broader membership categories and discursive strategies and introduces defensible

allegations without deliberately naming the acts as racist. Importantly, it showed how the interviewer agrees and adopts moral positions that support the racism explanation for being cropped out, thereby co-producing the racism allegations.

Activists are undermined following racism accusations (including by African journalists and commentators). Rafaely (2021) showed the caution and discursive work that needs to go into making a racism allegation, and for a good reason. Rafaely and Barnes (2020) demonstrated the intensity of the backlash against Vanessa Nakate following the racism allegations. The study was based on online media interviews in Uganda and South Africa and framed by discursive psychology. Not only did Vanessa find it challenging to introduce racism allegations, but African journalists severely undermined her in three ways. First, she could not claim to represent Africa, given that she does not have sufficient credibility in her own country. Second, journalists questioned her racism claims. For example, the reason she was excluded was because she was not famous. Third, they undermined her in gendered ways. For example, they suggested that her emotions, because she was a young woman, led her to become irrational and make racism claims. The study also demonstrated how the media predictably deny racism, explaining that it was an editorial mistake.

Activists deploy various forms of agency to counter the undermining. Vanessa was not a passive recipient of the undermining. In Barnes (2021), I continued to identify the types of undermining Vanessa experienced on social media, interviews, and media reports. In addition to the “cropped out” incident, I also included the backlash Vanessa experienced because she wrote a handwritten letter (emulating a youth peace activist from the 1980s) to the newly inaugurated United States president, Joe Biden, in which she asked him whether he would do everything in his power to fight climate change. Predictably, Vanessa was again criticised because of her geopolitical claims (she should stick to African issues and environmental problems in her own country before addressing global issues); her gender (there was overtly misogynist commentary to Vanessa’s activism focusing on women and children as well as gendered assumptions such as emotionality), and her youth (Vanessa was infantilised, and deemed naïve and precocious). For example, in response to the handwritten letter, one commentator suggested that she is “even 23 and writes like a 13 year old”, while another suggested she is like a seven-year-old (Barnes, 2021, p. 11). Importantly, Vanessa displayed remarkable personal and political agency in the face of the undermining. For example, when she experienced racism, she used that (personal) experience of racism to highlight how black people experience climate racism more broadly. She also drew on the future-oriented (projective) agency to reimagine what black activists can achieve. When criticised for her emotionality, she pointed out that care and emotional engagement should be essential to youth activism. Not only did this paper support the nature and intensity of the undermining, but it also demonstrated how she used the undermining to strengthen her activism.

Apologies for the reason are not meaningful and reinforce racist assumptions. More recently, I focused on the nature and function of apology in response to the digital exclusions experienced by Vanessa, Tonny, and Elise (Barnes, 2022). Given what we know about what might constitute *meaningful* apologies, this study focused on the sequence and content of the “apologies” from the Associated Press, Greenpeace Germany, and The Guardian. The study also attempted to understand the nature of local-level apologies and the possible relationship to societal apologies for climate change. The study collected data from social media threads, comments on those threads, websites, and online videos. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings suggest that none of the “apologies” could be considered meaningful.

White privilege was evident in the apologies in several ways, including the privilege: to control the narrative (“let us explain what actually happened”); to draw on unconscious racism as an explanation for the exclusions, thus absolving themselves of racism allegations; to maintain silence with regard to intersectional injustices (the organisations focused on the individual racism allegations, not on the activists’ claims that the erasure represented systematic racism); and to focus on themselves (particularly to carry out inner reflections and transformative meetings) rather than genuine repair for the accusers.

Together, the initial studies support the existing literature about the nature and sequencing of racism allegations, denial of racism, and apology. The events also followed a broad sequence of events. There was an act of digital exclusion, a racism accusation, a denial of racism (in Vanessa and Tonny’s case, and a statement of regret in Elise’s), a series of activism by the accused (online and interviews) often to justify the racism allegations, a plethora of public responses, allyship politics (for example, Fridays for Future organised an event to highlight climate change in Africa), apology, and acts of repair. It is important to note that events are not always sequential. For example, Tonny’s racism denial came with the apology, while Vanessa’s apology came after the denial. It is also important to note that a discussion with the accused organisation preceded Tonny’s allegation. In Vanessa’s and Elise’s case, the racism allegations appeared separate from discussions with the accused organisations. In Elise’s case, there was no public apology that the author could find only a statement of regret, but she wrote a piece on intersectional justice, which she requested. For Elise, then, there was no overt apology but a move straight to repair. In the next section, I focus on issues that are underdeveloped and worthy of further analysis.

STRENGTHENING THEORY AND ACTION TO STRENGTHEN BLACK YOUNG WOMEN CLIMATE ACTIVISM

The three incidents reinforced the need to consider how black young women activists experience racism, and the toll it takes to make a racism allegation and to see those allegations through. Indeed, the case studies highlighted several issues, including the nature and form of racism allegations, racism denial, racism apology, representational politics, identities, methods, whiteness, and agency. All these are important, but I reflect on areas for theoretical and social action in the following section. The suggestions are not exhaustive but hopefully valuable for those interested in developing the field.

Central to the allegations was the struggle to link personal racism with climate racism. All three activists argued that their (individual) image exclusion was racist, represented systemic racism in society, and that systemic racism is the root cause of climate racism. The linking of personal racism, systemic racism, and climate racism (mostly framed as disproportionate climate impacts) was a strong feature of all three accusations. For Vanessa, it started with a X (formerly Twitter) statement: “You have not just erased me; you have erased a continent.” She elaborated on this in subsequent interviews highlighting how her personal experience represented the experiences of Africans in climate change discourse (systemic racism). Moreover, despite contributing to very little carbon emissions, Africa is disproportionately impacted by climate change, which is unfair (climate racism). Vanessa’s argument focused on Africa. Although race was not explicit, the assumption was that there was a global bias against Africa.

Tonny Nowshin makes similar links in her allegations. She claims, “I am used to facing racism in the streets of Germany from people who dress up in black and shave their heads. Also, sometimes from regular-looking strangers who don’t realise that they are being racist. I was not expecting this from people I’d consider colleagues.” (Nowshin, 2021).

In this statement, she draws links between her image exclusion by her colleagues and the overt and subtle racism that she and black people experience regularly (systemic). She goes on to state that “that racism and the climate crisis have the same root and our fights are interconnected. A climate movement that is racist can never deliver a just future” (Nowshin, 2021), thereby reinforcing the link between personal, systemic, and climate racism.

Similarly, Elise argued that ignoring racism and resulting emissions meant that millions of black and brown people would die. For the activists, therefore, the personal is the political. They argued that their personal racism experiences were indicative of systemic racism and climate racism. However, as mentioned above, none of the accused organisations acknowledged this in any meaningful way, let alone apologised for it.

Scholars of structural and systemic racism have long argued that personal racism experiences are co-constituted with historical, geopolitical, structural, and systemic racism. *Individual* racism experiences cannot and should not be seen as isolated events where a deviant racist individual expresses racism towards a black individual outside of a historical and political context. While the individual experiences of racism are important as an analytical focus, the racism that individuals experience is linked to broader anti-black and geopolitical racism that is historically embedded. Thus, individual racism is seen as just the tip of a large iceberg, where large amounts of (systemic) racism represent the remainder underwater. In keeping with the activists’ assertions, the point is that personal racism is indicative of deeper, societal-level racism. Systemic racism, in turn, is inherently linked with climate racism.

However, in Tonny and Vanessa’s case, the accused organisations’ responses focused predominantly on the individual-level racism accusation. Importantly, systemic racism was contingent on the activists *proving* that individual racism occurred. While there was support in public responses, many commentators and journalists undermined the racism allegations, especially Vanessa’s. The activists were accused of seeking attention, being overly sensitive, and being emotional. There were also instances of hateful trolling and infantilising. In addition, the accused organisations also put forward counterarguments, for example, that the exclusions were not deliberate and resulted from “mistakes”, lack of insight, and in Tonny’s case, unconscious racism. Not only did commentators actively undermine racism claims, but when *possible* racism is acknowledged, it is relegated to the individual and, insidiously, to the unconscious and intrapsychic.

Proving individual racism (especially that it is intentional by inherently racist people) is difficult enough, but proving systemic racism concerning climate change is even more difficult. To the sceptic or the accused organisations, how can excluding an activist from a picture equate to climate racism, where millions of marginalised people will die? Rightly or wrongly, the link between personal and systemic racism is constructed as contingent on one another. In other words, to prove systemic climate racism, you first have to prove individual racism. If the exclusion of a picture is not racist, then how can an individual organisation take responsibility at a systemic level?

In addition to racism being enacted by individuals (not systemic), racism is conceptualised as *deliberate* and enacted by certain types of (bad) people. For example, Tonny mentioned that she expected racism from shaven-headed German men (a reference to Neo-Nazis), not

Greenpeace Germany (a supposedly liberal organisation). Similarly, Greenpeace Germany, in denying racism, argued that they did not deliberately erase Tonny's photo with reference to the Associated Press erasure of Vanessa Nakate. Vanessa similarly went to great lengths to prove deliberate racism in the cropping out incident and that the Associated Press were inherently racist for erasing her from the photo. Much of the accusations, denials, undermining, and apologetics surrounding the incidents focused on proving *deliberate* overt racism by *bad* individuals with the *intention* to be racist. What this fails to acknowledge are the varied ways racism operates in society.

The activists sometimes reinforced the individual racist perpetrator and accuser discussion. In addition, the activists rarely challenged the *intersectionality* of race with youth, gender, class and geopolitical location. While there was evidence of agency to counterarguments as they happened, the activists drew on the very assumptions that they aimed to criticise. The struggle to link individuals with climate racism is the challenge of our time. To complicate matters, it is important to note that it is not only limited to white people who were racists to black activists. African media interviewers were particularly scathing toward Vanessa about evoking her African identity and whether her erasure was indeed because of racism or because, as one commentator mentioned, she was an unknown activist. Not only do we, as scholars, need to understand how racism operates to undermine efforts to link them, but it is incumbent on us to strengthen our arguments about systemic and climate activism to support activists' strategies.

The activists drew on various forms of blackness in their allegations and interactions. Black, for example, was a reference to race, African-ness, migration, and ethnic identity, depending on the interactional context. For example, Vanessa drew heavily on her geographical African-ness, which was conflated with blackness in many ways. Yet, she tried very hard to resist her ethnic ties (which African commentators tried very hard to prevent her from doing) because it further restricted what she could say. Tonny's identity was tied to her country's history (Germany) and had some reference to her ethnic migration history in Germany (she was born in Bangladesh) in her activism.

Interestingly, Tonny does not explicitly identify as black and instead refers to herself as "non-white", which is considered demeaning among many black people because white is the standard against which black is framed, which is problematic. Elsewhere she refers to herself as a woman of colour. Elise's blackness was fundamentally rooted in the English context and was located to disrupt liberalness and colour blindness. Thus, there were clear differences in how the three activists drew on their blackness, with little evidence of a common rooted blackness that cut across geographical contexts. This is perhaps understandable given that they were taking on individual acts of erasure in particular contexts and against particular organisations. There is a need to understand further how activists draw on blackness and how this could be leveraged in their activism.

While there is a need to understand how racism allegations reveal much about blackness, developing our thinking about whiteness in youth climate activism is equally important. Whiteness played a major role in the case studies, including how the strong, youth, female, white activist is constructed, how black and African activists are positioned as in need of saving, the privilege of drawing on unconscious racism to explain the "misunderstandings" of racism, the privilege of silence, and the rights and privileges ascribed to white activists in the global North, for example, to speak on behalf of black activists, to name a few. It is assumed that they have a right to speak about the world, have lessons to offer the less fortunate, and

can speak about Africans and blacks. This is why Fridays for Future could organise an event following Vanessa's erasure to focus on Africa to provide an opportunity to showcase Africa's climate change advocacy. I doubt very much that African activists would get away with hosting an event to offer white activists in the global North an opportunity to talk about their whiteness and prove their local worth before they can speak on a global stage.

All three activists received "apologies" of sorts. However, none of the apologies could be considered meaningful. They included silence, a correction for Elise (whereafter Elise wrote a piece on climate racism for *The Guardian*), a clumsy forced apology after public outcry for Vanessa, and an apology that blamed the digital erasure on unconscious racism for Tonny. For Vanessa and Tonny, the apologies mostly took the form of apologia, where organisations tried to "explain" what happened, put their best foot forward for impression management, and to manage fall-out. The apologies also focused on individual-level racism and not systemic or climate racism. The apologies put the onus on the activists to assist the organisations to do better. So, not only were the main allegations largely ignored, but the activists were required to do some of the repair work themselves by assisting white people in understanding their racism.

Apologies for climate change are likely to become important as we enter an era of reparations, legal action, and redress that centre on large-scale historical and contemporary injustices such as slavery, environmental injustices, and colonialism. If the case studies presented in this chapter are anything to go by, the link between climate change, racism, and apology is likely to be interesting and complex. Who will apologise for climate change? What exactly will they be apologising for? How will historical and contemporary racism be written into apologies? To what extent is apology tied to legal culpability? What would a meaningful apology look like? How will climate apology tie in with other forms of social injustices, for example, slavery? Much work needs to be done on apology, particularly from the perspective of those disproportionately affected by climate change.

We also learned several methodological lessons from the studies. The studies have drawn on multiple sources of publicly available online sources (for example, social media and web resources) and have used different analysis methods depending on the research question. Much of the analysis relied on the data having interactional elements to identify the interlocutory agency, subject positions, assumptions, interpretive repertoires, and discourse. The data was interactional for online video-recorded interviews with two or more people, and we could source, transcribe, and analyse the data in detail. However, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and the comments under YouTube videos were also surprisingly interactive. Interlocutors often engaged in intense debates in threads, drawing on various discourses and adopting positions in online interactions. Interestingly, often comments cross-referenced other platforms, people, and other debates related to racism, which offered rich data. In addition, the data are freely available, so we could continue our research during lockdown restrictions.

Influenced by critical and discursive methodologies, the aim was to reveal how racism manifests in online talk and interaction in accusations, denial and apology. While studying online interactions and activism has been illuminating, it is necessary to link with activists' "real-world" perceptions, experiences, attitudes, and opinions about racism in their climate work. To do so, we need to understand their digital *and* real-world subjectivities. The allegations, denials, apologies, and contestations took place on digital platforms. Not only were the exclusion acts *digital* in nature, but the delivery of the accusations, contestations about the accusations, denials, and apologies all took place in online spaces. At some point, scholars were preoccupied with the difference between real-world activism and digital activism.

Concepts such as “slacktivism” and “keyboard warriors” were relatively common to refer to those who were not real-world activists. However, these boundaries have blurred over time, and with COVID-related restrictions, the digital sphere gained prominence.

Importantly, digital and social media platforms allow space for people who cannot participate fully in democratic processes. Importantly, digital participation provides some degree of safety from the physical violence many black activists experience. Digital technologies and platforms also potentially offer services independent of the state and private sector, an important consideration for increasingly distrustful constituents. Social media also allow for movements to decentralise. Thus, digital “contexts of being” become critical in conceptualising black youth activism. We must be careful about how activism takes shape in real-world versus digital environments. The reality is that activism takes place in both. Much more work is needed to understand how youth activists construct race, racism, and systemic violence. Thus far, no studies to my knowledge have focused on black youth climate activists’ experiences of racism, exclusion, and their associated impacts, including mental health impacts.

More work must be done to develop platforms and structures to support black young women activists, particularly in the global South. While there are many platforms, networks, and climate justice spaces for activists to share their climate activism, few, if any, focus specifically on black young women youth activists. A focused black, young, women-led platform could serve as a support structure for activists, and a site to develop a black youth climate change aesthetic and positive representations. It could also serve as a site to share resources, networking, and provide opportunities for critical conscientisation on issues such as racism, sexism, and other forms of undermining they may face in their activism. Importantly, such platforms could help the development of a black identity that, as mentioned above, was missing in the case studies presented here. Platforms could also provide the space for scholar-activists, such as myself, to serve as allies in the fight against climate racism.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The three case studies presented here provided rich data about racism, gender, and youth, particularly when they call out racism against white liberal organisations. So, what have we learnt about the image exclusion of these three black youth activists? Findings from our published studies show that racism is challenging to prove and that although activists display some agency in their interactions, they are severely undermined based on their race, gender, and youth. Activists did not receive meaningful apologies, and on occasion the apologies also revealed racist assumptions. I have also highlighted the need for more work on racism among youth activists, theoretical work on whiteness in youth climate activism, and further conceptualising of apologies in youth climate change activism as well as the need to develop spaces for black youth women activists. There is much theoretical, methodological, and practical work to be done. I hope this chapter served to stimulate more research in the field.

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15. Enabling conditions and challenges of youth sexual and reproductive rights activism in Indonesia

Rinaldi Ridwan and Putri Widi Saraswati

The Republic of Indonesia is the largest archipelago and the fourth most populated country in the world. Its total population was estimated to reach 272.6 million in 2022 (BPS, 2022). It is also a very diverse nation with hundreds of ethnicities, languages, and religions. The belief systems among Indonesians include Abrahamic religions, Eastern religions, and various local indigenous beliefs. Among the religions that are officially acknowledged by the Indonesian government, Islam is the majority – accounting for approximately 80 per cent of the total population – followed by Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (*Khonghucu*). The World Bank upgraded Indonesia to the category of an upper-middle income country in 2020, but the country went back to the lower-middle income category in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, its good economic recovery post-pandemic may mean the country could be re-classified as upper-middle income in the near future.

Indonesia also has a huge proportion of young population aged 10–29 years. There are approximately 89.3 million members of this age group in Indonesia, or 32.75 per cent of the total population in 2021 (BPS, 2022). This enormous number of young people – both in absolute numbers and proportion of the population – has tremendous potential for the nation’s developmental journey, including through their involvement in the dynamic of social conflicts and many stories of the struggle to rights fulfilment. This chapter hence looks at how young people in Indonesia established, participated in, and led activism within the country – particularly in the space of sexual and reproductive rights.

In 1998, the Indonesian authoritarian political regime (often called the “New Order”) fell, after being in power for more than 32 years. The regime was led by Suharto, a military general who came into power in 1965 after a “soft” coup against the first President of the republic, Soekarno. The regime itself was characterized by its anti-communist stance, corruption and nepotism, limited civic space, lack of freedom of speech, censorship, state’s persecution of those who were seen as threats to the nation’s “stability”, and extrajudicial killing and kidnapping. Activism existed during the reign of the New Order, but it was understandably limited. Suharto’s resignation from the presidency in May 1998 was followed by bloody riots in several cities in Indonesia, mainly targeting Indonesians of Chinese descent. It was a traumatizing but also a defining moment in the political and democratic history of the country.

The fall of the New Order marked a “reformed” era in Indonesian history in which there are greater freedoms and civic spaces. Journalistic freedom was significantly expanded as a result of the censorship laws (and a special department within the government which implemented them) being revoked and abolished. The laws concerning the formation of political parties were significantly liberalized. Political elections became more open and direct. Since then, there has also been a massive onset of activism in many forms and for various issues – such

as in the fields of human rights, gender equality, health, environmental justice, artivism, and many more.

During the New Order, the issue of adolescents' sexuality was a controversial subject. Researchers trying to reveal, publish, or disseminate information about the issue would be faced with state-sponsored persecution and censorship. Fortunately, throughout the reformed era, the government has made a substantial effort to address the concerns and knowledge gaps around adolescents' sexuality and their sexual and reproductive health by gathering evidence and developing policies. However, the reformed era was also marked by the growth of a new competing socio-political force from a Middle Eastern fundamentalist Islamic movement, which prevented the government from passing an adolescents' reproductive health policy and resulted in policy inaction (Utomo and McDonald, 2009). The failure of the government to pass policy on adolescents' reproductive health was a missed opportunity to improve young people's health and wellbeing. However, the resulting status quo might have also provided Indonesian reproductive health advocates and the movement itself with some opportunity and time to reflect, regroup, redefine, and expand themselves to be more inclusive, as will be illustrated in the following sections of this chapter.

The issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights among Indonesian young people indeed encompasses a broad range of problems – such as, but not limited to, child marriage, teenage pregnancy, HIV infection, sexual violence, and the limited access to sexual and reproductive health services. For example, the Demographic and Health Survey 2017 showed that 10.5 per cent of Indonesian women have had their first marriage by the age of 15 (Statistics Indonesia (BPS), 2018). The prevalence of HIV in Indonesia is concentrated among "key populations", which classically include men who have sex with men (MSM), female sex workers, transgender women, and people who use drugs. However, the prevalence of HIV among Indonesian young MSM aged 15–24 is alarmingly high – nearly 100 times greater than the prevalence in the general population and seven times higher than the average estimates for young MSM across Asia and the Pacific Region (Johnston et al., 2021).

Parallel to this growing challenge, there has been significant development in the provision of nationwide scale data from the government in cooperation with development partners through the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) every five years. There is growing support for youth-led and youth-serving initiatives within the country, as well as growing activism by the young people themselves to advocate for greater attention and support for sexual and reproductive rights. For instance, activism for young LGBT rights, feminism, and digital rights has been observed (Ridwan and Wu, 2018; Parahita, 2019; Purwaningtyas, 2021).

This chapter combines some findings of studies and research conducted by the authors as well as their first-hand experience as activists in the space of young people's sexual and reproductive rights in Indonesia, dating as far back as 2008. Specifically, this chapter focuses on how Indonesian young people have been organizing themselves to address sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues and challenges. In the Indonesian law no. 40/2009 about youth (UU No. 40/2009 *tentang Kepemudaan*), members of this group are defined as any citizen aged between 16 and 30. In our context, "youth" and "young people" are not necessarily defined as separate terminologies; therefore, in this chapter we will use both phrases interchangeably.

METHODOLOGY

Both of the authors have conducted studies related to young people's SRHR in Indonesia. Rinaldi has carried out four studies between 2016 and 2021 on various interrelated topics, such as activism for young people's sexual rights, anti-child marriage activism, digital sexuality education and activism, and sexuality education activism during the COVID-19 pandemic. The last study was also part of a broader regional research project in Asia Pacific. In all the aforementioned studies, Rinaldi has used a qualitative approach, such as in-depth interviews, involving participants from various stakeholder groups, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donor organizations, academics, and young people themselves.

Putri has carried out a study with an intersectional lens on the policy to reduce maternal mortality in Indonesia, including how it addressed the needs of young people. Putri has also utilized a qualitative approach, combining policy document analysis and key informant interviews from various stakeholder groups, such as NGOs, religious leaders, international organizations, and activists.

Some of the relevant findings from our research will be presented in combination with our own first-hand experience, reflections, and observation to illustrate youth activism on SRHR in Indonesia.

YOUTH ACTIVISM IN INDONESIA: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Before we explore youth SRHR activism in Indonesia in depth, we investigate how youth activism in general has been exercised in the past. One notable milestone occurred during the pre-independence era when young people all over Indonesia gathered on 28 October 1928 to proclaim three main ideas: one motherland, one nation, and one language. These principles are now collectively called "the Youth Pledge", and it has become a significant base for Indonesia's principle of unity. It is important to note that during those times, the idea of having a united Indonesia as an independent nation was quite novel. The yet-to-be nation was a very big and diverse region, and still under the Dutch colonization prior to its declaration of independence in 1945. Hence, prior to the Youth Pledge, the idea of having one united nation was basically unthinkable.

Another milestone was that after independence, the youth movement, which was often associated with the student movement, particularly university students, became one of the formidable forces for nation building. A study by Maiwan (2015) described the student movement during the post-independence era (1945–1965). This post-independence era preceded the New Order and is often referred to as the "Old Order". During the early establishment of the New Order after the coup, the government built the myth of the "student-army partnership", where students were positioned as a moral force for the nation (Sastramidjaja, 2016).

The strong notion that the student movement was the heart of the youth movement found its culmination, for better or worse, when the authoritarian New Order considered it dangerous to the regime – resulting in a policy to crack down on the movement and establish "political stability". By 1978, the Ministry of Education released a policy called the "Normalization of Student's Life". This policy aimed to push the student movement away from politics by merging student organizations under the university's control. However, the student movement

did not die or lose its significance. After the fall of the New Order, the student movement was and is still widely regarded as one of the main forces driving the fall of authoritarianism.

The historical milestones described above represent the façade of youth activism in Indonesia that is documented most often, which is the student (particularly those in higher education or university) movement. There is still a dearth of research that highlights Indonesian young people's activism outside their identity as students. Even more so, the common themes advocated by the student movement in Indonesia are usually around general issues of political participation and government accountability – classically through campus-based student organization. SRHR-related issues are rarely included. Therefore, there is a necessity to bridge the gap in what is known and documented about what occurred outside the "classic" student movement but still within the context of Indonesian young people's activism, as being a student is just one type of youth identity.

A paper by Ridwan and Wu (2018) describes how young LGBT people built their movement and resisted the backlash after the 2016 public outrage toward the LGBT community in Indonesia. However, the paper focused specifically on LGBT movements and did not describe the dynamics of broader movements related to sexual and reproductive rights such as young people who work to tackle child marriage, HIV, sexual violence, and lack of access to sexual reproductive health services.

CURRENT STATE OF THE MOVEMENT: A NEW WAVE OF ACTIVISM ON SEXUALITY

While activism related to sexuality is considered as new, a study by Hull et al. (2004) captured how the government, along with (adult) activists, established a peer educator network and a centre for adolescents' reproductive health called PIKR (*Pusat Informasi dan Komunikasi Remaja*) or adolescents' centre for information and communication. The effort was part of the government's commitment to empower young people to make informed and healthy choices. It is currently an ongoing government programme. However, we would argue that government-run programmes – even when the establishment was supported by activists or civil society – typically still have the tendency to employ top-down approaches. This tendency makes it almost impossible for young people to take the lead meaningfully in all the processes, including the strategic planning and daily activities of the programme.

While the government runs the PIKR, there is evidence that the civil society has been running a similar programme with a stronger rights-based approach. NGOs with a health focus such as the Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association (IPPA), which has a nationwide network focusing on reproductive health through their youth centres, has been assisting PIKR in the form of technical assistance such as providing training for PIKR youth. Furthermore, in some provinces, some youth volunteers from various NGOs were recruited by the government as staff to run their programme through the PIKR. Aside from health-focused NGOs, feminist organizations have also played a vital role in providing training to young volunteers to learn more about sexuality. In these organizations, young people tend to focus more on activism and public campaigns for gender equality rather than on peer education.

During the 2000s, these two types of organization were the pioneers in training a new generation of sexual and reproductive rights activists in Indonesia. Sexuality and reproductive health have been the main entrance points for these activists to learn more about SRHR. Along

the way, some of them develop their own “specialization”, such as LGBT activism, HIV issues, doing consultancy for the government, or developing careers in United Nations (UN) agencies or international NGOs. Some, however, stay in their organizations and are involved in the high-level management. From this part of history, it can be seen that the 2000s was a prime time for the seed of the SRHR movement in Indonesia to be sown and grow even further after 2010. We will describe our observations and findings on the more recent developments in the following section.

Defining Sexual and Reproductive Rights Activism

Sexual and reproductive rights comprise multiple intersecting issues such as LGBT rights, sexuality education, safe abortion, contraception, sex- and gender-based violence, child marriage and other harmful practices, HIV, and many more. While activism around LGBT rights, sexuality education, access to contraception, HIV, violence against women, and child marriage has been evident in Indonesia since before the 2000s and the fall of the New Regime, there has been limited effort to bring these under one activism umbrella and present the movement from the lens of intersectionality.

The International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) 1994 in Cairo has paved the way for all these issues to be considered as legitimate international development issues. The conference brought governments to agree on the ICPD Program of Action to be implemented in their respective countries. The agreement itself was not legally binding, but it was a significant push for governments to work on the population issues that have been side-lined in the development agenda. The conference has also brought activists together to work under the umbrella of SRHR.

The concept of reproductive rights was accepted during the 1994 ICPD, but sexual rights are still not commonly acknowledged on a global scale. Reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents, and other international consensus documents. The ICPD Program of Action further elaborated the concept of specific rights, such as:

the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion, and violence, as expressed in human rights document (UNFPA, 1994a).

Sexual rights, on the other hand, are still not commonly acknowledged on a global scale. Many nations consider sexual rights as being closely related to homosexuality and LGBT rights. While the rights related to gender identity and sexual orientation are indeed important parts of sexual rights, the concept itself encompasses much more. Sexual rights cover a vast spectrum of human rights that are connected to an individual's complete autonomy regarding their body. The World Health Organization is still in the process of contributing to the discussion around sexual rights and temporarily describes it as certain human rights that are already recognized

in international and regional human rights documents and other consensus documents as well as in national laws (WHO, 2010). Rights critical to the realization of sexual health include:

- the rights to equality and non-discrimination;
- the right to be free from torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment;
- the right to privacy;
- the rights to the highest attainable standard of health (including sexual health) and social security;
- the right to marry and to have a family and enter marriage with the free and full consent of the intending spouses, and to equality in and at the dissolution of marriage;
- the right to decide the number and spacing of one's children;
- the rights to information, as well as education;
- the rights to freedom of opinion and expression; and
- the right to an effective remedy for violations of fundamental rights.

It is important to note, however, that while there were Indonesian delegates to the 1994 ICPD, the government at the time was under the New Order. In addition to its authoritarian tendency, the New Order was characterized by its agenda to “put women back in the kitchen” – a gendered agenda which has been dubbed as “motherism” (*ibuism*) politics – in which women’s roles are constrained and idealized as wife, mother, and the “pillar” of the family (Suryakusuma, 2011). This agenda also meant women’s political movements and roles were deliberately constrained. This tendency was reflected in Indonesia’s statement during the 1994 ICPD, which still underlined the definition of traditional family forms and saw reproductive rights as a population control issue for which a family-based approach was the answer (UNFPA, 1994b).

When SRHR is widely used by different stakeholders, it has the power to unify activists across issues to work together under one umbrella. Some examples in Indonesia were various alliances working together as an umbrella SRHR alliance. “Aliansi Satu Visi”, or One Vision Alliance, established in early 2010, encompasses different types of organization such as health service providers, LGBT counselling services, HIV organizations, youth advocacy organizations, and faith-based organizations. “Seperlima”, or One-Fifth, established around 2013, is an alliance that works to advocate for the inclusion of sexuality education. “Kitasama”, or we are the same, established around 2016, is an alliance of different types of organizations working to advocate for better SRHR policy for youth in Indonesia. In all these alliances, youth-led organizations have been involved and share power with adults and youth-serving organizations for decision making for advocacy, strategic planning, developing programmes, including the budget, and mainstreaming of young people’s SRHR needs and voices. Some of those youth-led organizations are Independent Youth Alliance (*Aliansi Remaja Independen*), Pamflet, Sanggar Swara (a young transwoman organization), and YIFOS (Youth Interfaith Forum on Sexuality).

The effort to unify all the different actors, even the ones who generally agree on SRHR principles, is obviously not without challenge. Certain issues such as young people’s sexuality, abortion, and LGBT can be contentious. However, the experience of Indonesia shows that it is not impossible to work under a common goal despite ideological differences. The next section will describe specifically how young people have been organizing themselves within the movement to amplify their issues.

Forms of SRHR Activism by Young People in Indonesia

Since the 2010s, we have been observing and experiencing first-hand the emergence of youth-led organizations as well as youth-serving organizations led by the youth themselves. Young people in these organizations have different opportunities to channel their activism through volunteering and/or working, which mainly define the difference between youth-led and youth-serving organizations. Volunteering and/or working at youth-led organizations and/or community centres usually entails advocacy and public campaigning. At youth-serving organizations, the activities usually focus on serving the community or individuals, such as in healthcare service delivery, HIV-related services, serving the LGBT community, or abortion counselling. Most of these organizations at some point joined an alliance related to SRHR, either formally or informally. This has enabled young people to grow and learn SRHR from diverse perspectives. Some of the activities and their strategies are described below.

Addressing the HIV epidemic among young key populations

HIV activism was initially developed before any SRHR alliances were formed in Indonesia. The epidemic was initially concentrated among people who inject drugs during the 1990s and early 2000s, but then shifted to the younger MSM population. To respond to this, some organizations have facilitated the formation of a youth division to reach out to young MSM. Around 2014, a national network of the young key population called *Fokus Muda* was formed. Some of the members of *Fokus Muda* later established a new organization with the same members, *Inti Muda*. Their activities involve reaching out and working directly with young members of the key populations – such as young MSM, sex workers, people who use drugs, women, and young people living with HIV (PLHIV) – to empower them by strengthening their capacity to serve their own community at the local level, providing funding support to conduct activity, raising awareness, and strengthening self-decision making. Advocacy and public campaigning are also part of their work.

Responding to violence against LGBT

The LGBT community in Indonesia faced significant public outrage in 2016. It began when some members of the public became aware that there were LGBT counselling activities available at public universities. This then grew into widespread public attention and culminated in harsh indignation toward LGBT people. However, after 2016 there has been wider awareness of LGBT issues in Indonesia. For example, the Indonesian society used to see transgender and gay people as separate groups. Nowadays the public increasingly use the acronym LGBT to cover all sexual diversity and to refer to non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people. A big part of this development is due to the continued existence and resistance of the community and organizations advocating for LGBT rights, contributing to wider discourse amongst the public.

Some national and local organizations have been trying to address the issue of violence against the LGBT community, taking steps like advocating against the criminalization of LGBT people by law and offering legal assistance to people who have been victimized. Additionally, in the wake of the 2016 outrage, the existence of student-based movements or organizations focusing on LGBT issues has been growing instead of dying out. Some of them work in giving peer support, especially to LGBT students and young people, in addition to advocacy and public campaign works. Many of them are also associated with feminist values. Another significant development is that while some LGBT organizations do not specifically

claim to be youth-led, the majority of their workforce, including senior management, consists of young people under the age of 30.

Empowering young transwomen

Transwomen have unique needs and cannot be seen as one homogeneous group along with lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Within the LGBT movement itself, transwomen tend to struggle more due to multiple layers of oppression and discrimination which exclude them from education and health access. Many transwomen do not have the opportunity to finish high school. Transwomen who can access university education are even rarer. To address this issue, SWARA, a youth-led transwoman organization, has developed a programme called “Trans School” to empower young transwomen since the early 2010s. The programme was designed like a beauty pageant. However, participants were equipped with training on various issues and skills in areas such as human rights, sexuality, and public speaking. Participants of Trans School came from many different areas of Indonesia.

One of the early participants in the Trans School, the late Alexa Dominich, has been one of the leading faces of the transgender movement in Indonesia. She was able to represent and advocate for the trans community’s interest to the government. She was also the first young transwoman to represent the community for the Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanism.

Throughout their activism observed since the early 2010s, the main agenda of young transwomen activists has been empowering their own community such as by advocating against eviction from landlords and advocating for ownership of national identity cards. There are many Indonesian transwomen who face difficulties obtaining identity cards despite it being a basic right – impacting their access to health care and the government’s social welfare programme. There are also collaborative efforts with health professionals to address the provision of hormonal transition more safely. There are currently no national or technical guidelines on how to provide hormonal therapy for the purpose of transition, although the needs are obviously there – often forcing transwomen to resort to potentially harmful options.

Changing the norm and legislation around child marriage

Efforts to address child marriages involving young people can be considered to be limited prior to 2014. Plan International, a youth-serving organization, established a community called Youth Coalition for Girls (YCG) in 2015. Since then, YCG has been active in raising awareness on the harmful impact of child marriage and is expanding its network nationally. Aside from YCG, there is a youth-led organization called Aliansi Remaja Independen (ARI). They initially worked mainly in SRHR. During 2016–2020, ARI also focused on tackling child marriage together with some national NGOs and donors in a five-year project using a comprehensive approach in three areas in Indonesia.

Young people have been working using various approaches to change the norm around child marriage through different programmes. As an illustration, a special graduation ceremony is held for any girls who complete high school, making their parents aware of the importance of their daughter’s high school graduation. Another approach is through the rejection of the local custom that enables child marriage – for example by working with indigenous leaders to intervene in any child marriage case and by mobilizing village authorities and influential community members to prevent the marriage from happening.

Aside from changing the norm in society, young people have also engaged in the judicial review of marriage laws during 2014–2016. The judicial review was initially rejected by the constitutional court. However, in a second effort, the judicial review was approved, which meant an increase in the minimum age for marriage from 16 to 19 for females. The involvement of young people in the success of the judicial review has been evident in all aspects, ranging from awareness raising to giving testimony in court and mobilising public support.

Provision of safe abortion counselling

Abortion is generally restricted in Indonesia. The current law only allows women to have an abortion to save their lives or in the case of incest, rape, or severe foetal anomalies. Furthermore, there are no specific technical guidelines on how to perform a safe abortion, and there are no designated service providers. Indonesian criminal codes still criminalize abortion. That means any health personnel who perform it, and even the women and those who support them, are at risk of criminalization and incarceration. With the advancement of information technology and the safety and feasibility of medical abortion, a group of young people established an organization focusing on providing safe abortion counselling through telemedicine. Almost 50 per cent of their clients are under 28, and 51 per cent are unmarried. The organization has brought their activism to a more advanced status by publishing research papers in some peer-reviewed and highly reputable international journals.

Digital activism to tackle sexual violence

The Indonesian House of Representatives enacted a measure outlawing sexual assault in the early months of 2022. Prior to the passing of the law, a set of advocacy efforts had been conducted for years. They include extensive digital activism by young people. Before the law was passed, young people organized themselves and formed a network of digital content makers to spread awareness on sexual violence, particularly against women. The network consists of individuals, communities, and organizations all over Indonesia with a digital presence. This network mainly works on three tasks: developing content around sexual violence; disseminating the content into their vast network; and fighting back against digital trolling in the internet space.

Provision of sexuality education at school and in the community

Sexuality education has been included at school and community levels for decades in Indonesia – although the extent and depth to which it is provided vary widely. Sexuality education is mostly provided and managed by youth-serving organizations affiliated with an international organization – such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation – because they have the technical expertise, funding to go to schools and the community, as well as trust from the local government. Young people mostly work under the youth division or youth centre within the organization and organize themselves whenever they go to school or the community. During the process, the adult staff within the organization will typically monitor their work to ensure its quality. This can create an interesting dynamic, depending on the organization's policy and practice. Even within the same organization – for example those who have multiple local chapters – relational dynamics between the adults and youth can vary from chapter to chapter. Some chapters may have a more equitable relationship than others, allowing their youth to take more control and influence how materials for their sexuality education programme are developed.

Advocacy to include sexuality education at national and local-level regulation

Since the beginning of 2010, young people have been vocal supporters of sex education. In 2011–2012, those who joined a youth-led group participated in public campaigns. The effort has been rolling out with the formation of Seperlima, an alliance which focuses on changing the national policy around sexuality education. In 2015, the alliance proposed a judicial review to the constitutional court to change the national educational system law. The advocacy was to integrate reproductive health education into some articles of the law. However, the judicial review was rejected. After the rejection, efforts to advocate for the regulation have been conducted at the provincial, regency, and city levels. In some areas where a sexuality education module and programme has been developed, the local governments have welcomed the initiative and provided funding for its rollout at the school level.

Adapting the activism during the COVID-19 pandemic

After the pandemic started, most activities for activism switched to working online. Some youth-led organizations were able to adapt to this new way of working and were knowledgeable about social media and digital conferencing tools. Outreach and public campaigns shifted to online platforms, including training and workshops for youth. Interestingly, marginalized youth such as those who have disabilities were gaining more access to online public events. Previously, they had often been excluded. During the pandemic, the online modality enabled them to attend meetings with the government, participate as speakers at public events, and gain more visibility.

Enablers of Youth Activism

One thing that is quite evident is that most young people involved in activism started their involvement as volunteers. The environment of the movement in Indonesia has undoubtedly provided them with the place to grow and be activists themselves. This section will discuss some enablers of youth activism in Indonesia.

There are some explanations for why Indonesian youth SRHR activism has emerged in the past years. One significant factor is the greater freedom and democracy following the fall of the New Order. However, it was certainly not the only factor.

Widespread use of the internet

Internet access provides a greater opportunity for young people to engage with activism. This is particularly significant for those living outside the capital city or those living with a disability. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people can access many advocacy opportunities, such as hearing sessions with the government and meeting with fellow activists across the country. However, this is not without pitfalls. Access to the internet remains an issue for those living outside Java, the main island, and those who had not developed a rapport prior to the pandemic might find it difficult to get an invitation to a government event.

Support from transnational organizations and transnational activism

With the globalized world, activism has also become transnational. During the ICPD 1994, activists from all over the world were able to organize themselves and push for a progressive rights-based agenda. By the 2000s, transnational activism had emerged. Most youth-led

and youth-serving organizations would have connections to regional and international organizations.

Inti Muda, for example, has a strong connection with Youth LEAD, a regional Asia Pacific young key population. They are provided with technical assistance, training, and connection with fellow activists across the region. Another example is IPPA, which is a member association of IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation). They receive regular assistance in terms of the governing board, programme delivery for their clinics targeting young people, strengthening sexuality education, as well as funding. ARI (Aliansi Remaja Independen) has a close relationship with CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, a Netherlands-based, youth-led organization, which has SRHR projects in Asian and African countries. The connection to international networks is particularly evident and significant for LGBT organizations. Through these connections, organizations can access funding support, legal aid, and help during times of persecution. For organizations that work on sexuality education, support in terms of technical expertise and knowledge to develop modules is significant, including help to increase their capacity to advocate for inclusion in the policy.

Foreign funding

International donors play significant roles in supporting youth activism around SRHR. Most SRHR issues are considered sensitive in the Indonesian context and, most of the time, the government will be hesitant to acknowledge it. Some issues also face legal barriers, such as in the case of abortion and access to contraception for minors. This means that domestic funding streams are limited. Foreign donors such as private foundations and governments of Western countries enable young people to operate on a regular basis, supporting them to work more strategically, and ensuring job security.

Growing acceptance toward young people's SRHR

Indonesian society was known to be tolerant of sexual diversity in the past. Some SRHR issues that are an “issue” today had been accepted for centuries. For example, the Bugis society in Sulawesi Island acknowledged gender diversity and has five genders, which include female, male, *calalai* (masculine female), *calabai* (feminine male), and *bissu* (an androgynous person who becomes a priest). The term “*waria*”, which stands for *wanita-pria* (literally, a man-woman) referring to a transgender woman, has existed for a long time and is a commonly known term in the society.

Aside from traditional history, there are some “forgotten” stakeholders who have long been allies in young people’s SRHR. For example, there was a group of teachers with progressive values who often delivered sexuality education for their students using the existing curriculum or their own approach. Frontline health care providers such as midwives had been one of the important allies in providing contraception and safe abortion for young people. There is also growing support from Islamic religious leaders. For example, KUPI (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*), or Indonesian female cleric congress, consists of female clerics with progressive interpretations of sexuality issues.

Challenges to Sustain Youth Activism

It is evident that youth activism has specific challenges. The challenges identified, coming within the movement itself and as external forces, are elaborated in this section.

Financing the movement

Foreign donors enable young activists to sustain and run their operation financially. However, that is not without challenges. Most foreign donors come from Western countries. This fact is often weaponized to accuse young SRHR activists of being the extension of the agenda to westernize and liberalize Indonesia. For example, in 2016 the Indonesian government singled out the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Indonesia office for its LGBT-specific programme, “Being LGBT in Asia”. The programme was supported by the USAID (US Agency for International Development) and caused a backlash. In response to this backlash, the UNDP stopped the programme immediately.

Fundamentalism and conservatism

There are two sides of the coin regarding the fall of the New Order. Democratisation enabled progressive civil society to extend the agenda, but it also enabled conservative and religious fundamentalism to compete for their agenda. Religious politics, especially Islam, was limited by the New Order. The fall of the regime enabled religious politics to grow and gain support, which was then also strengthened by the global rise of religious conservatism or right-wing tendencies.

In the early 2000s, the government of Indonesia was about to pass a policy around adolescent reproductive health. However, the effort was stalled due to opposition from religious groups. In general, conservative movements are getting stronger and they have started targeting SRHR by framing it as a morality issue. Another example is that during the 2016 outrage toward LGBT, conservative groups used this event as an opportunity to gain political support from the public. They have also started to politicize sexuality education.

For the past 20 years, activists were not able to get comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) on the public agenda and make it a familiar discourse amongst the public. Recently, the conservatives have brought CSE to public attention as part of their public discourse – and they are doing this quite quickly. This has both positive and negative consequences. The positive effect is that this has somehow led to the inclusion of the sexuality education issue in the conversation within the general public in Indonesia, with all the resulting dynamics. However, the issue has also been weaponized by the conservatives as part of the westernization/liberalization agenda. Additionally, we have observed the growing phenomenon of sexuality education or its initiatives being disseminated with a conservative bent, including by young people.

During the writing of this chapter, the policy maker in Indonesia were revising the criminal code. One of the contentious issues was criminalization of same-sex sexual activity. However, the criminalization effort was failed to be included. The growing conservatism in Indonesia is evident not only from outside the government, but also within it. It is a complex dynamic with dimensions of political bargaining among political parties, attracting voters during the election, as well as a push from the conservative group.

No unified strategy despite available resources

During the 2010s, there were a large number of sexuality education modules for schools. However, there was limited coordination and communication among organizations with similar programmes. Sometimes, a new module was developed without prior study or without consultation with more experienced organizations that had produced similar programmes in recent years. This has undermined efforts by activists who have previously developed these

programmes as well as confusing the government on who to speak to and trust in terms of expertise from civil society and youth activism.

Another example is the tension with the HIV sector, which tends to see HIV as a separate issue from SRHR. Many HIV organizations developed partnerships during the 2000s after the enactment of the Millennium Development Goals, which puts HIV as one of the main international development goals until 2015. A large amount of funding came in as a result of this. However, it has built exclusivity among HIV programmes and sidelined SRHR.

Limited high-quality research

There is a huge disconnect between academia and civil society in the area of SRHR. Youth organizations do sometimes receive a research grant. However, the performance of research implementation is generally poor. Researchers often have limited knowledge of the issues and limited access to high quality journals. There is a lack of mentorship and sometimes no support from more experienced researchers to carry out the study. There is also limited awareness on the importance of conducting ethical research by involving a research ethics committee. All these issues have resulted in irrelevant, low quality, less valid research – which sometimes only developed as a formality for donors before carrying out the programme.

High turnover rate

It is quite common for youth organizations and community groups to have their personnel come and go in a relatively short space of time. That can be considered part of the nature of youth activism. Sometimes people in the movement work completely voluntarily. Sometimes they get paid through a full-time and part-time arrangement. Hence, limited job security is prevalent.

Security and safety issues for activists

With growing fundamentalism and conservatism, activists are more prone to persecution. For example, young people working on safe abortions have been under police surveillance on a regular basis. They move from one place to another so that the police cannot track their activities. Those who campaign for LGBT rights have been under constant threat, enduring public persecution including online attacks, as well as having their personal information doxed by various actors.

Access to donors for youth-led and youth community

For newly established organizations and community groups, it is hard to gain donors' trust to support their activism and activity. Donors often require youth community groups or organizations to be legalized and have standard financial procedures and reporting in place. Sometimes, the organization needs to obtain recommendations from other well-established organizations so that the donor is persuaded to provide funding.

Ageism

Lastly, young people are often seen as too incompetent, inexperienced, and emotionally immature to handle and manage complex projects and programmes on SRHR. There is often tension within the organization which has young staff and volunteers, as well as between youth-led and youth-serving organizations led by adults. Adult-led organizations can still be trapped in a top-down approach, employing young people for their agenda. Tokenism also plays a part.

Some organizations that have a policy on a minimum percentage for youth on their board, for example, end up struggling to balance the power dynamics between young people and the adults on the board – leaving the young people sitting at the table but not necessarily being heard.

CONCLUSION

Youth SRHR activism in Indonesia has emerged in the past decades, fuelled by democratization, transnational activism, foreign donors, as well as the widespread use of the internet. Young people have gained more power to advocate for the issues and decide for themselves. More importantly, the face of youth activism is no longer solely dominated by university students but has become represented by young people with diverse identities. Furthermore, issues of SRHR have gained traction both from supporters as well as opponents. These opponents are in general against the personal freedom and bodily autonomy of young people. This chapter provides some recommendations for the activists as well as related stakeholders who have interest in building a more inclusive, democratic, and healthy Indonesia.

First, local fundraising is needed. Foreign funding on SRHR is shrinking and we cannot rely on western funding for a prolonged period. The risks are high, and it will take effort to convince the community of the importance of SRHR.

Finding a new source of funding such as from individual donors and the private sector is an opportunity that can be seized. Religious groups that have been able to fundraise huge amounts domestically should be looked to as models. Aside from that, looking at how some local governments are able to allocate funds in their budget for sexuality education, HIV, as well as tackling child marriage shows that the SRHR issue is gaining acceptance and therefore budget advocacy is possible in the long term. Funding from the private sector is another possibility. There is growing interest from the private sector to fund civil society under the scheme of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Some multinational companies are known to support causes such as LGBT rights in their country of origin. This is something that can be explored by youth activists in finding new sources of funding.

Second, to build connections between academia and civil society, donors should promote partnerships between these two sectors whenever they want to develop interventions. There are, of course, issues around research capacity for both sides, but a mutual partnership should be established to have stronger evidence whenever an intervention is carried out. The partnership should also not be limited to local Indonesian universities. In the more globalized world and international collaboration, a good research study should comprise a team with interdisciplinary backgrounds to provide high quality, applicable, and relevant findings not only to Indonesia but also to other settings.

Next, to guarantee the safety of youth activists, it is crucial to develop safety plans. The nature of SRHR work is unfortunately sensitive and prone to persecution and violence. A comprehensive plan, which includes digital safety, is needed. Building partnerships with digital rights organizations and stronger links to legal aid organizations is crucial to ensure safety as well as the mental wellbeing of youth SRHR activists.

To fight ageism, a social norm strategy is needed as well as policy change. Some organizations that serve young people, such as IPPA, have a policy dictating that a minimum 20 per cent of their governing board should be young people under the age of 25. Other organizations

have developed a youth board to advise them on matters related to young people. It is advisable for the adults in adult-led and non-youth-led organizations to reflect on their positionality and roles in terms of balancing the power dynamics.

Fifth, fundamentalism is on the rise as one of consequences of a more democratic environment. More research is needed to understand this group – such as how to identify them, how they operate, what their approach and key messages are, as well as how to resist them in the event of attacks on the youth SRHR activists.

Furthermore, SRHR issues are mostly considered to be sensitive and controversial. However, it is important to discuss the issues in terms of anti-violence prevention. For example, when we advocate for LGBT, we frame it as an anti-violence movement towards human beings regardless of who they are. Another alternative approach is through collective empathy towards fellow human beings, as the collective characteristic of Indonesian society may not give enough room for the approach of individual freedom to succeed.

Education remains a key catalyst in fostering youth activism. Some youth initiatives can survive with no funding or networks. However, they usually come from educated young people. While for marginalized young people access to education can be a challenge, having scholarships dedicated only to marginalized youth will be beneficial.

With the emergence of many alliances and donors who fund SRHR, it is crucial for all parties who share the same interest and vision to sit together and strategize in order for the programme to be effective. Donors who show patience and flexibility to youth organizations that have limited experience in managing grants would truly help to support the movement.

Lastly, it is important to develop activists' own strategic planning indicators on SRHR in Indonesia. These indicators should be revisited every three to five years to examine the status of all SRHR issues – including those that will not be documented officially by the government, such as safe abortions.

To sum up, youth leadership within SRHR issues in Indonesia is evident and strong. It offers solid proof that in Indonesia, young people are taking the lead and pushing for a better SRHR policy – including outside of the “student movement” image. Young people’s activism has shown resilience against oppression and marginalization, not only through perseverance but also through strategic approaches. It is crucial for all other stakeholders with similar views and visions who aim to support young people to address the challenges and listen respectfully to what young people want and need.

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16. An ideal activist in a privileged society: studying the internal negotiations and practices of being a young Danish activist

Maria Bruselius-Jensen

Conceptualisations of political participation are undergoing drastic changes, partly spurred by young people's changing patterns of participation; this calls for new understandings (Loncle et al., 2012; Marsh et al., 2007). Most studies either measure young people's political participation based on formal criteria, such as participation in elections, political parties and youth counsels (Walther et al., 2019), or they associate youth political participation with a "youth rebellion" (Lieberkind, 2021), hence searching for new "rebellious" forms of political action (Pitti, 2018). Both approaches have led to contemporary youth participation being found to be lacking, which has consequently produced a deficit discourse, defining young people as apathetic (Marsh et al., 2007; Marsh and Akram, 2015), alienated (Stoker, 2017), and decoupled from political systems (Bang, 2011). To counter this deficit discourse, recent research has demonstrated that young people are not disengaged (e.g., Loncle et al., 2012), but still participate in politics in both formal and more rebellious ways (Milkman, 2017), as well as in ways that are not visible through conventional lenses (Bessant et al., 2017; Pickard and Bessant, 2018b). As a part of this endeavour, researchers have argued that everyday micro actions and political agency should be seen as much more interwoven, introducing conceptualisations such as "everyday makers" (Bang and Eva, 1999) and "lived citizenship" (Lister, 2007a; Smith et al., 2005; Walsh et al., 2018; Wood, 2014). This turn towards highlighting everyday practices and negotiation as political allows us to see all the micro-social practices and negotiations as constitutive of young people's participation and of political change in both the young people themselves and society at large (Batsleer et al., 2017; Percy-Smith, 2015; Wood, 2014). These perspectives on the political within the micro-social realm have primarily been applied to nuance how performing citizenship (Kallio et al., 2020) is done through informal everyday activities. A few studies of youth activism have applied a micro perspective to nuance studies of what motivates activists (Ojala, 2012). For example, Nielsen's (2019) study of university student activists stresses that they not only work to affect traditional political arenas, but also develop an internal reflective perspective that produces discussions and reflections on marginalised voices, their own privileges, and hierarchical meeting structures. With a perspective on everyday interactions, it becomes interesting not only to study the major transformation in what societal changes youth activists aim to bring about, but likewise to look inside the youth organisations to study the ideals that guide how young people negotiate and practise what they perceive as the right way to be activists.

LENSES TO STUDY INTERNAL NEGOTIATIONS OF BEING GOOD ACTIVISTS

Contemporary Danish youth constitute an interesting case for studying the everyday negotiations of being a good activist. Young Danes are distinguished by having grown up in a welfare state with a strong tradition of deliberative democracy with a social democratic twist (Boje et al., 2017) and in a very prosperous economic decade. Although other youth groups in the Western world react to unemployment, housing shortages, and increasing intergeneration inequalities (Bessant et al., 2017; Grasso and Giugni, 2016), Nordic youth continue to have a high level of trust in authorities, support of and trust in formal democratic systems (Bruun and Lieberkind, 2012; Ekman and Amnå, 2012), and high hopes for the future (Lieberkind, 2020). Based on international data from the ICCS,¹ Lieberkind (2021) found that young Danes are among the most knowledgeable of democratic institutions, with a very high level of interest in politics and strong engagement in everyday democratic dialogues. However, they are less active in protests and other unconventional political activities. Ekman and Amnå (2012) explain this by defining Nordic youth as “stand-by citizens”, thus indicating that they have a general belief in having the agency to affect political issues but have not found a cause worthy of their engagement.

The current study engages with the young people who have found causes worthy enough to become activists, thus constituting an interesting case to study what drives activism among trustful youth who perceive themselves as having both agency and privilege.

When youth activism is studied or debated in public, the focus is invariably on change: what new issues are emerging? How have forms of participation changed? Or what has happened to young people as political participants? Very little interest is given to study dynamics that are reproduced and continue to dominate and support young people’s modes and motives for participation. Theocharis and van Deth (2018) warn youth researchers against always searching for change and instead encourage studies that pay attention both to the forms of participation and political agendas that are changed, as well as those that are reproduced. Following this line of thinking Andres and Wyn (2010) describe how a generation and their agency can be formed through “the experience they have in schools, their family relationships, workplaces, consumption and leisure” (p. 35). In the present study, the focus is on young people who have grown up in Denmark, an affluent Nordic welfare state with certain ideals, cultures, and structural conditions that define their political socialisation processes (Marczewska-Rytko, 2020). Thus, it is expected that their constructs and practices of how to be ideal activists are based on a certain political habitus (Flesher Fominaya, 2016), a set of norms and cultural beliefs that are not objects for subjective scrutiny and reflection but that guide what the young people believe to be the right way to act and interact as activists.

However, although these conditions form a shared generational orientation, young people also co-produce and make changes to these norms through their everyday interactions. As the analysis will demonstrate, there are a number of especially dominant norms and discourses that shape young people’s outlooks and practices. However, these are challenged, twisted, and interspersed by competing interests through the young activist’s interactions. Hence, this study is equally interested in how the normative ideals for being a young Danish activist are reproducing societal norms and how they are renegotiated and changed.

METHODOLOGY

Taking inspiration from the turn in youth research applying new approaches to study and conceptualise young people's activism, this chapter draws on approaches that aim to study how young people do politics in micro-social interactions and practices in their everyday lives. Here, the chapter puts the formal agendas of the young activists on the backseat and turns to study the more subtle agendas that appear in their internal negotiations of how to practise being a good activist, stressing that these micro interactions are also political and produce and carry more subtle agendas. Although much youth research seeks to challenge the deficit discourse on young people's political participation by searching for overlooked and emerging forms of engagement, this chapter uncovers the norms, cultures, and discourses that are reproduced and how they are challenged and redefined, thus changing subtle micro-social agendas. For this purpose, a cross-cutting abductive analysis of the whole empirical dataset has been performed, interchanging between literature studies and data analysis with a methodology inspired by hermeneutics (Gilje, 2017) and thematic analysis (Schreier, 2012). First, three key themes were identified as dominant in guiding the young people's perceptions of what it is to be a good activist. Second, these themes were studied to detect how they were practised and negotiated by the activists. Third, I examined how the key motivational themes were challenged and interspersed by other practices and motivations. These three themes are introduced in the analysis. Themes are identified as cross-cutting the agendas and forms of organisations. It is however commented upon in the analysis when the agenda or form of organisation has implications for thematical analysis presented.

Dataset and Methods

The chapter draws on rich qualitative material encompassing interviews with 85 young people engaged in 19 different organisations. The study was performed in 2019–2020 to examine young people's motivation to take part in voluntary work. The term "activist" is used as a broad definition of people who are organised to bring about change. The selected organisations are both large associations with a long history and small, new, youth-led organisations. Despite this difference, the term "organisation" is used as a collective designation. The organisations were chosen based on the following criteria: 1) type of organisation: both formal [14]² and informal [5] organisations; 2) history: both new [9] and long-established [10] organisations; and 3) diversity in agendas. Diversity was achieved by including organisations representing four categories of agendas: (a) altruistic, which aim to help and support certain social groups [4]; (b) ideological and religious, including youth political parties and student movements [5]; (c) youth groups in certain subject positions, including mental and physical disabilities, ethnicity, and sexual orientation [6]; and (d) external issues, including nature, climate, and local areas [5]. The aim of these selection criteria was to obtain broad diversity in agendas and forms of organisations to perform a cross-cutting analysis of the dominating norms and motivations represented across the group of very different young activists. Most organisations [15] were based in large cities and suburbs, and few [4] organisations were based in smaller cities.

In 14 organisations, group interviews were performed with two to six young people, lasting 80–180 minutes. In four organisations, only single interviews were performed, as no other participants were able to take part. Because of Covid restrictions, five interviews were performed virtually using the same interview guide. In the face-to-face interviews, collective

mapping was used (Bagnoli, 2012), using post-its for several questions in order to maintain points throughout the interview. In virtual interviews, the chat function was used instead of post-its. The interviews focused on motivation, experienced barriers, daily functions, and sense of belonging, including the following questions: why are they part of this organisation? How did they join? What role or position do they have? What experiences are critical? When is participation easy versus hard? How are accessibility and openness experienced? Group interviews – or collective dialogues (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011) – were used to establish a dialogue and shared understanding among the young people and to study how they negotiate meanings and aims for their participation.

With a few exceptions, the respondents can be characterised as “very engaged”, which is marked by the fact that they agreed to use more than an hour of their free time to meet up and talk with us. Being “very engaged” includes having been in the organisation for a long time; spending many hours on activism at the time of the interview, or having a central role in the organisation as chairperson, organiser of events, leader of the group, and so on. All were unpaid volunteers. We have not systematically collected information about the social background of the respondents, but because of the agendas of the organisations and details in the interviews, the respondents can be described as follows: 1) a majority of youth in secondary or higher education; 2) a large representation of minority youth because of either ethnicity, sexuality, or mental and physical disparities; 3) an equal gender distribution; and 4) spanning ages from 15 to 35, with the majority of respondents in their early or mid-twenties.

Interviews were performed according to present General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules for qualitative research regarding personally sensitive issues. The participants gave written consent with the possibility of withdrawing consent at any time before publishing. This was used by one respondent. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. All names and placenames are pseudonymised, and personal identifiable data have been omitted. Because of GDPR rules, the organisations are not named, including in quotes because the respondents from small organisations would be easily recognisable. Given the length of the article, the analysis is built around a few selected quotes. However, these have been selected to be representative of the whole material. The analysis is presented in three separate themes for the sake of clarity. They have, however, appeared entangled and overlapping in the young people’s renditions.

REDEEM YOUR PRIVILEGE FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

The first theme that appears in the young activists’ renditions of the guiding ideals of how to be a good activist is the moral notion that you should use your privilege to support others. The young activists often talked about themselves as particularly privileged because of being Danes, and this made them feel obliged to redeem that privilege by making a difference for other young people whom they considered in need of support or for worthy causes such as climate action, animal rights, or more local issues. A young man explained this as follows:

So the reason I joined was that I felt, in a way, you are so privileged when you are born in Denmark, and you have so many resources. Like, you really live a luxury life here. And then I feel, like sort of, you owe the world to give something back. So that was probably the reason why I joined.

Across the dataset, the young activists considered their affiliation to the different associations as access points to practise this obligation. Some activists talked about the satisfaction of doing voluntary projects in African countries, some used all their spare time to fight for climate change, and others fought prejudices about the housing area they lived in to give their siblings a better future. Although the motivational factor for activism among young people in other European countries is often described as experiences of precarity, generational inequality, and economic crisis (Bessant et al., 2017; Pitti, 2018), the young Danes still predominantly considered themselves privileged, as the young man explained in the quote. Based on a data set from the international ICCE study targeting all eighth-grade students, Lieberkind (2020) finds that this perception is broadly distributed among Danish youth; they have all grown up with a strong discourse defining them as lucky and privileged because they have been born Danish. Obviously, this discourse of privilege was reproduced by the young activists in this study. Lieberkind (2020) and Ekman and Amnå (2012) likewise identify this perception of privilege broadly present among Nordic young people, but while in their studies this privilege presents as the reason why young people do not feel the need to engage in politics and activism, it became the core motivation for engagement among the committed young people in the current study.

Most of the young people in the present study could objectively be considered vulnerable because of their ethnic minority status, their sexual orientation, mental and physical impairments, or simply because of being young and not having the same resources and positions as adults (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2009). However, despite this, they did not refer to their own life situations to explain their primary motivation but explained their motivation as a drive to help others or in support of matters that lie outside themselves, such as climate issues and animal rights. They did, however, refer to their own life biographies to explain their commitment: discussing experiences of poverty, having previously been challenged with mental illness, or having been exposed to injustices and public degradations because of their status as minorities. However, this was presented as something lying in the past, and they presently insist on their own position as being privileged and thus target their activism towards other young people. This indicates that the young Danes who became activists were the ones now in a position with sufficient resources, which would be in line with findings underlining the inequality in youth participation (Bruselius-Jensen and Nielsen, 2021; Marien et al., 2010). Drawing on Rose and colleagues (1992), this could also be viewed as the young people's response to a neoliberal "responsible" technique that leads them to believe that they are responsible not only for their own happiness (Walsh et al., 2018), but also for the happiness of others.

This discourse of privilege-driven activism not only defined how the young people explained their motivation, but also guided their internal negotiations of what a good volunteer should or should not be motivated by. In the quote below, a young activist commented on the fact that many young people are motivated to become volunteers because they want to strengthen their CVs. However, as he explained, this is not the right motivation:

I've been doing a lot of recruitment [of volunteers]. Talking to people who want to join [the association], and when you get them on the line, they just say, "I need to have some experience." Not that they want to help young people or even just want to join to build friendships and community. Because it's okay to join for that as well ... So it's not that you are a total asshole when you think like this, but really, I just feel that they could at least just try to pretend that they are actually interested in making a difference.

In the young activists' internal negotiations, it was not seen as a legitimate motivation to become a volunteer only to improve one's qualifications. It was necessary to want to make a difference. Although career considerations are known to be a core motivation among young Danes to volunteer (Bruselius-Jensen and Sørensen, 2017; Grubb and Henriksen, 2018), the participant above did not see this as being acceptable to say out loud.

The quote above also points to the fact that "true" commitment was also associated with sacrificing oneself and one's time to the cause. In the data, there is a rich representation of stories about young people who talked about sacrificing themselves for the cause. In the extreme, just being in it for fun and good times can even lead to exclusion:

We have also excluded people because they have only taken part because they were having a good time and fun and liked being part of the group. And that is just not good enough, 'cos then you're wasting other people's time. Not because, fair enough, waste your own time. I do not care. Just don't waste mine or anyone else's.

In this quote, a young man explained that you must show the right attitude to be accepted as a good activist or even to be permitted to take part. In his small organisation, the contribution and attitude of all volunteers were frequently evaluated, and one had to show the right attitude to continue to be a part of the group.

Although this discourse is very strong and not directly challenged among the respondents, it was apparent in several interviews that this moral sacrificial-like obligation cannot drive everyday engagement. The young activists needed to have some enjoyment and personal gains from their participation to continue their engagement. Throughout the transcripts, there are several indications of how the young people continually negotiate and balance how one can show and practise the right attitude and moral engagement, while at the same time maintaining a stimulus to continue: "After that 11-hour-long meeting, it is customary to have a party afterwards and have fun. So you have spent a whole day sitting and concentrating on the work, so then, it's super nice that you can get something at the end of it."

As in this example, sacrificing yourself for the cause was balanced out by having fun and enjoying the community atmosphere. Although formal personal development, such as having a good reference, was not accepted as a good motivation, being social, partying, and having fun were fully accepted as a form of motivation – but only when combined with working hard for the cause.

YOU MUST BE (ALL) INCLUSIVE

The second overarching theme that appeared across the interviews was a strong belief, almost a mantra, that everyone was welcome to become part of the organisation if their background, beliefs, and positions were consistent with the outward agenda of the organisation. One young activist explained the following: "No matter where you live or who you are, if you speak Danish or not, then you can join. Everyone is welcome and can probably be part of doing something really big. Everyone can join." Being inclusive was not an explicit agenda for the organisations, and it was not something that young people fought for tooth and nail. Rather, it seemed to be something taken for granted. It might also seem perfectly logical to want as many participants as possible to join their cause. However, in the current study, this declaration of inclusivity took the form of a moral imperative that could not be outwardly challenged. Based

on their study of the Nuit Debout movement, Pickard and Bessant (2018a) argue that there is a new turn towards young activists being driven by moral political emotions. In their study, the French youth were driven by righteous anger caused by increasing generational inequality and hope for change. As pointed out in the first theme, it was not moral political indignation that drove the young Danes. However, parallel to the French youth, the young Danes were likewise driven by a moral political quest for a more equal world with opportunities for all. They, unlike the Nuit Debout, saw themselves as the ones holding the resources – namely, the access to organisations with both social and economic resources, as a young activist in a student movement explained:

It has to be a place for everyone. From the most politically engaged to someone who doesn't know anything. Even though you are not good at politics, you still get to have access to this strong community. And then at some point, if you want to, you get to have influence and work for something that you want. And you have all this support.

The “access to all” agenda was not only seen as an open door to anyone. It was also seen as a way to share the resources that young activists believe they have. Thus, in line with the first theme, this theme was also mostly expressed as a matter of supporting other young people by sharing resources. The quote indicates that these young people had faith in their own agency and their possibilities to affect matters that were important to them, and they wanted to invite other young people to share that power, much in line with Lieberkind (2021).

In some cases, this agenda of being inclusive became even more important than the main agenda of the organisation. Even though the young people were united around an ideology or because they shared a certain identity or social position, they still insisted on being open to members not sharing that particular ideology or position. Thus, in light of the moral imperative of being inclusive, it became less important that newcomers would actually work for the same agenda; to be inclusive became the primary agenda. This indicates that the organisations balanced multiple purposes. Organisations working for minority rights could work to promote inclusivity and equal rights in general while working specifically to promote their own minority culture. High school student movements that also engaged in climate activism and the Christian Youth Church also worked for equal opportunities for female musicians and so on. However, it is interesting here that the discourse of inclusivity sometimes overwrote the main agenda of the movement because it could not be openly contradicted, even if it went against the main agenda.

However, this strong moral quest to be inclusive and share resources was challenged in the everyday practices of being an activist by the fact that what the young people defined as the most valuable personal outcome of being an activist was to become part of a special community. Throughout the study, the young activists stressed the importance of being part of a community where they could be recognised as who they are and where they would feel safe to share experiences, feelings, and goals with equal-minded young people. This safety came from the organisations being a specific group of young people who shared specific commonalities. A young activist in a climate-related organisation explained why it was so meaningful for her to be part of the community:

I know it sounds fluffy, but you don't feel alone, and the others feel the same. And you can talk about things that you normally don't. I have this feeling like, normally, you restrain yourself, but you don't

do that at all at the volunteer meetings. There are just so many good ideas, and people really have the same kind of thinking as I do. It really is a kind of release ...

From this perspective, taking part in the association was particularly valued as spaces for particular groups of young people who have distinct commonalities. Using the terms of Goffman (1959), the discourse of “outsiders are always welcome” was the young people’s frontstage presentation of the association’s standpoint. However, backstage, there were boundaries to who can participate, which were limited to those “belonging” to a specific social group, whether referring to social positions, ideological beliefs, political standpoints, or other categories. Thus, these backstage spaces showed that the organisations were not as inclusive as outwardly communicated. However, according to Forkby and Batsleer (2020), these spaces should not be seen as strictly exclusionary spaces, but rather as “protected zones of experimentation”, where the young people feel safe and protected and can experiment with new ways of being a community and in which they can find a new normal. With reference to Polletta (1999), Nielsen (2019) talked about these kinds of spaces as “prefigurative free spaces”, and in her work, young student activists used these internal protected spaces to experiment with how they could be better at practising openness and inclusivity. From this perspective, these more closed-off internal spaces could also be seen as spaces for micro-political work (Lister, 2007b) that could further enable the young activists to practise inclusivity and equity.

TO BE COLLABORATIVE (WITH ADULT PROFESSIONALS)

In the public discourse, young people’s activism was expected to be loud and disruptive and in opposition to older generations and the formal system (Pickard and Bessant, 2018b). This discourse was contested by this final theme demonstrating a strong orientation towards dialogue among the activists and how this was further stressed by a general willingness to engage in professionally facilitated activities.

Several of the larger organisations in the study had professional staff employed to organise activities and engage the young volunteers. This kind of organised activity was something that many of the young people seemed to just slip into and appreciate. Here, a young person explained how the professionals in the association where she volunteered offer a number of activities that the young people could choose to participate in:

A lot of what [the association] does is basically to find a lot of volunteers who want to do something cool. It is just organised around different issues. First, it is outdoor activities we can work with; then, it is about sharing knowledge on sex education; then, it’s another subject and then a fourth subject. It just helps people to do something exciting that gives them energy and that they think is fun.

This young person did not find it problematic or strange in any way that her engagement was facilitated by professionals. On the contrary, she found that facilitation enabled her to use her commitment where it made the most sense: here by being able to reach out and help other young people in difficult circumstances. Very similar attitudes and modes of engagement were present in several of the other associations, demonstrating a very pragmatic approach toward activism by which it was rather practical to have professionals carve the way for their involvement. This also highlights that their activism was not driven by opposition to the older generations as such and that a trust in dialogue as a way to make political changes was present.

This finding is supported by what Lieberkind (2021) describes as a general trust in the formal political systems and in deliberate democracy among Danish youth.

This general trust in formal systems and in dialogue as a way to make political changes can also be explained by what Trondman (Sørensen et al., 2013) defines as a “new generational grammar” that has emerged from changes in intragenerational relations. As also established in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, this grammar increasingly positions young people as individuals with both the competencies and rights to be consulted on matters that concern them (Tisdall, 2017). This new discourse has been widely accepted and implemented in the Danish context, not only in young people’s intimate social relations, but also in their institutional and civic lives (Kjellander et al., 2016). Here, young people’s participation has been cemented and increasingly practised (Bruselius-Jensen and Nielsen, 2020) in projects, procedures, and formal systems, changing the general discourse on young people’s agency and citizenship. Although recognising that these new citizen positions are distributed unequally in different groups of young people (Bruselius-Jensen et al., 2021; Marien et al., 2010), they still constitute a general change in the political socialisation of young Danes, thus affecting their agency. Furthermore, the participants explained both the young activists’ willingness to collaborate and their expectations of being taken seriously and treated as equally competent participants. This was exactly what made a big difference to one young activist:

It was the first time that adults saw me completely at eye level, and I felt grown up, even though I was 15 when I started coming here. But it really made me feel completely recognised and not somebody’s anything, just completely myself. This has been a very big experience for me.

This quote stresses that the young person had grown up with the expectation to be met as a competent participant but had not felt that this expectation was met before she became an activist and experienced equal collaboration based on recognition (Thomas et al., 2016). The literature is rich in findings that problematise adults’ interventions to promote and facilitate young people’s participation (McMahon et al., 2018; Walther, 2012), often critiquing how it ends up being adults who define the aims and contents of young people’s participation. However, the young people in the current study did not seem to find adult facilitation troublesome. Rather, they seemed to use the help of adults to ease their way to practise their activism. This did not make them pitiful or powerless in the eyes of other youth. It was simply viewed as practical. Likewise, this was stressed by one of the young people engaged in a smaller organisation without paid professionals:

I have also been active in [a large environmental association], and that was super easy because someone just arranges a weekly meeting that you can show up for, so you always know where and when to go and so on. There will be, like, almost all tasks that are assigned to you. Where here, in [her association], you need to really show commitment and have an aim and a direction. So, it requires a little more people. But on the other hand, you can do basically whatever you want when you get when you are in.

So even though this young person was now enjoying the freedom and agility of being part of a smaller youth-led organisation, she did not critique the professionally led forms of activism, instead recognising the support they can provide. The reproduction of this generational collaborative and dialogical orientation could be seen in light of what post-Marxist scholars (e.g., Mouffe, 2005) have argued is just an element of the “post political”, where critique is reduced

to technocratic problems and participation is a tokenistic way to legitimise the status quo. In this light, facilitated activism could be argued as reproducing the status quo by not challenging intergenerational power structures. However, it is important to recognise the young people's pragmatic approach as a productive way for them to work for their proclaimed political aims and that they still subtly work towards more equal intergenerational relations.

However, although it seemed completely acceptable for young Danish activists to collaborate and even have their activism facilitated by adult professionals, the limits for adults' roles in youth activism were also clearly demarcated. In the second quote in this section, the young person stressed that what made an impact for her was to be met "at eye level" and that she was not "somebody's anything". Thereby, she clearly defined the limit for adult collaboration. The young people had to be treated as equals and with a recognition of their rights, competencies, and interests. If these conditions were not met, collaboration would not be possible. This was clearly voiced by an activist in one of the smaller youth-led movements: "Men in their 40s. They have this kind of technocratic, knowing-it-all, listen-to-me kind of wive. We don't want that! No one is better or superior to anyone. This just completely ruins the atmosphere. Exhausting. They have to go somewhere else."

As this theme indicates, generations or groups can also be disqualified if they do not engage in what is defined as the right way – namely respectful, inclusive, and without claims of a special position. Thus, adults, as a generation, were seldom seen as the "enemy", problem, or opponents. Rather, they were seen as possible enablers and supporters, and as long as they stayed in that role, it was perfectly acceptable to be an activist in an adult-facilitated context. However, if they acted disrespectfully or claimed power positions, they ruined the atmosphere. In this case, "men in their 40s" can be passionate activists willing to fight for the cause, but to be legitimate members, they had to be activists in the right way. These findings are largely supported by the study of Liou and Literat (2020) stressing that youths are very well aware of intergenerational dynamics around youth activism. Therefore, as in this study, openness to collaboration was conditional on reciprocal recognition, respect, and equality. However, when that was met, adult professional support and facilitation was welcomed.

CONTINUITY, NEGOTIATIONS, AND NEW AGENDAS – CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has studied how a wide-ranging sampling of young Danish activists made meaning, negotiated, and practised what it ideally means to be good activists internally in their respective organisations. With inspiration from everyday micro sociology (Kallio et al., 2020; Lister, 2007b), the chapter underlines that being – or maybe rather becoming – an activist is an ongoing process of internal negotiation through which young people negotiate and learn how to "do activism in the right way". Although the spotlight on activism is first and foremost on the outward political agendas, the current study demonstrates that behind the scenes, a number of more subtle, but newer, less-strong, and cross-cutting dynamics seem to be guiding young Danes' internal practices and negotiations of being activists in the right direction. These dynamics have been strongly conditioned by having grown up in a time with supportive and affluent civic and structural conditions, thus mirroring the political socialisation processes (Marczewska-Rytko, 2020) of young Danes. Thereby, the current study underlines Woodmann and Wyn's (2014) and Theocharis and van Deth's (2018) call for youth research

not always to look for new trends, but also to study continuity and reproductions of existing norms and trends. In this perspective, studying how young people perform being activists is also an exploration of how young people collectively reproduce the norms and discourses that have dominated their political socialisation and, thus, shape how they see themselves as political agents. This became especially apparent by the fact that the delivered discourse of having a special privilege as Danes (Lieberkind, 2021) seemed deeply embedded with the activists. Internally, this belief can be translated into a kind of collectively agreed admission request: to be a legal member, one had to want to redeem their privilege by working to make changes for someone or something outside themself. This included not being (openly) motivated by the fact that volunteering leads to career opportunities. If the individual was so motivated, they either had to learn or might be excluded. The political socialisation of Danes is also conducive to the intergenerational collaboration of activists. Carried by a new intergenerational grammar (Sørensen et al., 2013), the young activists were generally not driven by an intergenerational battle, but on the contrary, they were even open to having their activism facilitated by adults. Internally, they negotiated this collaboration as a pragmatic way to have support to work toward their political aims and a general trust in the deliberate political dialogue as a way to make change. Thus, the findings underline that youth activism is not only about rebellion, resistance, and new ways of doing politics, but also a continuation of the existing political traditions and norms. Possibly, these dynamics take an especially non-conflicting turn among young people in Nordic countries. First, the economic crisis and subsequent austerity have not had the same impact in the Nordic countries as in other countries. Second, the deliberative tradition and change in the intergenerational grammar have been especially strong and have cemented an anticipation of intergenerational dialogue, equity, and mutual respect. However, despite possibly being an extreme case, the current study still underlines that it is also informative to the study of youth activism to search for continuity.

Although the current study demonstrates how young people's political agency has strong elements of continuity, it also shows that the internal negotiations are interspersed by conflicting interests and orientations that are both conserving and changing the ideas of how to be an activist. First, the present study shows how the young people internally supported each other to live up to their own ambitions. Although their feelings of privilege propelled them to sacrifice their time and resources for the sake of others, the activists widely reassured each other of the necessity of having time for fun and enjoying the community. Likewise, the cross-cutting moral political aim of being inclusive to grant other young people access to resourceful organisations was inwardly supported through a collaborative process of building strong protected spaces, where the young activists could support and co-learn how to practise being inclusive. Finally, the young people also supported each other in defining the limits for collaboration with adults. As also stressed in the work of Liou and Literat (2020), the young people only engaged in adult collaboration if it was based on reciprocal recognition, respect, and equality; if these conditions were not met, the activists collaborated on re-educating the adults, disengaging from adult facilitation, or even expelling adults from youth-led organisations.

Although the continuity and reproduction of existing norms for political agency, as well as young people's collaboration to meet these norms, have played a central role in the current study, it is also a demonstration of young activist labour to bring about change. First, while walking old pathways, the young people were highly dedicated to the work of including and supporting groups and issues that they discerned as excluded or neglected, thereby continuing the work of what Rancière (2010) defines as demonstrating a wronging of "the part with no

part". Second, although they seem hegemonic believers of having a privileged position, they continually worked for increasing intergenerational equity by refusing to collaborate if the relation was not reciprocally respectful, appreciative, and equal. Finally, by being pragmatic, collaborative, and dialogue oriented, they also carved a new way to be youth activists that was not loud, rebellious, and conflicting.

NOTES

1. International Civic and Citizenship Education Study.
2. Demark has a strong tradition of forming formal associations. Thus, the high number.

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PART V

EFFECTS OF YOUTH ACTIVISM ON YOUTH

17. Reframing school engagement: relationships to school among youth organizing participants working for educational justice

Sara McAlister

Xochitl¹ is a member of a Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, a youth organizing group working for educational justice in Chicago, a city with deep histories of educational disinvestment and racial and economic segregation of schools. Like the thousands of mostly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) young people who are part of more than 300 youth organizing groups in at least 36 states (Valladares et al., 2020), Xochitl works to build collective youth power to hold the institutions that shape her life accountable for meeting her needs. Like most of those young people across the country, she devotes most of her organizing efforts to transforming public schools. Reflecting on how her organizing work has informed her view of school, Xochitl says, “When I’m in the school building, I prioritize learning. This is a learning space. But I also prioritize being someone who can speak up and do things in terms of the school environment, too.”

When young people commit themselves to critically analyzing the quality, resources, and policies of their schools and demanding changes, what does that mean for their experiences of school? How do the skills and dispositions they develop as organizers inform their relationship to school and their sense of themselves as students? This chapter draws on qualitative data collected with young people from five BIPOC-led youth organizing groups working for educational justice to examine how young people articulate the influence of youth organizing experiences on their school engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth Organizing

Youth organizing engages young people in a formal process to collectively identify and analyze issues impacting youth, propose solutions, and use public action to advocate for solutions (Braxton et al., 2013). Youth organizing draws from community organizing, which attempts to catalyze social and political change by developing unified visions and collective strategies with marginalized groups and communities (Conner, 2011), and from positive youth development, which rejects a deficit model of youth development and focuses on the developmental supports and contexts that youth need to thrive (Lerner et al., 2005). Youth organizing groups approach community problems through a critical analysis of race, class, and other systems of oppression and engage youth in formal and informal political education (Braxton et al., 2013; Mediratta et al., 2009; Watts and Guessous, 2006). While youth from all backgrounds are engaged in organizing, many groups locate their roots in civil rights and other

movements led by people of color (Kirshner and Ginwright, 2012). In a 2020 survey of 312 youth organizing groups in 36 states, Latinx and Black youth were significantly represented in the leadership of 75 percent and 70 percent of groups, respectively. Immigrant and refugee youth and LGBTQ youth were significantly represented among the leadership of more than half of participating groups (Valladares et al., 2020).

BIPOC young people have less access to engaging school contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Fredricks et al., 2004). They are more likely to attend under-resourced schools with limited access to intellectually rigorous curriculum, enrichment and extracurricular activities, and counseling supports; their schools are often compliance-focused and highly policed, with high rates of exclusionary discipline (Losen and Martinez, 2020; Zirkel et al., 2011). Further, school curricula and norms often devalue the cultures, community resources, and lived experiences of BIPOC youth (Gay, 2018) and stereotype them as less academically capable or motivated (McGrady and Reynolds, 2013).

Given the centrality of school in shaping the daily lives and life trajectories of young people, education justice is the primary issue focus for the majority of youth organizing groups in the US. BIPOC and other marginalized young people organize to demand access to well-resourced, inclusive, and engaging schools. In the last decade, groups have won important local and state-level victories on inclusive and culturally responsive curriculum, college access supports, reducing the use of suspensions and punitive discipline, and removing police from schools (Valladares et al., 2020).

Youth Organizing and School Engagement

Research suggests that participation in youth organizing strengthens young people's academic engagement, aspirations, and achievement. Conner and Slattery (2014) found statistically significant increases in GPA associated with youth organizing participation among students in neighborhood high schools in Philadelphia. Rogers and Terriquez (2013) found higher rates of four-year degree attainment among 410 alumni of California youth organizing groups than among a demographically similar sample and a more affluent sample of student government alumni. Youth organizing participants and alumni report increased academic engagement, better grades, and higher educational aspirations after joining an organizing group (Mediratta et al., 2009; Shah, 2011).

In qualitative studies, youth organizing participants and alumni report that their sharpened critical analysis of educational inequalities helps them contextualize and externalize academic struggles and build a stronger sense of agency as students (Mediratta et al., 2009; Taines, 2012) and connect their organizing experiences to a commitment to higher education and to specific decisions about pursuing social justice-oriented college majors and career goals (Conner, 2011). Young people also report that youth organizing supports them in building specific academic and analytic skills, such as conducting research and speaking publicly, which transfer to the school setting (Conner and Slattery, 2014; Nicholas et al., 2019; Pérez and McAlister, 2021).

Youth Organizing and Critical Consciousness

Evidence for positive impacts on school engagement and achievement among youth organizing participants is consistent with research on critical consciousness (CC) and developmental

outcomes. Originally conceptualized by Freire (1973), CC describes “how oppressed or marginalized people learn to critically analyze their social conditions and act to change them” (Watts et al., 2011, p. 44). In most formulations, CC consists of three dimensions: critical reflection, or a critical analysis of perceived social inequalities and the endorsement of egalitarianism; critical motivation, or the skills and commitment to produce sociopolitical change; and critical action, or taking individual or collective action to change perceived social inequalities (Diemer et al., 2015).

Critical consciousness is theorized as an “antidote to oppression” (Watts et al., 1999) for BIPOC youth that makes visible the systemic forces that constrain opportunity and fosters a sense of agency to challenge inequality. Substantial empirical evidence confirms that CC supports school engagement, aspirations, and later achievement among youth who are marginalized based on race and/or class (Chavous et al., 2003; Christens and Petersen, 2012; Diemer, 2009; Diemer et al., 2016; Luginbuhl et al., 2016) and that curricular and community-based interventions to strengthen CC increase school engagement and achievement (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee and Penner, 2016; Kornbluh et al., 2015; Seider et al., 2020; Watts and Guessous, 2006).

A central goal of youth organizing is fostering CC among young people, and, indeed, research has documented high rates of critical reflection, motivation, and action among participants and alumni. Youth organizing supports young people in analyzing inequities, recognizing their power to challenge and address inequities on their own and their communities’ behalf, and developing positive racial, cultural, and civic identities (Christens and Dolan, 2011; Conner, 2011; Rogers and Freelon, 2012; Shah, 2011).

While scholarship has largely focused on the development and role of critical reflection, the critical action component of CC is strongly associated with developmental outcomes (Diemer et al., 2021). Engagement in critical action during high school has been associated with higher grade point averages for Black and Latinx youth (Seider et al., 2020) and higher career expectancies in adolescence and subsequent occupational attainment in young adulthood among working-class Black youth (Rapa et al., 2018). Critical action may foster a sense of empowerment among marginalized young people, which in turn facilitates positive developmental outcomes (Christens and Peterson, 2012; Diemer et al., 2021).

Youth organizing provides an opportunity structure for engaging in critical action, by engaging young people in authentic civic tasks including discussing social and political issues with peers, constructing agendas, developing action plans, contacting the media, negotiating with decision-makers, and engaging in protest and public action (Christens and Dolan, 2011; Kirshner, 2009; Mediratta et al., 2009; Rogers and Freelon, 2012; Shah, 2011). Youth organizing alumni report high rates of civic engagement both during their participation and as young adults (Rogers and Terriquez, 2013; Terriquez, 2014).

Youth Organizing and Social-Emotional Skills

Youth organizing also provides a rich context for the development of social-emotional skills that are linked to school achievement and thriving in adulthood (Farrington et al., 2012). Youth organizing participants engage in work that has authentic personal value; they work in collaboration and mutual accountability with peers and adults, make decisions, and exercise agency (Christens and Dolan, 2011; Kirshner, 2009) – all approaches that have been empirically linked to growth in social-emotional competencies (Durlak and Weissberg, 2007;

Nagaoka et al., 2015). Qualitative and mixed-methods research documented stronger social skills, constructive relationships, positive identities, and high rates of individual and collective self-efficacy among youth organizing participants (Ginwright, 2010; Kirshner and Ginwright, 2012; Larson and Hansen, 2005; Lewis-Charp et al., 2003; Shah, 2011). Notably, Flores (2020) found that youth organizing participants experienced growth in social emotional skills comparable to and sometimes exceeding the growth of demographically similar youth in traditional youth development settings. In particular, collective decision-making and consensus and campaign work requiring outreach to community members strengthen interpersonal and collaborative skills (Conner, 2014; Pérez and McAlister, 2021).

CHAPTER AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The literature reviewed above elucidates likely mechanisms for how participating in youth organizing might support school engagement and academic achievement. To date, most qualitative research on youth organizing and school engagement has focused on how college-age and young adult alumni make sense of the role of organizing in their academic and career trajectories (Conner, 2011; Nicholas et al., 2019; Rogers and Terriquez, 2013). Aside from Conner and Slattery (2014) and Taines (2012), there has been limited research contemporaneously examining how and whether young people engaged in organizing transfer skills and competencies developed in that context to the academic context and on how organizing experiences prompt young people to engage differently in school. Taines (2012) found youth organizing participants connected the critical reflection skills built through organizing to changes in school engagement but had limited opportunities for engaging in critical action.

This chapter aims to build on this scholarship by examining youth organizers' contemporaneous understandings of the relationship between their organizing experiences and their engagement in high school. Specifically, this chapter examines how experiences with education justice organizing, where young people take action to challenge educational injustice and inequality, informs young people's identities as students and their relationships to school.

Methods

This chapter draws on qualitative data collected as part of a larger mixed-methods study on critical consciousness and social emotional skills in youth organizing participants. Between 2017 and 2021, the research team worked with six established youth organizing groups to collect a longitudinal survey, interview and focus group, and observation data on organizing participation, social emotional skills, critical consciousness, and school engagement.

The research team employed semi-structured interview and focus group protocols. Topics included entry into organizing; the extent and depth of participation, including in critical action; reflections about their own social-emotional skill development; critical analysis of issues facing their communities; experiences in school; and reflections about ways in which their school engagement has shifted since they began organizing. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed and then coded using Dedoose qualitative software. Coding balanced deductive and inductive approaches and employed the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002). Our initial codebook reflected our understanding of the extant literature on youth organizing, critical consciousness, social emotional skills, and school engagement. As new themes arose

from our analysis of qualitative data, we revised and expanded our coding scheme and revisited the literature. We revised our interview and focus group protocols after each round of data collection to include new prompts related to emerging themes and to ensure that each round of data collection built on the earlier rounds (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 1990). Findings that are supported by evidence from more than one organization are included here; direct quotes are representative of experiences described and reflections shared by multiple participants. Pseudonyms are used throughout, and some identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Sample

Table 17.1 Group membership and participant demographics

Brighton Park Neighborhood Council	24	Latinx/o/a/e	44
Make the Road New Jersey	19	Black/African-American	14
Philadelphia Student Union	11	Multiracial	5
Communities United	8	White	2
Make the Road New York	6	Asian/Pacific Islander	1
Female	50	Did not disclose	2
Male	13	Mean age at study entry	17
Non-binary	4	Mean tenure with group at study entry	1.3 yrs
Did not disclose	1		

Note: Sample Demographics (N=68).

Our partner organizations are all established youth organizing groups in major cities: Make the Road New York (MRNY); Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ); Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC, Chicago); Communities United (CU, Chicago); Philadelphia Student Union (PSU); and Communities for a Better Environment (CBE, Los Angeles). All have a membership and leadership structure, paid youth organizing staff, and a track record of successful organizing campaigns. Aside from CBE, which organizes around environmental justice, all organizations had multiple active educational justice campaigns during the study period. (Because they did not focus on education, we have excluded CBE members from this analysis.)

For this analysis, our sample includes 68 young people who participated in between one and three interviews and/or focus groups as group members during high school or immediately following graduation. See Table 17.1 for group membership and participant demographics. Participants' demographics are reflective of each group's overall membership.

Participants were recruited by research team members in person during regular organizing meetings and summer political education workshops. Participation was open to all members older than 14 who had attended at least two meetings and intended at the time of recruitment to continue participating in their organizing group for at least the current school year. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in-person prior to March 2020 and via Zoom or telephone thereafter. Young people who consented to participate in qualitative data collection had somewhat more organizing experience at the time of recruitment than our larger sample. Like most youth organizing groups, our partner organizations have memberships with a broad range of academic backgrounds and make a concerted effort to recruit members who have struggled in school. Our sample includes young people with a range of relationships to school at the time

they joined their organizing group, from indifference and struggle to high levels of academic and extracurricular engagement.

Youth Organizing Context

The five organizations employ substantially similar organizing models. Each recruits young people in a neighborhood region and/or through schools in a particular area of a large city (MRNJ operates citywide but most members attend one of two schools). Young people meet at the organizations' offices at least weekly to build community, discuss issues, participate in political education, and plan campaigns. PSU and BPNC also support school-based clubs that meet before or after school or at lunch and organize school-based campaigns. Members of school clubs often typically participate in regular cross-school or cross-neighborhood meetings at the organizations' offices, though this is not a requirement.

All prioritize recruiting youth organizing alumni to work as paid staff, and most send their staff to training through the School of Unity and Liberation. Meeting norms foster an affirming, supportive space in which young people are comfortable sharing their experiences and opinions, asking questions, and practicing active listening, empathy, and productive disagreement. Young people make decisions about campaign goals, tactics, and strategy through consensus-based models, with staff support. Staff regularly invite newer members to take on new roles including facilitating meetings, leading chants at protests, public speaking, conducting outreach, writing op-eds, and giving media interviews. Among the 68 young people in our sample, 45 percent reported that they played a role in leading the organization, 63 percent helped with outreach to other young people, 69 percent participated in decision-making around campaign goals and strategy; and 89 percent regularly attended big meetings and actions. They also reported regularly engaging in critical action: 71 percent reported signing petitions, 74 percent reported participating in protests or demonstrations, and 48 percent reported contacting an elected official by phone or email every few months or more often.

During the study period, each organization led and supported education justice campaigns as well as campaigns on non-education issues affecting young people:

- BPNC organized to limit police presence in schools, against school closures, and against the repurposing of a closed elementary school as a police academy;
- CU organized to increase mental health resources and supports in schools and to limit police presence in schools;
- MRNJ organized to establish a youth-led Student Success Center to provide college counseling and financial aid help and trained College Ambassadors to staff the center, and led a campaign to include youth workers in statewide \$15 minimum wage legislation;
- MRNY organized to limit the use of suspensions, limit the presence of police in schools, and increase school funding;
- PSU organized to return the school district to local control, against mandating the use of metal detectors district-wide, and to increase funding for guidance counselors.

Limitations

Most study participants who consented to qualitative data collection were relatively experienced at the time of their first interview, perhaps because they had more to say about their

organizing experiences than newer members or felt a stronger connection to their organizing group. It is possible that they had more positive organizing experiences and/or had stronger previous school engagement than other youth organizing participants. We did not observe participants in school settings or interview teachers or school leaders and are relying on young people's self-reports about their school engagement. Because we are most interested in understanding young people's relationship to school and their understanding of how organizing has informed their school engagement, though, young people's own accounts and analysis are most germane to our purposes.

We do not account for differences in school context, climate, or orientation toward student activism and voice. School engagement is highly responsive to school climate, and it is likely that changes in school engagement unfold differently in schools with an orientation toward social justice or student participation than in more compliance-oriented schools. We also do not include an analysis of how racial identity development shaped school engagement. Racial identity is implicated in both critical consciousness (Kiang et al., 2021) and social-emotional skills (Rivas-Drake et al., 2020) and is strongly associated with school engagement for BIPOC youth (Chavous et al., 2003).

FINDINGS

Our findings are largely consistent with earlier work on youth organizing participants' school engagement. Participants connected their critical analysis of inequitable policies and conditions and commitment to challenging inequities to new career and postsecondary aspirations, often connected to social justice-oriented careers (Conner, 2011; Nicholas et al., 2019). They highlighted new academic skills, including research, writing, and public speaking, that they were able to apply to classwork (Kirshner, 2007; Larson and Hansen, 2005), and described a strengthened sense of efficacy and agency as students (Mediratta et al., 2009; Taines, 2012). Below, we highlight key themes around school engagement in our findings that illustrate how young people applied critical consciousness and social-emotional skills to their work as students and that extend our understanding of how youth organizing influences school engagement.

New Pathways to Intellectual Engagement

Across all five organizing groups, young people positively contrasted their organizing groups with their schools. They consistently named content knowledge, critical thinking strategies, and concrete skills developed through organizing – and conspicuously not through school – that they anticipated being important to their academic, career, and civic trajectories.

The content knowledge and critical analytic skills cultivated through organizing – histories of social movements, political processes, and community issues – offered a sense of expertise that deepened academic self-efficacy and engagement. Young people offered examples of assignments where they were able to draw on specific content knowledge or analytic skills from their organizing work, including a project on gentrification, research on food deserts, and an essay on the school-to-prison pipeline.

Making connections between youth organizing and course content also prompted young people to participate more actively and confidently in class discussions. Among many newer

participants who attributed stronger class participation to their organizing, Liliana, a freshman in her first several months of organizing with MRNJ, shared:

When we're in school, when the teacher talks about a certain thing we talked about in the [MRNJ] meeting, I'm participating more, because I actually know what it is. When he talked about the millionaire's tax, I raised my hand. I knew what he was talking about. Then the DACA that he was talking about, I knew what that was too.

More experienced participants offered examples of class discussions on Black history, gentrification, policing, and political representation where they drew on critical reflection skills, challenging or adding nuance to their teachers' perspectives by offering a race or class analysis or connecting broad concepts to concrete local issues. They framed these discussions as examples of both their own deepening intellectual engagement with coursework and of a sense of responsibility for sparking critical reflection among their classmates.

Agency in Setting Academic Goals

Consistent with earlier qualitative research (Conner, 2011; Shah, 2011), organizing catalyzed stronger school engagement and higher aspirations for several participants who described themselves as disengaged or indifferent students. They credited their organizing experiences with helping them clarify their career aspirations, reframing past negative academic experiences in light of systematic inequities (Mediratta et al., 2009), and finding entry points to extracurricular activities. Among some young people who had entered organizing as academic high achievers, a different pattern emerged. As their critical analysis of educational inequality developed, they began to reject the models of academic achievement presented by their schools, even as those models positioned them as success stories. Max, a leader with CU, explained this shift in their thinking as their critical analysis of educational inequality deepened:

In the beginning it was like, "Oh, those students are bad, like that's why they're having bad grades. I'm a good student, and I do my work." ... Being a part of CU makes me realize that students in our place are at a disadvantage, and I, too, am at a disadvantage. And just because I'm taking basically their scraps that they're giving me doesn't make what they're doing to us good.

Similarly, Raphael described how organizing with MRNY prompted him to question the messages about college access his school conveyed:

I feel like that's a common thing in high schools that are in neighborhoods of poverty: they make college seem like this extremely difficult task that only a select few get chosen for ... I would have teachers come to me and be like, "Oh yeah, I think you out of everyone in the class could get to college. They should just work a little harder." You know, it creates that distance, like "damn, the 200 people in my school don't have a chance of getting to college?"

As they began to reject messages of educational scarcity and competition, young people began to prioritize their own long-term goals over strict conformity to their school's expectations. Gio, an MRNJ College Ambassador at a selective school with a competitive academic culture, began to:

put less importance on my grades, which like sounds like a bad thing, but it's like I've been in Make the Road, I've seen and heard people who've done great things [for their communities], and you know, they may have not gotten the best grade in AP bio, they may have not gotten the best grade in English.

Xochitl, a BPNC leader, described her trajectory from being a people-pleasing “golden child” during ninth grade to her refusal to “stress myself over an assignment just for the pleasure of you knowing I have an A in your class … I have my own voice when it comes to my learning, too.” These youth maintained a high level of intellectual engagement in school but began to align their effort and energy with their own goals for themselves and their communities. They made choices about elective classes and extracurricular activities based on their own interests and passions, rather than what would provide the most competitive college application.

Relational Approaches to Schoolwork

Young people noted that the practices, norms, and expectations of their youth organizing groups informed their approach to collaborative work. Young people frequently articulated an increased capacity for perspective-taking as an outcome of youth organizing participation. They described learning how to listen to understand, rather than to rebut; to appreciate the value of incorporating multiple perspectives into decisions; and to understand how perspectives are rooted in experiences of the world (Conner, 2014). Several young people described applying these skills as they participated in class discussions. Sam, an inexperienced member of BPNC, reflected:

I have to really take into consideration [other people’s] opinions, because at BPNC, leaders need to be calm, and not like, ‘No, don’t think like that.’ We have to hear them out, give them our view, and see if we can try changing their mind, but if we can’t, respect it, and that’s okay, too.

Young people frequently pointed to shifts in the ways they engaged in group. They were more active and engaged, more likely to take on leadership roles, and more attentive to ensuring that everyone had input into the process and products of group work. Amaya, a PSU leader, noted that after being supported to facilitate meetings at PSU, she’d transferred those facilitation skills to group projects in school: “if no one steps up to the plate I’ll come and make sure we’re all on topic and get us together and have us sort out the roles of who is going to do what in the group projects.” She went on to describe her new commitment to eliciting other perspectives, “asking everyone about their ideas, making sure we try to incorporate everyone’s ideas into projects, seeing what works, seeing what doesn’t.”

Luna, an experienced leader with MRNJ, shared a similar reflection:

I think I’ve learned how to better work with people in general. Because I felt like I’ve always been a type A person on group projects, like I have to do everything or it’s not getting done. Now I feel like everyone has a different role and everyone has lots to contribute. I learned the value of that … everyone’s individual perspective helps add to our argument and helps add to actually organizing our ideas.

Rather than ticking off tasks in order to get the assignment done, or taking control in order to protect their grade, Luna and Amaya and other youth described a more authentic engagement with group work as a collaborative intellectual exercise and an opportunity to learn from their peers.

Empowerment to Act at School

Youth organizing participants developed new critical analyses of the ways in which their schools weren't meeting their needs: crumbling infrastructure, aging and racist textbooks, insufficient counseling and mental health supports, over-policing, an absence of college access supports. For others, conversations with peers and organizing staff affirmed their own observations of inequality and gave them language to describe their experiences. Young people described their growing understandings that the conditions of their schools were not inevitable but rather the results of layers of policy and political decisions.

Drawing on their experiences with collective action and growing understanding of how young people could wield power to demand change, participants began to see their schools as potential sites of action and themselves as change agents within their schools.

Veronica and Mina described a shift in their thinking about school during their first year organizing with MRNJ:

Veronica: Everything I do now, it's like, "Okay, this is something I can talk about at Make the Road. Am I getting enough help here? Am I getting enough support? Are they treating me the way I'm supposed to be treated?" They teach my rights here so then I go to school, and I try to see if I have that. I compare it, yeah.

Mina: It makes you realize, there's certain things you should be given; there's certain things that you do deserve. So, Make the Road makes you realize this is the sort of stuff you should fight for.

At BPNC and PSU, which maintained school-based chapters, youth organizing participants led formal school-based campaigns. One PSU chapter, for example, organized alongside teachers and administrators to oppose the expansion of metal detectors into their school (and to highlight the ineffectiveness of metal detectors across the district). One BPNC chapter challenged their school's policy against outside food, holding a one-day hunger strike highlighting the poor quality of school lunches and the scheduling issues that made it impossible for many students to purchase cafeteria food. Members of groups without a school-based model acted on their own or collectively to raise concerns with teachers or school leaders, draft and circulate petitions, and make demands for change.

Young people experienced a range of responses from school leaders. At schools with a longer history of student activism or a more democratic orientation, administrators were mostly supportive and often collaborated with youth leaders and organizers. On the other hand, several school administrators ended relationships with both BPNC and PSU and banned their organizers from campus when student-led campaigns struck a nerve. In most cases, though, school leaders met youth activism with outright silence or tepid support or quietly made changes in response to students' demands without acknowledging student activism. According to BPNC leaders of the hunger strike, school administrators downplayed and mocked their tactics, then loosened the policy on outside food without responding directly to the protest.

For young people who were part of organizing campaigns or informal activism at school that led to material change, those experiences often reaffirmed their political efficacy and commitment to organizing as a strategy for change. For those whose efforts were not immediately successful, resistance from school leaders often prompted them to deepen their power analysis of how to create change rather than souring them on the potential of collective action.

Young people offered analyses of the limits of school-by-school change and the funding and policy constraints faced by school leaders. Several young people who planned to run for office, pursue a superintendency, or become paid organizers connected those aspirations to their frustrating experiences organizing at school. Among the 26 whom we re-interviewed after high school, all but two were engaged in some form of organizing, activism, or civic engagement as young adults.

New Identities as Community Leaders

Engaging in organizing shifted young people's relationships with their peers. Many reflected that conducting outreach on behalf of their organizing group and mobilizing student support for campaigns helped them broaden their social circles and grow more comfortable striking up conversations with students they didn't know well. Young people frequently brought up issues they were working on and shared knowledge with their peers:

Veronica: I feel like just talking to people [at school] in general has been such an easier process.

Brianna: You're able to help with other people, for example, like with the worker's rights or college applications, you talk to other people. You know things that they don't even know.

Veronica: Yeah, you can inform people about things that they don't know. It has happened to me so many times: "Look, that's not supposed to happen. Why don't you tell somebody about that?"

For some young people, youth organizing prompted them to approach school as a community where they could exercise leadership. Several young people shared that they developed a sense of purpose, beyond their own academic journey, for being in school. Vi, a BPNC leader, reflected that as she learned concrete organizing skills, she learned "how to view myself not only as a student but as a leader and a community member." Frederick, a CU member, reflected:

If I didn't get involved with Communities United, I don't think I would have joined the student advisory council at school because I wouldn't have believed that students could create a change in our school. But after working with Communities United, I really felt empowered ... I knew we could do something.

Khalif and Alex, two PSU leaders, described the ways their relationships with other students had changed since they began organizing. Khalif noted that he wanted to be seen as an engaged student and a "table shaker", someone who was willing to stand up for other students and push for change. He continued:

I would hope that people see me as willing to represent them and really, sort of hold those in power's feet to the fire. I hope that's the energy that I give off to others. I don't know if [organizing] has changed the way I think about myself, but more changed the way I think about the community and how I can engage other people.

For Alex, a self-described introvert, organizing had pushed him to be “more diligent in talking with other people, seeing how they think, seeing how I can affect the student body in more of a positive way.” Other students began to see him as an expert who could help them plan events and anticipate reactions from adults:

People have started seeing how I am as an actual person or how my personality is, apart from me just being the quiet, shy boy who’s usually always drawing in class ... They started actually approaching me more about ideas. I started taking in more information of how they wanted to see our school change and trying to push that towards what I can.

Organizing also provided an entry point for building relationships with teachers on a more equal footing, outside of hierarchical classroom relations. Many young people reflected that their closest relationships were with teachers who incorporated social justice issues in their curriculum or who brought up current affairs in class and didn’t “try to sugarcoat everything”, as one leader from BPNC put it. Young people struck up conversations with teachers outside of class about issues they were concerned about, and told them about actions they’d helped organize; teachers sometimes shared details of union organizing they were engaged in. For these young people, organizing work provided a source of adult respect. Isaac (MRNJ) talked to his favorite history teacher about traveling to New Hampshire to canvass and made sure the teacher knew to refer students to MNRJ’s Student Success Center. Angelica, another MNRJ leader, impressed her teachers by meeting the governor at a bill-signing hosted at the group’s offices.

CONCLUSIONS

Across these five organizations, young people offered nuanced descriptions of the ways their organizing work influenced their engagement in school. They consistently articulated a set of social-emotional skills developed through organizing that they brought to bear on their schoolwork and their interactions with adults and peers: confidence and self-efficacy for engaging with the curriculum and participating in classroom discussions; active listening and perspective-taking skills; social and relational competence for building connections with peers and teachers; and strategies for productive collaboration. The examples they offered reflected an orientation toward the collective and an awareness of social and power dynamics reflecting Jagers et al.’s (2019) formulation of transformative, justice-oriented social emotional learning.

This chapter’s findings add nuance and texture to scholarship on critical consciousness and school engagement and achievement for BIPOC youth. Young people shared detailed reflections about how their growing expertise on issues facing their community – and their developing critical analysis skills – supported their academic confidence and intellectual engagement in academic work. As they developed and sharpened critiques of educational inequality and the systems that sustain it, academically successful young people began to reject the meritocracy- and scarcity-based models of achievement that their schools embraced. They reframed their approach to school around their own aspirations for themselves and their communities and placed less weight on external measures of achievement.

Sharpened critiques of school, in particular a stronger analysis of how educational inequality relates to other systems of inequality and is the result of policy choices, and practice in critical action prompted young people to expect and demand more from their schools. Their

efforts towards changing their schools, whether ad hoc or through a formal campaign, mirrored Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal's (2016) conceptualization of "transformational resistance" among BIPOC students: resistance that is "political, collective, conscious and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible" (p. 320).

Running through these shifts in school engagement – increased academic and relational efficacy, self-definition as students and leaders in the school community, and a willingness to challenge adults – was agency. Consistent with O'Connor (1997) and Christens and Peterson (2012), young people's sense of themselves as capable of effecting sociopolitical change prompted them to reframe their relationship to school. Youth organizing, which provides a consistent opportunity structure for planning, carrying out, and assessing collective action, may be particularly well-suited to fostering agency (Diemer et al., 2021).

Implications

These findings add to the body of literature on the contributions of youth organizing to young people's developmental and academic trajectories and provide evidence that the critical consciousness and social-emotional skills developed through organizing are transferable to school contexts and support young people's agency and self-efficacy in school and their connections to the school community. Even when youth organizers formulate harsh critiques of school and challenge policies, school leaders should appreciate that youth organizing participation can strengthen school engagement and support learning. Expanding in-school and out-of-school access to youth organizing and related practices such as ethnic studies classes and youth participatory action research that support young people in developing critical consciousness can be an important lever for equity. Opportunities to participate in critical action are particularly ripe for building self-efficacy, agency, and social emotional learning development.

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NOTE

1. All names have been changed.

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18. Movements forward: finding healing through activism

Marlene Palomar, Abraham Jones and Ben Kirshner

Activism can be beneficial *and* harmful for young people's minds, bodies, and spirits. In this chapter, we discuss how youth activism works as a site of intentional solidarity and coalition that contributes to youth well-being while also eliciting challenges and struggle. In doing so we employ a conception of activism that embraces the multitude of ways that young people organize, communicate, and fight for change. According to Brown and Yaffe (2017), young people are looking for innovative approaches to political participation; they are becoming more inventive with their tactics and make their activism known in a variety of settings. Young people are agents of social change who generate knowledge in order to transform the world, rather than waiting until adulthood to exercise political agency (Ginwright et al., 2006). The goal of activism is to effectively "challenge and change" the dynamics of the existing social institutions that impact their lives (Conner and Rosen, 2016, p. 2).

Understanding how activism relates to health and well-being is crucial. Youth encounter a spectrum of activism's beneficial and harmful aspects as they work to change the world for others and themselves. To characterize this complex dynamic of beneficial and harmful experiences of youth activism, we utilize the term "radical healing".

PERSPECTIVE: RADICAL HEALING

Critique and hope as well as struggle and joy are all elements of radical healing. To heal and mobilize, we must examine, dismantle, and reconstruct. To radically heal, we must understand the root of our pain and joy. Mobilization and healing are intimately intertwined; the struggle to survive is intrinsically related to the necessity to heal. In this respect, the sites of healing are personal, communal, and social. The Coyolxauhqui Imperative, as introduced by Anzaldúa (2015), is "a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que echan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us" (p. 1). By definition, this struggle to reconstruct the self and construct a collective while challenging the state is an act of resistance analogous to the idea of willful subjectivity (Ahmed, 2014, as cited in Fine et al., 2018). This idea recognizes the fact that young people, especially those with marginalized identities, engage in activism as a form of collective identity, which allows them to critique and challenge "structural, state, and social violence" (p. 623). This act creates solidarity among young people across various struggles for justice.

To help the reader make sense of the complex relationship between critique, activism, and healing, we rely on and re-mix the metaphor of healing as *rhizomatic* (Lopez, 2020). In plant biology, a rhizome links points, produces new plants, and stores nutrients that allow plants to thrive. Our roots connect us to one another, to places, to history, to space, and to the body.

Healing, in this sense, entails returning to centers of ancestral knowledge. Rhizome is a useful metaphor for understanding the relationship between activism and healing because it is not linear; it offers a lens for making sense of the nuanced, sometimes unpredictable, connections and relations between activism and healing.

SOURCES AND APPROACH

Scholarly Literature

Our review began by asking broad questions about the emotional dimensions of youth activism, with particular focus on evidence about how youth activism can contribute to emotional well-being and healing, while also creating new and emergent emotional challenges. Youth activism research is extensive and varied, especially when studies from outside the United States are used. Our aim is not to offer a comprehensive review of research on youth activism, but instead to highlight those articles most pertinent to understanding the emotional consequences of activism seen through the lens of radical healing.

Our initial literature searches in Google Scholar fell between 2010 and 2022 and used different combinations of the following key terms: youth, activism, global, organizing, mobilizing, mental health, emotions, healing, protest movements, state-sanctioned violence, well-being, belonging, and violence. To make decisions about which articles to read closely, we reviewed titles and abstracts to ensure they were empirical studies about youth activism among marginalized or minoritized youth. We defined “empirical” broadly, to include any study that used systematic inquiry to understand the experiences of youth engaged in activism, ranging from large-N studies to single qualitative case studies. To define “youth”, we used age ranges accepted in the country of study, which, because of global variation, means the ages discussed ranged from 11 to 29. Consistent with our radical healing lens, we prioritized studies that examined the experiences of young people who were directly and negatively affected by existing social structures, such as global inequality, neoliberal economic policies, immigration restrictions, white supremacist policing, and government corruption. This led us to focus on articles that discussed the experiences of minoritized and marginalized youth in the United States and Europe or young people in the Global South, ranging from Chile to South Africa to Thailand, including some written by the authors. The studies we discuss are an example of progressive or social justice activism in the service of democracy and human rights. By being explicit about our parameters, we hope that readers can also see missing areas or omissions that call for further research, such as social justice activism carried out by privileged groups.

To synthesize this diverse body of interdisciplinary literature, we followed a four-step process of sense-making and analysis. First, we met together to discuss our perspectives on the topic and possible structures for the paper. We organized our first outline in three broad categories: beneficial experiences, harmful experiences, and emerging trends in how youth activist groups support young people’s mental health and well-being. Second, we selected the articles and summarized them in a spreadsheet that had columns for abstract, article methods, relevance to our topic, and how they fitted our outline. During this step, we refined the sample of papers, excluding, for example, studies that were not empirical or focused mostly on adults, and developed memos summarizing findings. In step 3, Marlene (first author) reviewed articles about radical healing and suggested we consider healing as the lens to organize our syn-

thesis of literature. This suggestion was persuasive to the team because our initial categories felt fragmented, and the new lens – rhizomatic healing – offered constructs that were closely aligned with the sub-themes in our initial review. We developed a new, refined paper structure that used specific terms from Lopez's metaphor of rhizomatic healing to organize themes.

Online Digital Culture

To complement our focus on published empirical studies and capture emergent forms of youth activism around the world, we also analyzed digital artifacts uploaded to social media (particularly TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube). Since our social media praxis is equally focused on following and engaging with content that creates awareness and support for social issues, particularly young activist action, we did not focus on specific hashtags. Modern youth activism is a dynamic and increasingly digitally connected area in which new forms of action and expression are continually developed and remixed. We wanted to make sure that our samples mirrored features of modern online youth culture because of the lengthy publishing process and fast-paced information community on social media. We selected certain instances of online art and expression to illustrate or exemplify various difficulties during our publishing review, but we did not perform a full investigation of the artifacts. Based on our combined experiences as activists and researchers, we investigated digital resources from around the world that supported healing through youth-led and arts-based action.

Our Backgrounds

This chapter was authored by three writers who bring different social identities and lived experiences to our analysis of activism and healing. Marlene Palomar identifies as a Chicana first-generation student who draws on her experiences working in mental health and educational settings. Her work focuses on the intersections of race, mental health, and education to explore issues of social justice, power, trauma, joy, and culture in learning. Abraham Jones identifies as African American/Black. He is a first-generation student. He draws on his experience working as a community organizer and educator. His work focuses on using critical race theory, community-based participatory action research, and ethnography to engage in counterstory. Ben Kirshner is a white Jewish professor of education who brings experience as a youth worker and community-engaged researcher. His interest in the research about healing was catalyzed by conversations with youth organizing groups that have been increasingly making mental health, wellness, and healing central to organizing practice.

FINDINGS: HEALING IN YOUTH ACTIVISM

Research on the effects of youth activism has tended to fall into two broad categories: contributions to policy change and youth development. Of the latter, there is a sizable body of literature, typically in education, adolescent psychology, and community psychology, that reports beneficial developmental outcomes of participation in activism (Ballard and Ozer, 2017; Daniel and Valladares, 2016). Much of this work has been carried out through a positive youth development (PYD) framework that posits strong connections between community participation, a sense of purpose, and general thriving (Lerner et al., 2002). Here, the psychologi-

cal variables of interest tend to circle around civic engagement indices, such as civic efficacy, empowerment, and community connectedness (Flanagan and Christens, 2011).

A second strand of work linking activism to psychological outcomes, anchored in critical social theory and liberation psychology, has focused on critical consciousness and sociopolitical development (SPD) (Freire, 1970; Watts et al., 2003). SPD, primarily theorized and studied among young people navigating oppression and marginalization, refers to a process of gaining greater understanding of the historical and social roots of injustice and the knowledge, skills, and sense of agency to change those systems (see also Kirshner, 2015; Watts and Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). This tradition, in its *telos*, is about liberation from oppression. But until recently, much of the research on critical consciousness and SPD has been preoccupied with its cognitive dimensions, such as how young people gain insight into the structure of social reality or specific conceptions of civic and political efficacy (e.g., Diemer et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2011).

Whether working in the PYD or SPD traditions, it has been less common for scholars to focus explicitly on the relationship between activism and mental health or emotional well-being (Conner et al., 2023; Hope et al., 2017). As Ballard and Ozer write in their 2017 review, “There has been surprisingly little systematic research on the role of activism for youth health and well-being” (p. 226). Hope et al. (2017), writing about the literature on college student activism, write: “Few studies consider political activism as a mechanism to reduce psychological consequences of racial/ethnic discrimination” (p. 2). Frost et al. (2019) write: “The association between activism and well-being for LGBTQ and GNC youth, particularly youth of color, has been under-theorized and under-researched” (p. 10).

For this chapter, inspired by recent scholarship in the SPD tradition that centers emotions and well-being in youth activism (e.g., Fernández and Watts, 2022; Ginwright, 2015), we review studies that foreground issues of mental health and well-being associated with social justice activism. Consistent with a turn that community youth organizers have taken towards paradigms of healing justice and radical healing, we look at these studies through the lens of healing, specifically the metaphor of rhizomatic healing advanced by Lopez (2020). Scholars and organizers tend to believe that engaging in transformational resistance can foster healing, and that healing can advance activism – but how? What are the ways in which activism promotes healing? Moreover, what complicated harms to our well-being might also accompany activism?

Contributions of Youth Activism to Healing

For young people who are the targets of oppression, dehumanizing institutions, or deficit-based narratives, the experience of standing up for rights and dignity, particularly in collectives with others, offers a powerful experience of agency, connection, and well-being (French et al., 2020; Thomas and Louis, 2013). Many studies report an experience of exhilaration that comes with asserting dignity and self-determination through collective action. Public forms of protest and social movement actions endow the actor with hope and a sense of being part of a cause bigger than oneself (Fullam, 2017). Schwiertz (2021) in a comparative study of migrant youth activism, shares narratives from undocumented youth in the US that communicate this exhilaration. As Sofia described it, “It can be a cathartic experience, where you literally tingle and you feel all kinds of power within you” (Schwiertz, 2021, p. 408). Watts and colleagues (2018), in their comparative study of youth activism in four countries, report feelings of

agency and power that come with mass marches. They report one quote from a focus group with Black South African youth activists: “How do we march? We go to town. We sing peacefully. We sing with big smiles on our faces” (p. 20). This idea is both intuitive and consistent with theories of humanization and human development ranging from Paolo Freire to James Baldwin to Martin Baro. Efforts by social scientists to study this phenomenon quantitatively have identified evidence from surveys. Frost et al. (2019), for example, analyzed data from a nationally participatory survey of LGBTQ and gender non-confirming (GNC) youth aged 14–24 in the US ($N = 5860$) and found a significant association between activism and reduced health problems, defined in terms of psychological distress, suicidal ideation, and self-reported health.

Using the healing framework, we sought to delve into this argument and identify and unpack what components could be contributing to healing using largely qualitative sources. Drawing on the metaphor of the rhizome, we organize our discussion in terms of various rhizomatic connections that social justice activism can foster, including (a) connections to history, place and ancestry and (b) connections to a collective with shared purposes.

Connections to history, place, and ancestry

Studies have proposed that examining personal and social histories and ancestries has the potential to anchor young people in their activism (Greene et al., 2021). According to Moodley and West (2005), healing entails rejecting colonial knowledge and practices as a means of knowing and valuing ancestral wisdom and cultural traditions. Being a part of the story, whether through activism, taking part in protests, or posting on social media, is a type of healing that ties us to others, much like the rhizome metaphor. Through this process of healing, youth are engaging in communal memory by acknowledging the need to deconstruct and change colonial narratives. While those with the advantage of looking the other way may ignore the erasure of certain narratives, for those whose lives and bodies are implicated, the insult of erasure is continuous and unrelenting, and it demands intervention.

French et al. (2020) argue that sustaining a feeling of optimism in the midst of oppression requires “strength, resistance, and cultural authenticity” (p. 25). Communities frequently use their links to the past and their ancestors to defend their territory and indigenous communities. Connections to history were a central feature of the Mní Wičhóni Nakičižij Owáyawa (Defend our Waters school) in Standing Rock, South Dakota (Eagle Shield et al., 2020). A core element of the multigenerational movement was a school where children and youth learned about traditional Lakota practices and the history of Native American resistance. Similarly, contemporary youth activists in South Africa frame their movement in the language of the long anti-apartheid struggle, both as a way of linking their work to prior generations and gaining legitimacy in the public sphere (Kirshner et al., 2021).

Engaging in research, as well, when linked to activism and embedded in community-driven processes, can be a vehicle for drawing connections to suppressed histories or far-flung places. In Greene et al. (2021), for example, Alex Davis describes his experience as part of the Green Haven Think Tank, organized by men serving prison sentences in the Green Haven correctional facility of New York State. Davis argues that the first step in the process of healing and social change was to “study the historical problem” (p. 11), which in this case had to do with the factors contributing to over-representation by People of Color from seven New York City neighborhoods in the mostly White counties of upstate New York.

Maria Elena Ros, a professional saxophonist from Oaxaca, is one of many activists who utilize social media (@elenariosax) as a site of action by exploring the past as a link to the present. She raises awareness about *feminicidio* (femicide) and the need for land preservation. She represents the continuous *lucha* (fight) for the preservation of our history and women's rights via mobilization, which has resulted in ongoing efforts to heal ourselves, our ancestors, and future generations.

Reclaiming our history and ancestry is a significant dream and a possible outcome of mobilizing and healing. When thinking about our relationship to history and ancestry, it is imperative that we understand that there are communities that have been and continue to be marginalized, erased, and excluded from location, story, and space. Thinking back to the Coyolxauhqui Imperative and the rhizome metaphor, we argue that our fragments have the potential to flower. Despite forced pressure, each endeavor for change enables the community to organize while also increasing each other's well-being.

Connectedness to a collective with shared purposes

A sense of belonging to a larger collective or movement is a crucial feature of activist experiences that transform stress and isolation into healing. Similar to rhizomatic linkages, social justice action elevates the individual while stressing the worth of the communal; individuals find vitality and purpose in belonging to something larger than themselves. Conner et al. (2023), for example, in an interview study of 42 self-identifying college student activists, found that social connections and relationships were a key factor in buffering the stressful and negative emotions associated with activism. Here we review some of the mechanisms of that sense of connection to a collective, including both online artistic exchange and face-to-face routines.

Art and online engagement

Youth organizing requires substantial interpersonal relationship-building (Ortega-Williams, 2017). Like rhizomes, all levels of movement are connected. These connections are often facilitated through artistic exchange. Through the arts and in niches that are generally deleted, forgotten, or ignored in the movement's primary narrative, youth have historically and presently been organized. The increased social media usage has had an influence on both activism and the showcasing of art through social media. When engaging in activist efforts, platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have made it easy to share music, hashtags, and visual art.

Another type of mobilization that links individuals is social media activism (Nesi, 2020). While social media is frequently connected with negative effects on adolescents, there are some general advantages to using it, such as humor, entertainment, identity development, and creative expression (Anderson and Jiang, 2020; Clark et al., 2018; Tanksley and Hunter, Chapter 19 in this book). Youth employ a range of artistic mediums to challenge the state and inspire one another. One aspect of social media is the use of storytelling as a form of activism. The many components of digital storytelling enable the author to think carefully about the tale and build their own point of view by using graphics and music (Hausknecht et al., 2021). Music, according to Bakagiannis and Tarrant (2006), pulls people together and helps them to build a more collective social identity. Artist Janin Nuz (@janinnuz), for example, used the Bad Bunny song "Andrea" in a social media post regarding the creation of a mural in Moctezuma, Venustiano Carranza, Mexico City. The song was speculated to be written about Andrea Ruiz, a woman from Puerto Rico who was killed by her ex-boyfriend after a court

declined her request for protection. In an interview with Chente Ydrach (2022), Bad Bunny clarified that it was about all women who experience gendered violence. Art and social movements are intertwined in the *lucha* of historically disadvantaged people.

Ritual

Ritual, like a rhizome, is a way of connecting oneself to one's community and one's ancestors (Greene et al., 2021). Rituals unify and embrace ancestral knowledge while also providing vital sustenance to our spirits. Based on their research on cultural rituals and the well-being of kids who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), Causadias et al. (2022) identify how ritual offers a critical culturally sustaining approach to mental health. Rituals are ceremonies or a sequence of activities that offer a way of retaining generational ways of knowing and a unique method to resist, survive, and thrive against colonization (Bonfil Batalla, 1987; 1996). Rituals are critical for ensuring that activist spaces and groups enable participants to take care of themselves and stay rooted in connections to each other and ancestors.

During protests, rituals may help organizations strategize, motivate, and resist. This theme shows up powerfully in Eagle Shield and colleagues' (2020) edited book describing the features of movement spaces at Standing Rock in South Dakota and in Chicago. In both settings, participants drew on various rituals to stay connected to each other and centered in their purpose. Valerie Shirley, for example, in recounting her experiences at Mní Wičhóni Nakíčižiŋ Owáyawa (Defend our Waters school), describes the role of ritual in handling the stresses of police violence against the camp:

[T]hey [the educators] shared a moment when the camp experienced intense raids by the police and how the youth helped heal the community by singing and drumming at the sacred fire for the entire day. They relied on the power of prayer to help calm and heal the people; the youth themselves are powerful individuals, and we can rely on them to help sustain our communities as well. (Garcia et al., 2020, p. 90)

Echoing the way collective prayer held people together at Standing Rock, multigenerational community organizers for equal education in South Africa engaged in group singing at mass meetings or protests (Kirshner et al., 2021). The authors quote one young activist who said:

The songs that we sing, trust me, a song at Equal Education, if you're in a mass meeting, will always bring everyone together ... We take those songs and we use them to actually unite ourselves and bring about the spirit that everyone here is fighting for something. Everyone here is fighting for a certain cause, but in a very beautiful way. (p. 12)

These examples illustrate ways that young people, often in tandem with older generations, engage in ritual as they mobilize politically, which inspires group solidarity in the face of adversity.

Humor and play

As researchers and educators who have spent time in youth-centered activist spaces, we have often experienced lightheartedness, humor, and playfulness as part of routine interactions. Uttamchandani (2021), for example, after completing a multiple year participatory ethnography of a LGBTQ+ youth organizing group in the US midwest, made the analytic decision to focus on talk and interaction that initially might be construed as "off task". By looking at young people's asides, jokes, and digressions, Uttamchandani uncovered a process he called

educational intimacy, that is, relational practices that (a) enabled the group to manage tensions and disagreements while advancing its goals and (b) prefigured the kinds of relations they were trying to bring about through their activism.

Other studies have reported various uses of memes, imagery, and humor in mass protest activity. Chilean student activism in 2011, for example, innovated on earlier generational forms of mass protest by utilizing flash mobs and carnival-esque performances in Santiago streets (Bellei and Cabalin, 2013). Sombatpoonsiri and Kri-aksorn (2021), in their study of efforts in Thailand to reclaim public space and counter autocratic restrictions, identified multiple ingenious strategies for mobilizing young people and adults in ways that avoided the wrath of the state. Here, too, humor and irreverence were central to their protests, ranging from mock marathons, to satirical skits, to flash mobs:

A case in point was “Such a Beautiful Garde” action staged in July 2020 when the Bangkok metropolitan authorities placed numerous flower pots around the Democracy Monument to obstruct mass gatherings there. Activists responded by inviting people to visit this urban flower garden, and collectively shouted “Such a beautiful garden!” 10 times. (p. 99)

In a similar display of irreverence, refugee youth in Germany wove humor and mockery into their collective protests and messaging, such as by symbolically electing the “Deportation Minister of the Year”, who “excelled” in a particularly repressive policy approach (Schwierz, 2021). This process, as argued by Schwierz, inverted power relations, “with the refugee youth discussing, laughing, and deciding on those politicians who would otherwise turn them into decision-making objects” (p. 410).

Summary

There is compelling evidence that opportunities to stand up with others for human rights, democracy, and social justice have beneficial effects for well-being and psychological health (Ballard and Ozer, 2017; Frost et al., 2019; Ginwright, 2010). In the above section, we have highlighted the ways that activism contributes to healing through the cultivation of rhizomatic connections. Some of these connections are to the past: to suppressed histories, forgotten ancestries, or ancestral traditions. Opportunities to forge these connections and prioritize experiential knowledge enable activists to explore, understand, and reconstruct fragments in our world. Healing also occurs through connections to the collective. These connections can flow in many ways, online and in person. Digital platforms are particularly compelling for the exchange of visual arts and music that serve to inform, educate, connect, and inspire. Qualitative studies of face-to-face organizing also reveal key interactional practices, such as ritual, humor, and play, that help groups form connections and persist in the face of significant adversity. These various practices, both online and in-person, are particularly important given the varied stresses, dangers, and risks that youth activists face, which we turn to next.

The Dangers of a Movement: Complicating the Relationship between Activism and Well-being

Until recently, the literature about civic engagement and activism has too often downplayed or ignored the emotional and physical risks of activism, particularly more extreme forms of activism by young people who are subjected to oppression or state violence. In this section we share themes related to studies – including some of the same studies discussed above – that

document challenges to health and wellness that can accompany participation. We have identified three themes: the harms of state-sanctioned violence; internal organization dynamics; and the risks of offering trauma for public consumption.

The harms of reactionary state-sanctioned violence

As youth engage in activism and movement building, they highlight injustices that impact their own lives and the lives of others. According to Linder et al. (2019), on college campuses, activism may become a need rather than a choice for students who feel ostracized, and the desire to retain one's humanity through activism is met with a lack of institutional support and understanding. Their activism, if visible enough, exposes systems, people and ideas that aim to uphold the paradigm the youth wish to change, which can lead to varied forms of push-back and even state violence (Strong et al., 2022).

In many political contexts, when young people devise new and imaginative ways to resist, the state responds with an increase in violence. Fournier (2018), for example, discusses how peaceful protests among youth and young professionals in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution of 2004, left "young protesters ... severely injured" (p. 57). This type of state brutality is not an unusual response to protest; similar actions have been witnessed in demonstrations around Latin American countries such as Mexico and Argentina as part of the #NiUnaMenos movement against femicide. Another example of this is the 2020/21 occurrence of the "Isan peoples movement" in Thailand. Alexander (2021) describes the history and details of this movement, writing that the youth participants' activism was ignited by watching their parents become disenfranchised by the government during their early childhood. Alexander describes youth speaking out against corrupt leadership and state propaganda, which elicited state violence against protesters. Violence included using irritant-laden water cannons to disperse crowds and arresting leadership; in some cases, activists were known to be abducted and disappeared. Like previous movements and demonstrations throughout the world, the youth of Isan devised innovative tactics to take public action at a time when such action was barred.

Protesting youth throughout the world frequently raise awareness of long-standing concerns that have affected not just them personally, but also their families for generations. This act of speaking up can frequently be harmful and endangers young people. There are examples of global youth activism in the face of violence that span historical and contemporary discourse (Blitzer, 2012; Lam-Knott, 2017; Sombatpoonsiri and Kri-aksorn, 2021; Strong et al., 2022; Swartz et al., 2022). Youth are at risk of experiencing trauma due to the use of violence against demonstrators who disturb political norms and goals.

Dynamics of power and privilege within organizations

Although documented in research about US social movements, such as critiques rooted in intersectional frameworks about the treatment of Black women in Civil Rights and feminist movements (Táiwò, 2022), less has been written about processes of marginalization within *youth* activist organizations. We identified some accounts that documented how power dynamics within groups could lead young people to feel disempowered or frustrated as they embarked on activist projects.

Gender

Curnow, for example, completed a multi-year study of climate justice advocacy among Canadian college students. One of Curnow's (2013) studies revealed how femme-identified activists felt marginalized and diminished by the gendered (i.e., masculine) group leadership practices. Eventually the young women in this group formed a "sub community of practice" where they vented frustrations and engaged in conscientization to address this emergent power dynamic tied to the organizational dynamic of activism. When seen from an intersectional perspective, age and gender both have an impact on how power and privilege relations play out.

Documentation status

Differences in power and privilege tied to documentation status among immigration justice youth activists became visible in response to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policies created during the Obama administration. DACA is an initiative established to endeavor to safeguard qualified young individuals who arrived in the US as children from expulsion and to grant them temporary, renewable work authorization. Arriaga and Rodriguez (2021) studied the experiences of immigration activists in North Carolina who reported various types of emotional strain linked to issues of documentation within the movement. Those who had DACA status felt privileged relative to their un-DACA-mented peers and reported feelings of guilt and sadness when seeing these stark differences, even within their own families or friend groups. One student said, "I want to help people while I am trying to figure all this out. Sometimes I can't help people with all their questions. I just cry afterwards" (p. 14). These emotions were tied to broader divides, created by the xenophobic policy environment at the time, between "good and bad" immigrants, such as those who would qualify for the DREAM Act if it were passed and those who would not. One student said: "Organizing is draining, emotionally draining. It's emotional labor and energy that I put out there, and it takes away from homework or relationships" (p. 15). The article underscores the need for scholars and organizers to attend to these risks and challenges as we write about and theorize features of settings that sustain youth organizing.

Revisiting trauma for public consumption

Much of the literature on activism documents the ways that speaking one's truth about traumatic experiences, particularly when embedded in a loving collective, can contribute to healing. This theme, indeed, showed up in the section above, showing the various ways that artistic expression and ritual connect young people to a collective in ways that tap into an inherent human resilience and capacity for healing (Lopez, 2020). We would be remiss, however, not to acknowledge a concern that some young people and adult allies have raised regarding the pressure that young people sometimes experience to perform their stories in ways that re-awaken or re-visit negative experiences (Hipolito-Delgado and Zion, 2017). The complexity of this phenomenon was captured in a vignette reported by Watts and colleagues (2018), in which they describe a complex scene where Xochitl, a high school 10th grader speaks at a community event about her experiences with the school to prison pipeline, and how she felt "stupid and embarrassed" (p. 14) to be kicked out of school. During the telling of Xochitl's narrative, she began to sob. One can imagine how, in this moment, the experience could go in several directions – and in a space that felt more extractive or performative, participating in such an event could be harmful. In this case, as the vignette communicates, she received embodied support – from an adult organizer who gave her a long hug, while another

said, “Deep breath Xochitl, you got this” (p. 14). This example illustrates the vulnerability that young people may experience when giving testimony about painful experiences, and how being part of a loving collective acting in solidarity can ultimately enable that experience to be a healing one. It also, however, underscores the complexity and possible risk of further harm that can accompany these kinds of public performances.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We are seeing an increasing embrace of radical healing and healing justice by social justice youth activists and organizations in the United States (Fernández and Watts, 2022; Greene et al., 2021; Valladares et al., 2021; see also, Tanksley and Hunter, Chapter 19 in this book). Young people seek collective healing and well-being while they work to transform the institutions that cause harm (Ginwright, 2015). This effort by young people calls for parallel scholarship that makes sense of the complex emotions that are brought forth in young people’s struggles for liberation and freedom.

To make sense of the vast and interdisciplinary scholarship about the emotional and mental health dimensions of youth activism and to be consistent with what we are seeing in grassroots youth organizing, we drew on metaphors of rhizomatic healing (Lopez, 2020). Although most of the empirical studies we reviewed did not situate their studies in a “healing” framework (focusing instead on terms like emotions, mental-health, or well-being), we found it useful to look at the studies through this lens. Doing so surfaced young people’s creative use and remixing of cultural practices that evade simple binaries: they are both ancestral and future-oriented, traditional and innovative.

On one hand, we see youth activists, especially in communities of color in the US, draw on cultural traditions, including Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Chicana feminisms, and the Black African diaspora, to anchor their organizing in a healing framework (Anzaldúa, 1981; Eagle Shield et al., 2020; Greene et al., 2021; Mendoza, 2022). Historical inquiry, artistic practice, and ritual all bind young people to a collective and a set of traditions that offer meaning and purpose.

On the other hand, such work is not only or simply “traditional”. As suggested in the artistic examples, we see young people remixing communal practices and arts in ways that speak directly to their experiences today and take advantage of new technologies. Such efforts to reclaim practices that have been suppressed or silenced are themselves activist practices, but also lend spirit and gravity to social movements for rights, equality, and dignity.

These examples of contemporary youth healing through activism are inspiring and hopeful. And yet in our scholarly accounts and work with young people, it will be important to hold on to the “both/and” qualities of activism. Yes, there is evidence that activism links young people to movements and fugitive histories; collective creative action against oppressive systems is part of healthy development. But the dangers of activism are also real. As suggested in our review, many examples of documented examples of state violence against youth protesters are from countries in the global South, such as Thailand, Nigeria, Egypt, Argentina, and Mexico. It may be that the tendency for social science research to privilege the United States and Europe has led to a systemic lack of attention to the high stakes that confront protesters in some geopolitical contexts and the ingenious tactics that young people deploy. More research

is needed into these risks and the creative and courageous strategies that youth develop in the face of state violence.

Themes from this chapter also point to a need for engaged scholarship that speaks to practical dilemmas that may show up in grassroots organizing spaces that draw on healing frameworks. For example, how can *multiracial* spaces honor (and learn from) ancestral healing practices within particular cultural communities without appropriating them in irresponsible ways? How should organizers manage tensions that emerge if the emphasis on well-being and self-care is viewed as hampering the steady struggle of community organizing? As “healing” is popularized in the youth sector, it risks becoming a *buzzword*, packaged to appeal to funders but carrying individualistic and apolitical models of mental health. We hope this chapter has provided a critical and hopeful space to examine the possibilities of radical healing with youth and will open up new directions for participatory and community-engaged scholarship about healing justice.

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19. Black youth, digital activism, and racial battle fatigue: how Black youth enact hope, humor, and healing online

Tiera Tanksley and Alexis E. Hunter

The 2020 movement for Black Lives, catalyzed by anti-Black police brutality and inflamed by the public execution of George Floyd, has continually revealed the promise and peril of social media technology to serve as a platform of political activism and transformational resistance (Solórzano and Bernal, 2001) for Black youth. As the primary curators of viral justice campaigns, including #BlackLivesMatter, #ICantBreathe and #DefundThePolice, Black youth have become particularly adept at leveraging social media technology to center, challenge, and organize against racism and anti-Black violence (Carney, 2016). Hyper-circulated cyber content, digital fundraising and collective organizing via youth-generated social media pages are just a few of the ways Black youth are operationalizing digital systems to critique and combat anti-Black violence (Tanksley, 2019; 2020).

At the same time, anti-Blackness exists as the “default setting” of internet technology (Benjamin, 2019), and Black social media users must navigate a dizzying matrix of algorithmic oppression every time they log in online (Noble, 2016; 2018b). Not only are Black youth overexposed to racially traumatizing digital content like viral police killings (Tanksley, 2022; Tao and Fischer, 2021; Weinstein et al., 2021), but they are also the group to experience some of the highest rates of race-based digital harassment and content moderation (Anderson and Hitlin, 2016). The consequences of algorithmic bias are profound, and scholars are only just beginning to understand the psychological impacts of racist infrastructures on Black youth (Maxwell, 2016). Not surprisingly, Black youth activists report a plethora of socioemotional and mental health consequences (Tanksley, 2019; 2022; McLeroy, 2022), and the need to strengthen young people’s digital wellness practices to combat activist burnout and racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2011) has become substantial.

In recognizing the ubiquity of digitally mediated racism and the urgency of remediating mental health concerns for Black youth, this chapter examines the landscape of algorithmic oppression for Black activists online. It simultaneously documents how young Black activists employ practices of hope, healing, and digital wellness as they navigate anti-Black digital systems. Grounded in critical race and Black feminist approaches to race, healing and technology, this chapter poses the following research questions:

1. What are common manifestations of algorithmic oppression and anti-Black digital racism that Black youth activists encounter online?
2. What socio-emotional or mental health effects do Black youth experience as a result of digital racism and algorithmic bias?
3. How do Black youth cope with and heal from the socio-emotional or mental health consequences of anti-Blackness either online or offline?

In order to answer these questions, this chapter leverages qualitative interview data with 25 Black youth activists, and offers youth-initiated insights on how to employ self-care, communal coping, and digital wellness strategies online.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As Black youth continue to use social media to engage in activism, more research is needed to understand the impacts that heavy participation in racial justice campaigns and overexposure to racially distressing content have on their socioemotional health and mental wellness. Research on the psychological impacts of digitally mediated racism is quickly emerging (Maxwell, 2016; Tanksley, 2022; Williams, 2021), and scholars have identified a range of associated mental health consequences, including anxiety, depression, stress, and anticipatory body alarm response. Though a majority of these studies focus on highly syndicated, exceedingly gruesome acts of racial violence, such as the extrajudicial killing of Black Americans at the hands of police (Tanksley, 2022; McLeroy, 2022) or the ongoing genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians (Mahamid and Berte, 2020), there are countless other forms of digitally mediated trauma that are more obscure and harder to identify. We believe that the cumulative weight of these mundane, seemingly trivial digital assaults produces similar mental health effects and should be thoroughly examined alongside the more graphic and “spectacular” digital assaults.

For instance, Black youth endure some of the highest rates of digital harassment and racist trolling online (Anderson and Hitlin, 2016), and are simultaneously the least likely to have their reports of racist content validated by content moderation protocols. This means that when Black youth are confronted by racist slurs and threats of violence online, they are less likely to be believed and protected than their non-Black peers. At the same time, Black youth are the group most likely to have their posts flagged and deleted for “violating community guidelines”, particularly when that content challenges white supremacy and anti-Black oppression (Murray, 2021). This digital discrimination is coupled with disproportionate contact with race-based content, defined by the Pew Research Center as any post including references to race, racism, or racial justice. Studies show that Black youth’s social media accounts are rife with race-based content, and though not all of this content is violent or gruesome, a vast majority (nearly 60 percent) is politically oriented and centered around issues of social injustice (Pew Research Center, 2017). Cumulatively, these statistics suggest that Black youth are more likely to encounter social media content that is distressing, disturbing or emotionally draining, regardless of whether or not that content was shared with the intent to harm, to entertain, to educate or to organize.

As a response, Black youth are calling attention to the permanence and pervasiveness of platformed racism (Tanksley, 2024), creating Instagram reels, Twitter polls, and Facebook livestream to spark dialogue, share experiences, and collectively theorize about algorithmic anti-Blackness “from the margins” (hooks, 2000). A recent example of this communal theorizing includes a prominent social media debate prompted by Rachel Cargile, a young Black social media activist. Following the gruesome murder of Nia Wilson, a Black girl in Northern California slain by a white supremacist assailant, Cargile created an Instagram post inquiring about Black women’s mental health in the wake of the tragedy. Despite it being positively received by hundreds of Women of Color, the post was flagged and deleted by content moderation algorithms designed to detect hate speech. In response to this algorithmic slight, Cargile

shared a screenshot of the “violation of community guidelines” message she received, and included the following caption:

Someone reported the post as hate speech and Instagram immediately took it down. Do you see this? Do you see how not only are we killed in the streets we also are punished for grieving. We are not seen as human, we are not regarded as beings who live and breathe and feel and are worthy of existence. We are oppressed, then we are killed, then we are silenced.

This secondary post garnered hundreds of responses, and users flooded the comment section with first-hand accounts of algorithmic silencing and the emotional toll that it takes on Black users and social media activists. Cargile’s experience, and those users who shared similar experiences in the comment section, raise an important question, namely: what are the socioemotional and mental health consequences of experiencing algorithmic anti-Blackness for Black youth and social media activists?

Together, these scenarios highlight the ubiquity and diversity of race-related stressors online – both interpersonally and algorithmically – and call for more nuanced examinations of digitally mediated trauma that can illuminate the minutiae of race-related stressors currently mediating Black youth’s experiences online. Pierce’s groundbreaking work on racial microaggressions provides an important rationale for taking a more granular focus, noting “one must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today’s racism” (Pierce, 1974, p. 516). We need more scholarship that can expose the minute, everyday manifestations of digital racism that contribute to race-related stress for Black youth and social media activists. By acquiring a more complex understanding of digitally mediated harm beyond highly publicized instances of racial violence, we can develop a more robust approach to digital wellness that recognizes the macro and micro components of digital racism. Doing so can produce a necessary paradigmatic shift, placing the onus of mental health reform onto sociotechnical *systems and structures*, rather than on individual users and youth activists.

Theoretical Framework

In order to illuminate the everyday manifestations of algorithmic oppression facing Black social media activists and the strategies they employ to cope with digitally mediated trauma, we draw upon two emerging theoretical frameworks in the field of education: critical race technology theory (CRTT) in education (Tanksley, 2019; 2023a); and a healing justice framework (Ginwright, 2015b). Grounded in critical theories of race, gender, and technology, CRTT responds to calls for more intersectional, techno-structural examinations of digital technologies within educational research that can expose the intercentricity of racism as the “default setting” of school-based technologies, learning platforms, and digital research contexts (Tanksley, 2016; 2019; 2022; 2023a; forthcoming). This framework disrupts majoritarian “stories” that characterize information technologies as post-racial, apolitical, and democratic and instead acknowledges the power systems embedded within twenty-first-century information systems (Noble, 2018a; Benjamin, 2019; Cottom, 2016; Brock, 2020; Gray and Leonard, 2018; Buolamwini and Gebru; Nkonde, 2019). In doing so, CRTT in education “shifts discourse away from simple arguments about the liberatory possibilities of the internet toward more critical engagements with how the internet is a site of power and control over Black life” (Noble, 2016, p. 2). To date, this work has made more discernible the ways Students of Color intersect with and are intersected by social media and internet technology (Tanksley, 2016;

Tanksley, Lopez and Martinez, 2017). Ultimately, CRTT works to expose the “racialized layers of subordination” (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 663) embedded within information technologies that have historically restricted Students’ of Color access to, representation in, and ownership of information technologies that inevitably influence their educational, socioemotional, and techno-social experiences.

While CRTT can render the existence and subsequent mental health effects of algorithmic racism more visible, a healing justice framework (Ginwright, 2015b) can help illuminate the culturally situated and historically anchored approaches that Black youth use to navigate and survive anti-Black racism. Healing justice was first conceptualized as a way to “restore, rebalance, and reimagine ways we held healing and harm from oppression and colonization in our People of Color, Indigenous, Queer and Trans, disabled, formerly incarcerated, and institutionalized communities” (Greene et al., 2021, p. 6). This framework recognizes that activism and healing must occur simultaneously because, as Ginwright (2015b) states, “both strategies, braided together, make a more complete and durable fabric in our efforts to transform oppression, and hold the power to restore a more humane, and redemptive process toward community change” (p. 35). Healing justice is community oriented, culturally situated, and unapologetically rooted in the ancestral traditions of Black, indigenous, queer, Trans, disabled, and incarcerated communities. Thus, healing justice is a critical departure from the more traditional, race-evasive, and ahistorical constructions of coping and self-care that currently permeate the academy (Healing Collective Trauma, 2013). While conventional scholarship on coping is premised upon individualized approaches to mental health, including talk therapy, mindfulness, medication, and self-help, healing justice sustains and connects Communities of Color to the power, love, and knowledge of their ancestors, and in doing so, offers a more expansive and multifaceted conceptualization of healing that is decolonial, justice oriented, and race-conscious (Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective, 2021).

Three main focuses are present in the healing justice framework and serve as a guiding framework for this study (Ginwright, 2015b, pp. 39–40):

1. *Restoration* involves “actions and activities that restore collective well-being, meaning and purpose by understanding this as a political act that recognizes the collective nature of wellbeing and moves away from individualistic notions of health.”
2. *Resistance* “involves disrupting and rejecting hegemonic notions of justice, particularly in regards to race.”
3. *Reclamation* is “the capacity to reclaim, redefine, and reimagine a possible future.”

Ultimately, healing justice is more than a theoretical framework; rather, it exists as a radical social movement that aims to foster collective, multi-generational healing and well-being for the racially marginalized, while simultaneously working to transform systems and environments that are producing intersectional harm (Ginwright, 2015b). Though a majority of this scholarship has occurred in offline spaces (Chavez-Diaz and Lee, 2015, Ginwright, 2015a, Greene et al., 2021, Juárez Mendoza, 2020), we believe a healing justice framework has powerful implications for Black youth in digital settings. Thus, in the context of this study, healing justice can reposition the everyday practices of joy, rest, humor, and play that Black youth use to sustain their digital wellness as transformative acts meant to subvert colonial fragmentation of the Black mind, body, and spirit.

When augmented by a healing justice lens, CRTT's guiding tenets can illuminate Black youth's understandings of and approaches to racialized healing within and by way of digital technology. The following tenets inform our study:

1. *The Intercentricity of Socio-Technical Racism:* CRTT in education acknowledges that racism is permanent and deeply ingrained within the very fabric of American society (Bell, 1992; Pérez Huber and Solórzano, 2015), both on and offline, and should therefore be centralized in discussions of racial equity for marginalized youth (Tanksley, 2023a). In the context of this study, CRTT enables us to name and interrogate the range of algorithmic micro-assaults leveraged against Black youth online, from digital harassment and content moderation to the viral Black death and dying, and re-position these technological "glitches" as symptoms of a larger, algorithmically codified disease of white supremacy.
2. *The Challenge to Dominant Ideology:* CRTT in education encourages scholars to interrogate dominant narratives of race, gender, and technology, and challenge oversimplified constructions of social media technologies as post-racial, ungendered, and politically neutral. Together, CRTT and healing justice can take an asset-based approach to youth digital activism, and illuminate the extensive emotional, intellectual and physical labor that goes into navigating and repurposing anti-Black social media technologies to "talk back" and "bring wreck" to offline systems of power. They can also challenge popularized notions of mental health that focus on conventional, individualized approaches to "self-help" and "self-care" that overlook the role of systemic racism and algorithmic oppression in Black youth's approach to digital wellness and mental health.
3. *Commitment to Social-Technical and Algorithmic Justice:* In its struggle toward sociotechnical justice, CRTT aims to abolish algorithmic racism completely, as well as to eliminate all other forms of sociotechnical oppression along axes of class, gender, sexuality, and more (Tanksley, 2023a). When leveraged alongside healing justice, this tenet enables us to complicate oversimplified narratives of Black youth's digital activism that overlook the socioemotional and mental health consequences of engaging in social justice activism within an anti-Black internet structure. It simultaneously pushes us to consider the role that healing plays in Black youth's approach to social media activism, and how communally constructed counter-spaces help foster racialized wellness for youth activists both on and offline.
4. *The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge:* CRTT in education recognizes that the lived experiences of People of Color are legitimate and critical to understanding the current condition of educational inequity (Pérez Huber, 2009; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) and sociotechnical oppression (Tanksley, 2019). In the content of this study, this tenet enables us to center the everyday experiences, healing practices, and sociotechnical funds of knowledge of young Black social media activists.
5. *The Interdisciplinary Perspective:* CRTT actively integrates race and racism within a sociotechnical context by drawing upon scholarship from ethnic studies, feminist theories, communication studies, digital humanities, and critical science and technology studies (Tanksley, 2016; 2019; 2023a). For the purpose of this study, we draw upon a growing body of Black feminist and critical race technology studies, as well as a growing body of healing justice scholarship in education, psychology, and social work.

Ultimately, a thorough analysis of social media activism for Black youth requires a more complicated approach to digital healing and resistance that can highlight how social media

platforms help, heal, and hinder youth activists in new and familiar ways. Such an analysis would move past one-dimensional examinations of social media as a democratic equalizer to make clear the prevalence and permanence of white supremacy within, beneath, and beyond the computer screen. By leveraging the power of CRTT and healing justice, this study strives to contribute to a nuanced body of youth activism scholarship and foster more liberating and restorative experiences for young Black activists both on and offline.

METHODS

This qualitative study focuses on the socio-technical insights of 25 self-identified Black and Afro-descendant high school students from 11 schools across Southern California. Students were recruited for the study through their participation in a culturally relevant college-bridge program at a large public university in Southern California. As a part of their participation in the residential bridge program, students were required to complete a five-week critical race technology course, which was taught by the first author. After completing the course, students completed semi-structured interviews with the first author about their experiences with and perspectives on technology before and after the course.

Interviews with students were semi-structured, lasted around 60 minutes, and focused on the following subtopics: students' experiences with digital activism (e.g., "Have you ever used social media to engage in social justice activism? What sorts of topics do you post about and why?"); their encounters with racially traumatizing content (e.g., "Have you ever seen racially traumatizing content online?" "What sorts of content do you consider to be racially traumatizing?"); their experience with interpersonal or algorithmic racism (e.g., Have you ever seen, heard about or personally experienced racism online? Was the source of that racism a person or an algorithm?); the effects of experiencing race-related stressors online (e.g., "When you see racially traumatizing content, how does that make you feel" "What, if any, are the mental health effects of experiencing the digital racism you discussed?"); and the ways they attempted to cope with or heal from digital trauma (e.g., "How do you heal from racial trauma online?" "Are there spaces online where you can go to for relief or support?").

We utilized a Black feminist and critical race approach to thematic analysis (Noble, 2016), which allowed us to use our outsider-within status (Collins, 1986) to unearth intersectional nuances within the data. After collecting, transcribing, and cleaning the transcripts, we engaged in open-coding, which enabled themes to organically emerge "from the bottom up" (Merriam, 2009). We simultaneously leaned on our theoretical and onto-epistemological expertise to identify four units of analysis, including activism, digital trauma, mental health, and coping.

As we continued to code, we found that these units of analysis became much more nuanced and pronounced, and we had bi-weekly team meetings to discuss our preliminary insights on how these categories were expanding and collapsing. Eventually, we approached data saturation, and went back into the data to code more specifically around three main themes.

FINDINGS

Three main findings emerged related to digital racism, mental health, and racialized healing for Black youth online: (1) engaging in social media activism exposes youth to racially traumatizing content; (2) constant exposure to racially traumatizing content has a range of mental health consequences; and (3) Black youth employ race-conscious and culturally situated strategies of healing to navigate and survive digital racism.

Engaging in Social Media Activism Exposes Youth to Racially Traumatizing Content

As the youth in this study used social media to engage in social justice activism, they were regularly confronted with racially traumatizing content and sentiments online. For instance, after explaining how she posts a lot of racial justice content on her stories, Kamryn notes that her newsfeed is often rife with images of Black people dead and dying. She recalls a slew of graphic murders, saying:

Recently, there was this guy, I do not remember his name, but he got shot in front of his kids, something like that ... And then, recently I've been seeing posts about how this white guy shot ... He was 17, I think, and he shot two protestors, and they haven't done anything about that yet I think. Meanwhile, another guy that was like, not armed, nothing, he just got shot in front of his kids, so I feel like that's one of the many things I've seen involving racism on [social media].

For Olivia, witnessing viral images of Black people dead and dying was particularly traumatizing. She recalls:

There was this one video that was sort of traumatizing. It also involved police and a Black man. He was trying to wiggle away when they were restraining him. One of them, even though they were restraining him, they took out their gun. One of them took out their gun and shot him twice. Shooting him twice made him die.

Christopher captures the pervasiveness of Black death and dying, noting, "I'd say it's been tough, especially from the start, with Ahmaud Arbery, then to Breonna Taylor, to George Floyd. It's been tough to see Black lives continuing to be devalued and killed at rates that were absolutely unjust." Zaria often feels like she can't escape Black death and dying online, and points to the role that suggested content plays in her overexposure to the content. She states:

I see [Black death] a lot on my timeline and on my feed on Instagram and then also on my suggestions, topics page, I always see a lot of different things as well. Just the other day I seen a video of ... I think it was a Black man getting shot by a cop. It blocks it out, but I see it.

Although students felt saddened or angered by images of Black death and dying, they simultaneously felt compelled to engage with these conversations because they felt it was a necessary part of activism. Mike notes:

For me, I know that at the beginning of all of this, I posted something to a couple of my Instagram accounts, just speaking in support of all of these things and giving the reasons as to why we're fighting. And I did that by way of song lyrics. I quoted a few songs that I like a lot that sort of talk about just the fight and what it means to be Black in America, which is to fight, just talking about those. For me, that was honestly all I did for it, and the reason that I didn't do much past that was because

my mental health is just so bad. I really wish that I could do more, but I'm just not mentally there for it. That's something that I sort of struggle with because along with that comes this feeling of guilt because I know that I have a voice and I know that I should be participating in these things, but I just physically cannot bring myself to engage in that on such a deep level.

Unfortunately, Mike was not alone, and multiple other students felt similarly compelled to continually engage in “the fight” despite desperately needing to opt out and “take a break” for the sake of their mental health. Zaria captures the guilt and subsequent pressure that many of the youth in this study experience when wanting to opt out of “the fight” for justice online, saying:

Honestly, it's heartbreaking and I don't even watch the videos all the way. I'll see a little bit, I'm like, “Oh, I already know what's going to happen.” So I'll click out of it. But then days later, it'll be a big topic and it's like, “Oh my gosh, let me go back and see what actually happened because I didn't see everything and people are talking about it.” ... So it's like, “Oh, let me just watch this, let me see what's going on.” But, I don't know. My thoughts on watching the videos have changed because people keep posting it. I don't know if it's a right word to say, “interested,” because no one wants to be interested in seeing someone die. I don't know how to say it, but I want to watch it because it's a topic and it's really bad and everybody's posting it and it's just like that.

Zaria's comment sheds light on two crucial, under-analyzed features of racial justice activism online: an unstated social pressure for Black youth to be involved and “up to date” on racial justice activism, and how that pressure is linked to the virality and hyper-visibility of racially traumatizing content.

Constant Exposure to Racially Traumatizing Content has a Range of Mental Health Impacts for Black Youth

Whether due to automated content suggestions, viral hashtags, or in-network friends posting trending content, the youth in this study had a hard time escaping distressing content online. In fact, over-exposure to content documenting Black oppression and suffering – even if it was shared with the intention to raise awareness or promote racial justice – had a slew of mental health effects for the youth activists in this study. For instance, Angel recalls seeing an uptick in socially conscious digital content during the 2020 uprisings, including posts about the historical roots of racist policing, statistics depicting Black men's disproportionate death at the hands of police, and news stories containing inflammatory responses about George Floyd's death by conservative hate groups. Experiencing all of this race-related content was distressing, and Angel admits: “When I first saw stuff, I was just like, ‘Dang.’ For a moment, I was a little stunned ... I have friends who, for sure, had to take breaks from social media. From talking to people, some people were really going through it.” Likewise, Patricia says:

I know, like in the beginning with George Floyd, when it was just circulating and people were seeing the video, I cried watching the video because it is just so heartbreakingly that people get away with this types of stuff ... There's so many other innocent minorities and Black people that go through this and it was just truly heartbreakingly and I have anxiety and I suffered with depression a little bit. So it was all just a lot on my plate at the moment.

Kamryn feels similarly, noting that the constant influx of information about anti-Black racism in nearly every facet of US society – health care, housing, education, criminal justice and more – is not only overwhelming, but it can feel debilitating. She states:

I feel like [seeing racially distressing content] really damages us because we constantly keep ... It gives us this feeling of the government, and all of that is not made for us.

They're oppressing us, and they're just totally against us. And then, even when we keep on trying to get through to them and be like, "Hey, we're human beings too," they still don't acknowledge that. So I feel like that just really traumatizes people.

Brittany echoes these sentiments and reiterates the compounded trauma of seeing videos of Black people dead and dying, stating, "Seeing those videos, revisiting trauma. Black people suffer from current traumatic stress disorder, where we are consistently living that same experience, where we're continuously seeing Black death, and being desensitized to it."

For many participants, constantly bearing witness to and learning about the landscape of anti-Black racism made them feel overwhelmed, hopeless, and unsure of how to cope with their race-based digital trauma. In describing his experiences with seeing anti-black racism online, Ashton explains:

It really upsets me because it's been going on ever since I was a kid, basically. So, I guess just something that keeps repeating on and on and it doesn't seem to be slowing down or getting any better. So, it kind of just upsets me a lot and puts me in a bad mood.

For Wesley, who encounters a wide range of racially distressing media posts, including racially insensitive comments, live footage capturing racist interactions, and posts that share distressing statistics for the goal of raising consciousness, being online can pose significant challenges for his mental health. He explains:

All this stuff isn't really doing good to my mental health if I'm being real honest. At the start, I was feeling pretty depressed ... There's no rest day for stuff in our country. If it's not stuff happening with Trump, then it's the virus or if it's not the virus then it's police shootings. If it's not that then it's some white person shooting something. It just feels like there's always something bad happening and that's pretty tough to see when there's no good things happening on the news or stuff like that. So, I would definitely say that it affected my mental health ... I've lost my optimism I guess you could say for the world and the country. I didn't really have any, but it's definitely lost because of all this."

Likewise, Bryson admits that being constantly exposed to racially charged content through his friends, his trending topics, or his suggested ads adversely affects his mood. He notes:

I always get really angry, and just really sad and scared ... Just a lot of emotion, but I don't know what to do with this. So I'm just like ... I don't know what to do. But I see this, and I feel awful, but I don't know how to deal with that emotion, I don't know how to put it.

Importantly, the interviews revealed a distinct sense of hopelessness and palpable exhaustion among the youth, who often struggled to articulate, process, and ultimately heal from the ramifications of anti-Black racism and algorithmic oppression online.

Black Youth Enact Race-conscious and Culturally Situated Strategies for Healing from Anti-Black Racism

As a direct response to racial trauma, the youth in this study employed multi-faceted coping strategies that traversed digital and analog spaces and focused on healing in individual and communal ways. When asked whether or not they use social media to engage in healing and mental health support, the youth in this study gave a resounding “no”, explaining that social media is largely unable to support racialized healing for Black youth. Wesley captures this collective sentiment, explaining:

There’s not one part [of social media] where you can completely just de-stress. There’s always stuff happening in the world so there’s no point where I feel like, “Man, let me just go on Twitter and see something nice to like.” My timeline is crazy but there’s no safe place I guess that I can really go to because everything is happening.

Consequently, the very first step that youth often took to remediate racialized digital trauma was to disconnect from social media to focus on reclaiming and restoring their physical body. For Jackie, dancing provides an invaluable opportunity for healing. She explains, “I love to dance and so I find a lot of joy in dancing at home. I’m alone and I’m dancing to different music that I love … It’s just like dancing makes me feel really good.” For Angel, engaging in rest and relaxation apart from social media plays an important role in healing. He notes, “I’ve been keeping pretty much on my sleep schedule. If I had nothing to do, I’ll go to sleep, but I’m not going to stay up at night and watch TikToks.” Bryson finds similar ways to disconnect from social media and reconnect with his body. He shares:

Skateboarding is really important to me. I’m not good at it, but it’s like I want to know physical exhaustion and not thinking about anything, just focusing and trying to do this trick even if I don’t get it that day. It’s just something I would select to focus on. It’s really cool.

For Carson, ancestral approaches to healing the body have proved to be particularly helpful. He notes that he’s been:

learning all this stuff, learning to breathe. I didn’t used to know how to really breathe and exhale and make sure my stress goes with it. [I’ve been] drinking smoothies that help me with my body as well. [A Black girl mentor] put me onto this Aztec secret face mask thing, too.

Although a majority of students in this study identified social media as a racially traumatizing space, they nevertheless found themselves leveraging race-conscious and culturally-specific digital enclaves as necessary sites of communal healing. For instance, Jackie explains that although social media writ large can be a racially traumatizing space, Black affinity spaces can be particularly rejuvenating. She explains:

Going on Instagram and seeing all these images and all the injustice, it’s just so much. But for me, I think why I feel less affected by my mental health is that I try to go on Black Twitter and be uplifted by a Black community, and going on different Hispanic sites because I’m Guatemalan, so I love reading about my culture. I think just trying to find the light in this not a great time has been what’s keeping me feeling better so I’m looking for spaces that are going to amplify that good feeling inside. As well, I’m not just looking at the injustice and I’m not just trying to solve that, I have a space for relaxation and rest.

Likewise, Bryson recalls the joy and humor of engaging in Black Twitter, explaining “I spend half of the day looking at memes and just die [laughing].” Kamryn also uses social media to engage in joy and laughter, noting, “Just looking at memes in which there’s funny videos, and there’s also fun stuff definitely on the media, so that helps you sometimes just to sit back and laugh basically.”

When asked about their motivations for using social media to engage in joy, laughter, and humor, participants placed these practices into a rich history of Black resistance. Brittany shares:

I use laughter as a way to cope with traumatic situations, and that is something that is often used within the Black community. There are so many times within my life that I can think about times where I’m like, “Man, I should not really be laughing at that, but it’s hilarious in my head.” It might not be that way to other people. Because literally, I think it influenced the title that I had [for a final paper], which was “Laughter Is the Best Medicine for Black Girls Who Don’t Cry.”

Jackie also engages in collective coping through laughter and humor online. She notes:

Talking to my friends who I know who love me and we’re supporting each other, and we talk about the injustices that we see, but we’re still having fun, laughing about different topics. And going on Instagram and seeing all my beautiful Black melanated friends and posting their pictures. I’m like, “Oh, this is what we love to see.” We’re not being stopped because of racism. We’re not shying away, [but instead] tapping into what our culture is. I love to see that and that’s what really makes me feel good on the inside … Communicating with people and going on Instagram or Twitter and talking to my friends, or even talking to people that I don’t really know. It’s just really nice to be filled with that good feeling on the inside.

Ultimately, although the youth in this study encountered profuse instances of digital racism and anti-Blackness, they nevertheless found ways to leverage race-conscious and culturally situated healing strategies that helped them navigate and survive digitally mediated trauma.

DISCUSSION

For the students in this study, social media was a complex site of activist potential and racial exhaustion. The youth in this study regularly used words like “necessary” and “important” to describe the role that social media played in racial justice activism, but simultaneously used “traumatizing”, “racist”, and “stressful” to describe their experience engaging in activism on these same platforms. Eric captures this complex duality when he notes:

I would go on Twitter and just type different stuff, how I felt about the situation. So that allowed me to express my thoughts and stuff like that … So, I feel like that was good, but it just made me just realize how trapped I was. It wasn’t really that good for my mental health at all because I seen a lot of [racialized content] It just felt weird because everybody around was like [sharing race-based content]. I just felt like I was an adult dealing with all this different messed up stuff on the side and I couldn’t really do nothing. I just felt weird because I was angry and “what should I do?” type of thing.

The findings of this study echo current scholarship detailing the myriad of mental health concerns that arise from encountering distressing content and hostile experiences online. For instance, the youth participants reported mental health struggles that are in line with current

scholarship, including sleeplessness, anxiety, depression, and chronic worry (Coyne et al., 2020; Odgers and Jenson, 2020). These findings also echo scholarship detailing the emotional and psychological strain that digital activism can have on youth activists, who often report increased levels of racial battle fatigue and activist burn-out as a result of heavy participation in politicized conversations and collective organizing online (Conner et al., 2021; Tanksley, 2019; 2022). Additionally, the student narratives in this study exposed anti-blackness as a distinct and pervasive form of online racism, which places Black users at a unique risk for encountering racially distressing digital content and developing related mental health concerns (Tao and Fischer, 2021; Volpe et al., 2021). This finding supports Del Toro and Wang's (2022) scholarship, which found that Black youth not only suffer disproportionate rates of anxiety and depression as a result of online racism compared to other racial groups surveyed, but that the effects of these interactions are more significant and longer lasting.

Although there is a growing body of scholarship denoting the mental health consequences of encountering racially traumatizing content online (Maxwell, 2016; Perkins et al., 2022), this research adds important nuance to this body by broadening the scope of what Black youth consider to be "racially distressing" experiences or "trauma-including" content online. In addition to graphic videos of Black people dead and dying, the youth in this study also identified racist slurs and sentiments, shadowbanning and biased content moderation practices, and the inability to escape race-related content in their suggested content feeds as primary causes of their mental health struggles. Importantly, the types of content identified as "racially distressing" were broad in terms of their assumed intent, and youth felt overwhelmed by the cumulative weight of race-based content rather than the intended purpose of individual posts.

This means that digital content meant to harm (e.g., posts using racist slurs to discuss George Floyd), to entertain (e.g., videos of comedians trying to make light of racism in America), to organize (e.g. crowdsourcing accounts meant to raise funds for just causes), to educate (e.g., posts detailing the historic roots of racist policing) and/or to inform (e.g., news stories providing live trial updates) contributed to a racially distressing *digital environment*, and youth often felt overwhelmed by the inability to "fully escape" or disconnect from topics of race, racism and white supremacy online. This finding is important, as it broadens the scope of "racially distressing content" to include content that is shared with good or even activist intentions.

While the extant literature has documented the impacts of hostile interactions at the user level, including comment trolling or cyberbullying (Okumu et al., 2020; Urano et al., 2020; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2007), this study adds important considerations about algorithmic processes that mediate youth mental health. In addition to encountering distressing content posted by in-network friends, the youth in this study struggled to navigate racially biased algorithmic processes, including suggested content, sponsored ads, and trending topics, that left them over-exposed and hyper-vulnerable to racially distressing content and experiences. In many cases, youth didn't have to actively search out, click on, or interact with race-based posts to see a steadily increasing amount of racialized content on their profiles. Consequently, the youth in this study reported feeling anxious, depressed, scared, angry, hopeless, and helpless after encountering vast amounts of racially distressing content online.

While the perils of social media for Black youth remain high with repeated exposure to racially distressing content and experiences, this research simultaneously denotes the incredible ways Black youth are reclaiming and recreating digital spaces that foster joy, restoration, and healing from racialized violence. As a direct response to racial trauma, the youth in this study employed self-care and coping strategies that used culturally situated and

community-oriented strategies to heal the individual self. These strategies often focused on healing the body (e.g., exercise, dancing, smoothies), the mind (e.g., unplugging, sleeping, breathing), and the soul (e.g., prayer, laughter, joyful hobbies). Black Twitter was identified by multiple participants as an important source of joy and laughter, and participants regularly cited Black cultural content, including memes, GIFs, and “clapback” threads as indispensable sources of racialized healing.

Together, CRTT and healing justice highlight the various ways these digital counter-spaces engage in restoration, resistance, and reclamation, and emphasize the historic importance of humor as healing and joy as resistance in Black digital communities (Brock, 2020). Importantly, the healing strategies shared by youth in this study provide a preliminary glimpse into just how powerful and important race-conscious digital media spaces can be for Black youth’s mental health and digital wellness.

Leveraging CRTT to Expose Algorithmic Oppression

Youth encountered a range of race-related stressors, including race-based trolling, digital harassment, content moderation, and over-exposure to graphic or violent images. Though the participants felt that this type of racially distressing content was “important to see”, they simultaneously felt overwhelmed by the sheer volume of race-based content that evidenced Black suffering and oppression. Participants often found it improbable and even impossible to move through social media platforms without encountering distressing content, and consequently felt compelled to engage when content “went viral” or came up in their “suggestions pages”. This finding is important, and stands apart from conventional scholarship suggesting that Black youth endure higher rates of online racial discrimination and sustain higher rates of mental health concerns as a result of *racially or culturally motivated user behaviors*, such as spending more time online, seeking out race-related content more regularly, and engaging in high rates of intragroup racial dialogue. Quite differently, this study shows that *algorithmic racism* is a primary catalyst for Black youth’s distressing experiences online. That is, the presence of anti-black infrastructures, including racially biased content moderation algorithms, platform monetization systems, and machine learning algorithms that determine rank and visibility of content according to racialized profit motives (Noble, 2018b; Tanksley, 2022; 2023b) play a definitive, yet largely invisible role in shaping the digital environment that Black youth navigate when they log online.

Here, CRTT can provide critical insight into this phenomenon by placing content virality, automated content suggestions, and algorithmically curated “timelines”, “newsfeeds”, and “Explore pages” into a larger matrix of algorithmic oppression. As a digital microcosm of offline racial logics, anti-blackness exists as the default setting and organizing logic of digital technology (Benjamin, 2019), and racially disparaging content is often “pushed to the top of the information pile” because of its historically-anchored popularity and profitability (Noble, 2014). Historically, the state-sanctioned killing of Black people has always been a wildly popular form of entertainment, and white patrons would often pay top dollar to attend showcases of Black death and dying, including public lynchings and Mandigo fights. CRTT recognizes how these historic practices have been digitally updated and identifies digital interest convergence as the reason social media platforms can hyper-circulate graphic, modern day lynchings and simultaneously block content meant to interrogate white supremacy – all while purporting to be “democratic” and “race neutral”. In the era of Big Tech, machine learning

algorithms quietly ensure that most grotesque, racially violent, and “click worthy” content is competitively priced, easily found, and readily accessible via keyword auctions and content monetization programs. Research into the inner workings of virality and content moderation make this reality increasingly clear, and according to Google Trends, the state-sanctioned killings of Black Americans are some of the most popular search queries in Google’s history (Tanksley, 2023b). Whether it’s George Floyd, Philando Castile, or Eric Brown, the most popular keyword searches for victims of police brutality are always the same: death video, chokehold, shooting video, dead body (Tanksley, 2023b). Here we can see the monetary incentives for viral Black death begin to emerge: when images of Black people being killed by police garner over 2.4 million clicks in 24 hours, and the average “Cost per click” for related content can range from \$1–\$6 per click, the virality of Black death is not only incentivized, but nearly guaranteed.

The virality of Black death is further ensured by racially disparate content moderation policies, which are often designed in ways that protect – rather than deter – anti-black racism and hate speech. For instance, leaked content moderation training manuals from Facebook show that “white males” were identified as a protected category that should be shielded from hate speech, but that “Asian women” and “Black children” were subgroups that did not require similar protections (Angwin et al., 2017). As ProPublica writes:

Facebook deletes curses, slurs, calls for violence and several other types of attacks only when they are directed at “protected categories” ... It gives users broader latitude when they write about “subsets” of protected categories. White men are considered a group because both traits are protected, while female drivers and black children, like radicalized Muslims, are subsets, because one of their characteristics is not protected.

By these rules, a post admonishing white men for murdering Black people would immediately be flagged as hate speech, while race and gendered slurs against Black youth would be upheld as “legitimate political expression”. With these racial logics at the forefront, it is not altogether surprising why the youth in this study feel over-exposed to and under-protected from racially distressing content and experiences online.

By exposing the inner working of algorithmic oppression and the dissemination of racially traumatizing content as technological microaggressions (Tanksley, 2022), CRTT reveals the emotional labor and associated trauma that Black youth endure when attempting to organize against racial oppression within anti-Black digital environments, and the urgency to create sustainable, long-lasting systems of support and healing within and by way of digital technology (Schueller et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

The present study’s use of CRTT offers important contributions to the field by illuminating how anti-Black algorithms – not the individual actions or usage statistics of users – determine Black youth’s exposure to racially traumatizing content and interactions online. This is a crucial finding because it means that Black youth don’t have to actively seek out or engage with race-based content *or* spend more than a couple of minutes online to be exposed to racially distressing content at disorienting rates. The implications of this are far-reaching and stand apart from extant literature that prioritizes altering the behaviors and actions of youth

online as a protective factor against racism; instead, it argues that a vitally important step to addressing youth mental health online is to make systemic, structural change to algorithmic underpinnings of social media, including data mining, learning algorithms, and content moderation processes. Until anti-blackness is abolished as the central, organizing logic of social media and internet technology (Noble, 2018a; Benjamin, 2019), then Black youth will continue to be at significant risk of online racial discrimination and mental health consequences.

Finally, the youth stories shared in this chapter echo current scholarship documenting the socioemotional effects of anti-black racism, and the need for structural changes to both mental health supports and social media platforms that can protect and support Black youth and social media activists. As our research shows, digital platforms are not systemically equipped to sustain or promote long-standing or holistic healing due to algorithmic racism and digital anti-Blackness. Yet, through their creativity and ingenuity, Black youth are surviving these oppressive systems and structures by embodying old and new traditions of Black fugitivity that create transformative – albeit temporary – ruptures in the dissemination of traumatizing content. Future scholarship should continue to explore how Youth of Color are navigating, surviving, and thriving within anti-Black digital systems, and also how they dream up, design, and deploy alternative platforms that support Black life and living within its content, its user interface, and its algorithmic infrastructure.

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20. Political context and Russian youth: the political socialization of young activists under authoritarianism

Svetlana Erpyleva

From 2017 to 2020 not just youth but minors, people under 18, started to be heroes of a public discussion about protest politics in Russia. In 2017 and after, minors suddenly became visible at the anti-regime oppositional protests. How did adolescents, who were coming of age in a depoliticized and authoritarian society, become interested in anti-regime politics? The question of how political views, attitudes, and preferences are formed is addressed within the area known as political socialization research. It brings us many valuable insights into the political aspects of the growing-up process but still suffers from several shortcomings. It is mainly conducted in Western democracies, based on quantitative data, and focused on norms' acquisition rather than practical attitudes' formation. This chapter contributes to overcoming some of these shortcomings. By relying on qualitative data from Russia, I pose a question of *how exactly* the political socialization of adolescents in authoritarian society leads to their interest in anti-regime politics.

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION RESEARCH: LITERATURE REVIEW

Within social movement studies, scholars identify various factors that lead people to activist involvement (for a review of approaches and factors see, for example, Grasso et al., 2018). Some of the heroes of this chapter, politically active adolescents in Russia, were involved in "movements", that is, long-term activist projects with an organizational structure, while others simply visited anti-regime rallies. All of them though became highly interested in protest politics during their socialization; in other words, they became politicized. The goal of this chapter is not to explain their decision to take part in a protest/movement but to analyze how they politicized gradually during their growing-up process. To do that, I turn to the theoretical frameworks and empirical findings of political socialization research. Cognitive scholars argue that a profound shift in the character of political thought begins in adolescence, and that to be fully able to reason about politics in conceptual/abstract terms, an individual must often face politics during his or her growing-up process (Adelson, 1971; Keating et al., 2011; Nieuwelink et al., 2017). How does this happen?

First of all, family plays a crucial role in the political socialization of individuals. Parents transmit political attitudes to children, both directly and indirectly (Jennings et al., 2001; Niemi and Sobieszek, 1977; Quintelier et al., 2007; Wasburn and Adkins Covert, 2017). Political and even community participation of parents as well as political discussions in the family during childhood serve as strong predictors of children's engagement in politics (Ainley and Schulz, 2011; Quintelier et al., 2007; Quintelier, 2015; Wasburn and Adkins Covert, 2017). When

children disagree with parents' opinions and question adults' points of view, they also learn necessary skills for future civic and political engagement (Almond and Verba, 1963; Flanagan and Gallay, 1995).

Educational institutions are other important agents of political socialization. Civic education lessons, exposure to political discussion in the classroom, and school activism may positively affect further voting practices and various forms of civic engagements of individuals (Campbell, 2008; Conner, 2011). The availability of political organizations in high schools and universities, new connections and relationships make it a particularly fruitful context for various political influences, especially among peers (Isaacs, 2021; Memon et al., 2018; Sherkat and Blocker, 1994). Additionally, participation in volunteer/ community-based/ youth organization in adolescence raises the chances of people being politically active as young adults (Hanks, 1981; Kedem and Bar-Lev, 1989; McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Verba et al., 1995).

New media – social networks, YouTube, etc. – gradually replace family as the main political socialization agent (Bernardi et al., 2022) and sometimes revolutionize political socialization patterns of youth (Seongyi and Woo-Young, 2011; Wasburn and Adkins Covert, 2017). They offer a pathway to activism to those not affected by traditional institutions of political socialization, for example, low-income youth of color (Conner and Slattery, 2014; Maher and Earl, 2019). Young people, socialized by new media, may be more interested in politics and more willing to participate in it compared to those mainly socialized by other agents (Bernardi et al., 2022).¹

Political socialization occurs not only under the influence of particular socialization agents but also in a particular context with its political events, news agenda, and so on. Children, like adults, actively react to political events and change their views with changing political contexts (Niemi and Sobieszek, 1977). Such events may generate dispositions that persist into later life stages (Haug, 2017; Valentino and Sears, 1998). Intense political struggle in a society and the contestation of ideas in public discussion positively affect the future political participation of young people, through their political socialization (Grasso et al., 2018; Pacheco, 2008). Children who come of age in more politicized periods become more politically engaged as young adults (Grasso et al., 2018).

However, the political socialization paradigm is criticized for a functionalist view of politics, an abstracted view of the person, and for its focus mainly on the acquisition of norms that are not directly translatable into practice (Owen, 2008).² It targets participation in party politics, thereby usually ignoring socialization into movement politics (Petrović et al., 2014). The quantitative methods are overrepresented in political socialization research, and qualitative mechanisms of change in people's attitudes as well as the specificity of children's thinking are studied more rarely (Nieuwelink et al., 2017). Finally, most political socialization research is conducted in Western democracies (Owen, 2008; Petrović et al., 2014), although it can be assumed that in non-democratic societies political socialization processes will differ.

In this chapter, I aim at overcoming some of these shortcomings. Based on in-depth interviews with adolescent participants in anti-regime protest politics in authoritarian Russia, I explore the qualitative *mechanisms* of their political socialization. *How* did particular socialization agents contribute to their politicization process? *How* did these young people become interested in anti-regime politics in a society where "politics" is considered to be an adult business and oppositional politics is seen as "senseless" and risky? I argue that the political socialization of these adolescents was shaped by a quickly politicizing context of their

growing-up process, of the environment in which they have been coming of age. Only through the politicization of this environment did other socialization agents – such as new media, peers, school, etc. – acquire their own politicizing roles.

THE CASE: PROTEST POLITICS AND CHILDREN IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

In December 2011 the biggest nationwide mass mobilization since the early 1990s took place in Russia: the so-called For Fair Election (FFE) movement. Thousands of people in big Russian cities protested against the falsified parliamentary election results, and later, against Putin personally. While not accomplishing its explicit goals, the movement still changed civil society and politics in Russia: it made oppositional politics a more familiar genre to people, but it also led to increased repression of activists (Zhuravlev et al., 2020).

The new wave of the nationwide anti-regime protests took place in 2017 when popular opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his team released a video (titled “He is not Dimon to you”) that accused Dmitry Medvedev, then acting prime minister, of corruption. The video went viral, produced mass discontent among the people, and provoked protests. At the same time, Navalny announced his intention to run as a candidate in the upcoming presidential election of 2018, and dozens of regional headquarters promoting his campaign (but also developing anti-regime and local politics) were opened throughout the country in 2017–2018. Various anti-regime rallies and mobilizations around local problems with anti-regime claims continued to occur in 2018, 2019, and 2020 until peaking in 2021 as the third nationwide wave of mass anti-regime protests fueled by the arrest and imprisonment of Alexei Navalny.

The decade in Russia between 2011 and 2021 was also characterized by the strengthening of the regime’s authoritarian nature and worsening repression toward civil society. Between 2012 and 2020, the government enacted more than 50 laws that violated human rights and contradicted the Russian constitution (Vorozheykina, 2018), some of them specifically aiming at preventing minors’ participation in anti-regime politics. With the regime becoming more authoritarian, the state rhetoric on children and childhood became more conservative; children, their well-being, education, and loyalty were presented as crucial for the state. Unsurprisingly, this narrative emphasized society’s need to “protect” children rather than children’s right to express their “own” attitudes. This was reflected in the public debate on children’s participation in the anti-regime protests since 2017. Despite adolescents representing only a small percentage of the protesters at anti-regime rallies (Khasov-Kasia, 2019), the pro-governmental media often called the rallies “protests of school children”, and the public were warned that “our silly children” were being used by “anti-Russian” politicians who were trying to achieve their “dirty” political goals.

Although adolescents and youth do not seem to be massively involved in oppositional politics in Russia (despite various concerns of the state), they have become more and more informed about protest politics, receptive to the so-called Western values and styles of life, more tolerant toward various minorities, and participate more in volunteer activities (Krawatzek, 2020; Krawatzek and Sasse, 2018; Volkov et al., 2020). During 2017–2020, the apoliticism of young people was gradually replaced by different forms of political interests (Obraz budushego, 2020). Youth culture and especially its online segment (e.g., social media networks, internet memes) also became more politicized (Moroz, 2020; Shomova, 2019).

DATA AND METHOD

This chapter is based on the analysis of in-depth biographical interviews with young people born between 2000 and 2006 and involved in the anti-regime protest politics in Russia between 2017 and 2020, before they turned 18. In total, I collected 37 such interviews, each lasting for 1.5–2 hours. Among my interviewees, there are people involved in oppositional politics in three different ways: some were members of the liberal youth movement “Vesna” (Spring), some were members of Navalny’s campaign headquarters, and some were not part of any organization but participated in anti-regime protest rallies. These types of involvement were not exclusive. Navalny’s headquarters and “Vesna” represent the most prominent and well-known oppositional organizations in the period in question, the latter being a youth movement (for people aged 14 to 30) and the former not being restricted by any age criteria. I interviewed 19 teenage activists from both movements, with 10 being only members of the headquarters, seven being only members of “Vesna”, and two being members of both. Additionally, 18 interviewees took part in the anti-regime rallies while not being members of any organization. There were 14 girls and 23 boys among all interviewees.

The search for the participants was organized in two ways. First, messages with an invitation to participate in the interview were sent to all members under 18 of several groups devoted to particular anti-regime rallies during the period in question on the VKontakte social network (the Russian version of “Facebook”). Second, I used my contacts with (adult) activists from the chosen organizations and asked them to recommend adolescent protesters for possible interviews (the “snowball” method). Some interviews were conducted offline, while others were online. In the period in question, 13 interviewees lived in St. Petersburg, three lived in Moscow, 12 lived in Tyumen, six lived in Chelyabinsk, and three others lived in Arkhangelsk, Perm, and Novosibirsk. The interview guide consisted of two parts: a biographical section and a section about political participation. All research participants were fully informed about the research goals, the methods of data anonymization used in the project, and how the research results would be distributed. As my research subjects were political activists in their late adolescence, I considered them competent to give their informed consent to participate in the research.

During the analysis, the interview data on the growing-up process of the interviewees was coded inductively with a focus on possible factors/agents of political socialization known from the literature. The presentation of results below is organized via the emergent codes.

RESULTS

Contrary to the expectations formed by the literature review, family does not seem to play an important role in the politicization process of my interviewees: while some of them have politically active parents, others do not. At the same time, communication with peers, new media, and schools contribute to the *gradual* growing political interest of many of them. This is a crucial difference of politicization process of this cohort of young activists that distinguish them, for example, from those adolescents who protested alongside adults in 2011–2012, and who politicized “*suddenly*”, a few months before their actual political participation (Erpyleva, 2020). My interviewees have been developing their interest in politics over several years, being affected by changes in the political environment around them. Below, I focus on

showing *how exactly* a particular event (e.g., the annexation of Crimea in 2014), a tendency (e.g., the politicization of meme culture), or a tool (e.g., YouTube) contributed to the growing political interest of these teenagers. In the end, I tell stories of three interviewees' gradual politicization during the growing-up process to illustrate how the identified factors work within particular biographies.

The FFE Movement (and Other Protests)

The For Fair Election (FFE) movement of 2011–2012 changed Russian civil society, harshening repression towards oppositional activists but, on the other hand, it normalized the very idea of protest. Young people born between 2000 and 2006 were too young to meaningfully experience the FFE protests at the time they took place, although some of them familiarized themselves with the movement a few years after. For example, one of the interviewees recounted that she watched videos from the FFE protests in 2014 when she became interested in politics, and “through the screen experienced some kind of unity, some kind of collectivity and belonging … belonging to a group” (f., age 17, Navalny’s headquarters, 2018).

Some interviewees shared their memories of the “castling” of Putin and Medvedev,³ protest rallies after the FFE movement, or the assassination of the oppositional politician Boris Nemtsov.⁴ Even when these events were not turning points in the interviewees’ politicization process (as most of them were still too young to be really interested in politics), they created a context of growing up with protest being a “normal” part of politics. For example, when talking about his childhood memories of events in Russia and abroad, one of the interviewees mentioned the TV coverage of the FFE movement, Euromaidan in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, and the assassination of Nemtsov. The latter became memorable because he had heard how his mother discussed it with her friend, and both were indignant about it. “This was something I remembered and thought about, maybe not for long and not really deep, but I gave it a thought,” he explained (m., age 16, Navalny’s headquarters, 2020).

Euromaidan and Crimea

However, the events that attracted the attention of more than half of all interviewees and, moreover, made many of them curious about politics, were the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine in 2013 and the following annexation of the Ukrainian Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation.

In November 2013, Ukrainian citizens took to the central square of Kyiv to protest against their authorities’ refusal to sign European alliance agreements. Following four months of demonstrations, Ukrainian President Yanukovich fled to Russia. Euromaidan – as the protests were called – won. Meanwhile, the insurgency started in eastern regions of Ukraine and soon led to a full-fledged war between the new Kyiv regime and the Donbass region of Ukraine, with Russia being unofficially involved on the anti-Kyiv side. In February 2014, the Russian military invaded the Crimean Peninsula without any military response from Ukraine, organized the so-called status referendum, and shortly after, formally incorporated Crimea.

These events were widely covered by Russian TV and often provoked heated discussions among relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Sometimes my interviewees would overhear such discussions and their curiosity would be instigated: is it really possible that something can lead a President to flee? How can a territory of one country become a territory of another country?

As one of the interviewees explained, “I was curious, how it happens that people joined another state. It seemed unusual for me. And also, I thought—we have such a big country, and why nobody disengages from us?” (m., age 17, oppositional rallies, 2020).

Other teenagers’ attention to the “Ukrainian crisis” was attracted by more “intellectual” interest. For example, schoolchildren interested in history realized that events similar to those described in their textbooks were actually happening around them. As a result, they began to follow these events, and became aware and interested in contemporary politics. Finally, some interviewees turned their eyes to the Ukrainian events because the latter affected their everyday lives. Favorite cheeses and fish disappeared from the family fridges (as a result of Western sanctions), savings for a new computer suddenly appeared to be insufficient (as a result of the ruble’s crash), and the refugees from the Donbass region of Ukraine became their new classmates (as a result of the war). These factors all made the teenagers ask questions about ongoing political processes, understand their reasons, and often search for the guilty.

Even when the protest rallies of 2012–2015 and the Ukrainian events did not directly provoke an interest in politics in the interviewees, they still created a context of growing up with opposition and protest being a “normal” part of it. The following quotation from an interview illustrates this idea well. In it, the interviewee starts the story of his politicization from the FFE movement and the events in Ukraine; however, these events serve as context of his growing up rather than the turning points of his politicization:

I became interested in politics even in the year 2011–12, but then I still did not understand much. But the For Fair Election protests, so at least in the media they looked interesting. I thought that, in principle, the demands were fair. In my childhood, I saw Ukrainian presidents, which at least changed, and I understood that this was a good thing. At the same time in Russia, it’s all Putin, Putin, now Medvedev came and Putin again—it’s no good. ... But I did not go into it at that time. Then Crimea happened, the same story. Well, I thought, well, here we go again, some sort of squabble between countries. But I did not go deep into all of this again. And that’s where high school starts. I started getting more into history and politics, watching and reading something of my own. (m., age 18, Vesna movement, 2020)

YouTube and the Rhetoric of the Opposition

One of the most important media through which the future politically active adolescents in Russia were affected by their politicized environment in 2012–2020 was the video platform YouTube. The popularity of the internet in general and YouTube in particular among Russian youth has been growing, and video blogging has been politicizing (Polylog, 2015). Teenagers who are active users of YouTube subscribed to a variety of channels, for example, those for entertainment or for general education (preparation for exams, popular science videos, and lectures). They could also simply “wander” on YouTube, watching videos that appeared in the recommendations section. In 2015–2017, the interviewees began increasingly to find videos of bloggers talking about politics in this section. Some of the teens viewed such videos and then subscribed to the bloggers. At some point, these bloggers started mentioning Alexei Navalny, thus opening a new world of opposition politics for these young people. After the mass anti-corruption protests of 2017, political themes began to slip into the speeches of “non-political” bloggers, such as, for example, the stand-up artists popular among teenagers. Sharing her experience of politicization, a teenage female interviewee said: “I used to watch Poperechny [a stand-up comedian] with my older sister. I watched his humorous perfor-

mances, stand up shows, and later, after subscribing to the channel, I saw that he often talks about politics, and I also started watching these talks" (f., age 16, Vesna movement, 2020).

YouTube itself can be considered one of the main "culprits" of teenagers' interest in Navalny. Certainly, some high school children learned about Navalny from other video bloggers, acquaintances, or even their parents – but the overwhelming majority of my interviewees simply opened this video with a strange and obscure title that kept popping up in the recommendations section. This, for example, is how one of the interviewees describes it:

Question: And how did you see this video, I mean, were you already interested in politics at the time, how did you even come across it?

Answer: There's, you know, just recommendations. YouTube's recommendations. I was not involved in politics, I was not interested in it at all, that is how much I, one might say, supported this regime before this clip, ... but I still had thoughts in my head that they were stealing everything, that our situation here becomes worse every year, and then I found this video. ... I do not even know why I got this recommendation. I did not watch any political videos, you know, only entertainment content. (m., age 17, oppositional rallies, 2018)

By watching the popular video, these teenagers rarely became supporters of Navalny immediately – but the video shocked many of the interviewees. They became outraged by the contradictions between the official image of a modest prime minister who cares about people's needs, as shown on TV, and his unconcealed, demonstrative wealth revealed in the video. They resented the hypocrisy of the prime minister and the corrupt state officials in general. Shocked, they started to search for additional information about corruption in Russia.

The videos of Navalny and the Anti-Corruption Foundation, an organization created by Navalny in 2011, in the way they were made, appealed to young people. They gave them a sense of belonging, a sense that things depend on them too, that they, not just adults, can effect the resolution of problems in Russia – and even an idea of how exactly this could be done:

For underage teenagers in Russia, Navalny probably gave the only means of interacting with the state, with the authorities, such as going to the rally, "liking" posts, reposting. That is, I realized that by watching each new video, I make a certain contribution. Of course, it is nominal; one view does not mean anything, but on the other hand, I simultaneously enrich myself with information, and, in accordance with my worldview, I do something good for Russia. (m., age 18, oppositional rallies, 2019)

In other words, Navalny used rhetoric more familiar and recognizable to the young people. For many young political activists in the near future, meeting Navalny on YouTube and other social media was the first turning point, the first push in their activist career. "When you start to be interested in politics, when you are young and understand nothing, Navalny is a very convenient instrument for your adaptation," said one of the interviewees, referring to her own story of politicization (f., age 16, Navalny's headquarters, 2020). At the time of our conversation in 2020, she was 16, and she had participated in many oppositional rallies, volunteered at Navalny's headquarters, changed her perception of Navalny to a more critical one, and became a feminist and an environmental activist.

Memes and Politicization of Youth Culture

Since 2017, not only video blogging, but youth popular culture in general has become more politicized. In particular, researchers note that memes that somehow use the figures of Navalny and Putin (or Ukrainian events of 2013–2014) gradually penetrated the culture of the youngest audience of internet users (Shomova, 2019). Importantly, the popularity of memes that used political events went beyond the politicized audience – many of my interlocutors told me that such memes appeared in their favorite (not political!) groups on the social network VKontakte, were found in school class chats, or were forwarded by friends to each other. In order to understand the language of such memes and sense exactly what to laugh at, teenagers needed a minimum familiarity with the political context: at the very least, knowledge of who Navalny is and what his “conflict” with Putin is all about.

Thus, in the case of some young people, their desire just to follow the trend led to the development of an interest in the activities of Navalny. An excerpt from an interview with a young female participant at one of Navalny’s regional headquarters demonstrates this process:

When there were still memes about “He’s not Dimon to you”, we would just send them to each other ... Well, I also stayed away from it for a long time, and at some point, I was on the bus on the way to my sports practice, and I was like, man, my whole feed is full of memes about Navalny. Well, I have to see what it is that is trending everywhere. ... [Before] I saw just, a guy sitting at a table, and it says at the bottom: “I’ll give you back hentai with lolis”.⁵ Like, “He is not Dimon to you”, “duck house”,⁶ things like that. I was like, okay, it’s politics, I’ll look at it later, when I have time. And then I had some free time while I was riding a bus to practice, I had an hour of time, I had the Internet, I watched this video [“He is not Dimon to you”], and I came to my practice ... And I was like, fuck, this is so hard! [laughter] I was like, this is too much information, I was like fourteen or thirteen at the time. ... I was like: Holy shit, this was all so carefully hidden, and here’s, like, the man figured it all out. I looked at other investigations, and then I joined Navalny’s headquarters (f., age 15, Navalny’s headquarters, 2018).

Other evidence of the politicization of youth culture in Russia in the period in question is the respect most peers of the interviewees showed towards the interviewees’ political interests. Protest politics did not seem to be something “weird” among many teenagers and was sometimes even perceived as a “cool” thing to be involved in. As one of the interviewees put it, “Well, among youth this oppositional attitude, it is especially popular, so there is nothing to really discuss with my friends, we are just like-minded people” (m., age 17, oppositional rallies, 2019). The story told by another interviewee demonstrates both the politicization of youth culture when protest politics is perceived as something worth trying and “cool”, and its effect on the interviewee’s peers and herself. When she was 15, two years before she joined the Vesna movement, she and her friends wandered around their town. One of the friends suggested checking out the recently opened Navalny’s headquarters in the town. The interviewee herself was not really interested in politics at the time – she had seen a couple of Navalny’s videos and knew who he was but nothing more. This is how she described what happened: “We were just taking a walk and passing it [Navalny’s headquarters], and my friends were like: ‘Oh, what is that? Navalny’s headquarters! Wow, let’s go in.’ ... I just liked the idea to go in the headquarters, to see something unusual, something oppositional.” (f., age 17, Vesna movement, 2020).

In other words, oppositional politics seemed to be “something unusual” but definitely “cool” to these teenagers who were not (at least, at the time) specifically interested in politics.

This “coolness” was both an outcome of the processes described above (protests becoming routine, politicizing of YouTube and social media, etc.) and a factor that itself contributed to the politicization of adolescents.

It should be noted though that the majority of my interviewees – including those who came into politics through trying to make sense of political memes – did not like the “*fashion*” for Navalny, rallies, and protests. They complained about the crowds of schoolchildren who visited Navalny’s headquarters only to take stickers and stick them on their skateboards, or who came to opposition rallies solely to post “fashionable” selfies on their social media. As one of the interviewees noted, “there were also people who, you know, just came for the sake of hype, for the sake of, well, this is a fucking Navalny rally, this is, like, a new rock star” (m., age 17, Navalny’s, November 2018). In this sense – a curious detail – the politically active minors themselves continued to consider political space as not being a proper place for “children”.

Politics in High Schools

Politics began to infiltrate high schools as well. Memes involving figures and events of contemporary Russian politics appeared in classroom chats, and students often joked about political topics. Most of my interviewees recalled conversations about Navalny, Putin, Crimea, and so on with their classmates, but emphasized that these conversations usually had the character of “banter” – ironic remarks that did not imply sympathy for one or another side:

It wasn’t a mass thing, I mean, we didn’t come to school and didn’t discuss, like, “Have you seen the investigation ‘He is not Dimon to you?’” But a few months after this video came out, after it had already gone around all kinds of sources of information, we probably started joking about Medvedev. I mean, … he’s the Prime Minister, but he has all these yachts and vineyards. We started joking about these yachts and vineyards, but in class, we didn’t have any serious political discussions with each other; we refrained from it. (m., age 17, oppositional rallies, 2019)

In order not to be left out and to be able to participate in banter and mocking with their friends and classmates, teenagers needed a basic awareness of current political events. Thus, an environment in which liking Putin is just not fashionable was reproduced.

Conversations about politics in high schools occurred with teachers as well. Quite often, the interviewees discussed the contemporary political system during social studies classes, expressing their opinions about the regime, the president, the opposition, and so forth. According to the interviewees, such conversations were encouraged by the teachers, who “loved their students” and “tried to understand them”, even if they themselves held different views. Many interviewees also remembered situations when teachers attempted to defend authorities in power but achieved, in a way, the opposite effect. For example, as the following excerpt from an interview shows, a teacher trying to instill “anti-Western” values in her students unwittingly contributed to the popularity of memes about Navalny:

Oh, there’s a technology and art teacher. … We were writing something in our notebooks, she was explaining something to us, and she was like, “Did you guys know that the United States is a nation of criminals and outlaws who escaped from Europe from justice?” Unexpectedly. We started just teasing her, laughing, like, “We’re in technology and art class; what’s your point anyway?” That, of course, was hilarious. Then after a while, when she started again, she said like: “Navalny is a monster!” We

just made a meme with each other, a joke like this: “Navalny is a monster!” It was hilarious, we were openly teasing her. (m., age 16, oppositional rallies, 2020)

Apart from the interviewee and his friend, none of the students in this technology and art class were interested in politics. However, the teacher’s insistence on imposing certain views, strange and outlandish in the eyes of the students, caused the latter’s mockery and irritation. As another interviewee explained: “Since we are from the same generation, we are closer to each other. We always took each other’s side in conflicts; that is, there was probably not a single case where in a conflict with teachers we took the side of the teacher.” (m., age 17, oppositional rallies, 2019).

In a sense, the policy of some schools (or individual teachers) aimed at preventing the political involvement of high school students may have led to the opposite result – the politicization of the very conflict between “young people” and “older teachers”, where solidarity with other youth also meant solidarity with the opposition against Russia’s authorities in power.

Stories of Politicization

Thus, as protest politics becomes more routine, youth culture becomes more politicized, and the rhetoric of the opposition becomes more attractive to young people, some of them developing a conscious interest in protest politics. However, even my interviewees, let alone politically active teenagers in the period in question in general, were not influenced by all of the factors of political socialization described above. A few specific stories of politicization, told from beginning to end, can give us a better idea of how the processes described above played out at the level of individual biographies of these young people.

For example, Ivan became a regular participant in oppositional rallies in 2017, at the age of 17. When he was 14, he discovered that his favorite fish (and some other foods) were missing from the family dinner table. Trying to understand what had happened, he found that the disappearance of a number of familiar foods was the result of a food embargo imposed by the Russian state in response to anti-Russian economic sanctions by Western countries, which in turn were a consequence of Russia’s annexation of the former Ukrainian territory, the Crimean Peninsula. Over the next few years, Ivan continued to follow the political news, and his political awareness increased. On the eve of 2017, he was already a regular reader of the so-called independent (i.e., mostly anti-government) Russian media and considered himself a holder of liberal political views. As soon as Navalny announced the first anti-corruption rally, Ivan knew that he would take part in it.

Ekaterina became a member of Navalny’s headquarters in late 2017 when she was 14 years old. Her interest in politics emerged at the age of 13 when she finally decided to figure out who this man was, the memes her friends were always laughing about. “The man” turned out to be oppositionist Alexei Navalny, who had recently published a video exposing Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev’s corrupt schemes. Impressed, the girl immediately shared the information with her best friend, together with whom she spent an entire evening watching a variety of political videos. Some time later, Ekaterina saw an announcement on social media (on which she had already subscribed to Navalny’s pages) about the opening of a politician’s headquarters in her city – and she joined the activists in the headquarters.

Pavel joined the youth movement Vesna in 2020 when he was 16. When Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, he was only 10, but he has a clear memory of these events. He

was a Russian patriot (in his own words) at the time and liked discussing “reunification with Crimea” and other geopolitical problems with his classmates. In 2017, at the age of 13, he continued “following the trends” and watched the “He is not Dimon to you” video, suggested by YouTube and already discussed by some of his peers. He realized that Navalny was right, Russian officials are all corrupt, and this worldview makes more sense than the “patriotic” one. He subscribed to oppositional bloggers and media on the internet and started following political news. At the age of 16, he felt that he wanted to do something as well and started looking for a political organization to join. His internet search led him to the local branch of the Vesna movement, which he joined shortly after.

In all three cases – as in the cases of most of my interviewees – the politicized environment of their growing up permeated their lives in different ways and directly affected their political socialization.

CONCLUSION

The young people in Russia born between 2000 and 2006 grew up in a politicized environment – at least, compared to the cohort of youth who were born in 1995–2000 and came of age before the FFE movement (Erpyleva, 2020). This environment affected them in several ways in order to make them anti-regime-minded and, later, politically active. In their early teens, they were able to hear about protests, revolutions, annexations of country’s territories, and other “big” (geo)political events happening around them – this instigated the children’s curiosity or at least provided them with a feeling that (protest) politics is something “normal”. When their favorite bloggers started to talk about oppositional politics, the famous Navalny video kept appearing in the recommendation section of YouTube, and their peers laughed about memes with Navalny, Crimea, Medvedev, and Putin – many of them “followed the trends” and “went deeper into this stuff”. Being shocked and impressed by the new information on corruption and injustice in Russia, they would turn to protest politics more seriously. The rhetoric of critique and demands, used by Navalny and the opposition, would help them to feel the power and the ability to actually influence things, despite their age.

My study confirms some insights from political socialization research conducted in Western democracies, although it also shows that the exact mechanisms of political socialization in authoritarian societies may be different. Thus, we know that political discussions in schools and in particular, in civic education lessons, positively affects adolescents’ future political participation in democratic countries (e.g., Campbell, 2008). In authoritarian Russia, where there are no civic education lessons in schools, similar discussions can be initiated by enthusiastic teachers – or even by students themselves, as a response to adults’ efforts to warn them against and prohibit potential sympathies to the political opposition. In a sense, finding good “mocking” arguments in response to a conservative pro-Putin teacher can simply look “cool” in the eyes of teenagers. Thus, high school may serve as an agent of political socialization in authoritarian Russia; however, it is not the curriculum that affects the students, but rather the school itself becomes a space permeated by politicized youth culture.

As in many other countries (e.g., Bernardi et al., 2022), in Russia new media became conductors of big political events in youth culture. It is harder to censor the new media compared to the traditional media; that is why the new media is an important tool for social movements, especially in non-democratic countries. In Russia, this is where popular bloggers talk about

politics using the rhetoric familiar to and resonating with adolescents, thus drawing their attention to political issues and giving them a sense of possibility to contribute to change.

Unlike in many democratic countries where the majority of political socialization research has been conducted, in Russia family does not seem to play a crucial role as an agent of socialization into protest politics. It can be assumed that if, in democratic societies, people can rely on various cues to form their opinions and then translate them to their children, in non-democracies, which strip many political cues of their meanings (e.g., Greene and Robertson, 2019), it is harder to form a stable system of political opinions that can be reproduced through family upbringing.

Apart from expanding political socialization research beyond Western democracies, my study focuses on identifying particular mechanisms of political socialization of young people, and not just its agents/factors. In other words, it answers the question of *how exactly* Russian teenagers became socialized into anti-regime politics. All the mechanisms taken together, though, indicate the crucial role of the politicized environment of the young people's growing up in their politicization process.

We must not forget that my interviewees are a politically active minority of young people in Russia. The aforementioned mechanisms of politicization did not affect the lives of many Russian teenagers. Talks about the events in Ukraine in 2014 remained boring adult talk for them, YouTube videos did not attract much of their attention, and memes about Navalny were ignored by them as "not funny enough" – or simple "banter" never escalating into something more. Nevertheless, thanks to big political events, rhetoric that resonates with young people used by opposition leaders, the proliferation and politicization of new media, and the consequent politicization of youth culture, protest politics became a "normal" part of socialization for at least some teenagers. As a result, politics has even penetrated places where it is "not supposed to be": the daily lives of children.

NOTES

1. It is important to keep in mind, though, that key agents/factors of political socialization mentioned above play different roles depending on the class, race, gender of socialized people (Almond and Verba, 1963; Quintelier et al., 2007; Wasburn and Adkins Covert, 2017).
2. What is criticized here is political socialization as a paradigm. There are researchers studying youth movements and activism and addressing issues of socialization as well in a non-functionalist, interpretative way, but these issues are not key in their research and they do not associate themselves with "political socialization" as a particular area.
3. This expression is used to describe the "job swap" between Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. After the two first terms of Putin's presidency came to an end in 2008, the former prime minister Medvedev became President, while Putin became prime minister. In September 2011, Putin announced that he would again run for the presidency in 2012, and Medvedev would return to the position of prime minister.
4. Boris Nemtsov was a Russian politician who opposed the government of Vladimir Putin. He was shot by an unknown assailant in Moscow in February 2015.
5. Navalny's figure has become a meme in the anime community as well. The phrase "I'll bring you back a hentai with lolis", quoted by the interviewee, belongs to a popular meme that was born in this community but has gone beyond its borders. The phrase is an ironic comment on the popular notion that once in power, Navalny will lift all bans. The phrase makes fun of this belief by including into bans Navalny's "promise" to lift those related to pornographic anime (*hentai*) with teenage girls ("lolis").

6. In one of the episodes of the “He is not Dimon to you”, the camera shows a pond in the grounds of the estate allegedly owned by (former) Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. A small island and a house can be seen in the center of the pond. The authors of the video add a “duck house” sign to this image. This expression later became a meme, and the duck became one of the symbols of anti-corruption protests.

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PART VI

EFFECTS OF YOUTH ACTIVISM ON THEIR INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY

21. “These are my greatest accomplishments”: how US youth activists frame their biggest wins

Oladimeji Fatoki, Amanda Galczyk, Christopher M. Wegemer, Laura Wray-Lake and Jerusha Conner

Young people, through their activism, can and do effect change at different scales. History provides numerous examples of how young people (including adolescents and young adults) have led social movements that have meaningfully advanced civil and human rights and racial and environmental justice on local, national, and global levels (Light, 2015; Rhoads, 1998). In addition to dramatic impacts on national policies, young people create social change in more informal and less visible ways, such as challenging dominant societal stereotypes about minoritized groups and educating peers on social and racial justice issues (Wilf and Wray-Lake, 2021).

Although several studies have provided valuable case examples of impactful campaigns or specific policy changes youth have achieved (e.g., Christens and Dolan, 2011; Conner et al., 2013; Delgado and Staples, 2008), rarely are youth activists themselves asked to describe what they see as their accomplishments and contributions. This exclusion of youth perspectives may reflect ageism inherent in adult attitudes towards the activism of youth (Liou and Literat, 2020). Using open-ended survey responses from 401 US youth activists enrolled in an organizing training sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), this study explores the range of impacts youth activists in the US have achieved, as told through their accounts of their biggest wins to date. Cataloging such wins represents an important step in documenting and understanding their impact.

BACKGROUND

Outcomes of Youth Activism

Examining the societal impacts of youth activism can contribute to a broader understanding of how youth play a meaningful role in social change. From a critical consciousness perspective (Watts et al., 2011), a central goal of youth activism is to improve the social and economic conditions that oppress and marginalize people. Thus, youth who engage in activism tend to have larger end goals in mind for the kinds of societal changes they wish to see and are working to achieve. According to Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015), actions that challenge injustices can be undertaken by individual young people (personal actions) and as part of larger groups and movements (collective actions). Young activists’ work can be focused internally on their social or activist community, such as through strengthening the skills, knowledge, and actions of others who are also working for social change. Youth activism can also be aimed

externally toward changing policies and practices of systems and institutions. This framework can provide insight into the various scales at which young activists effect change, spanning from influencing change in people around them to playing a role in changing policies at local, national, or global levels.

Within the context of youth organizing, which is a particular type of youth activism that combines community organizing approaches with youth development programming (see Delgado and Staples, 2008), Turner (2021) has documented how Black boys advocate for their own survival in systems that oppress them, strengthen their own communities by educating and politicizing their peers and building collective capacity for challenging systems, and work to confront and transform unjust policies, practices, and norms in society. This research, as well as scholarship on critical consciousness development (Anyiwo et al., 2020; Watts and Halkovic, 2022), reminds us that young people may gravitate to different approaches to social change based on their personal experiences of oppression as well as their resources, opportunities, and sense of agency. Prominent examples of achievements of young activists, which we highlight in the next section, support the notion that youth activism can be personally or collectively undertaken and can target changes that are small or large scale.

Achievements of Youth Activists and Types of Action

Published case studies of specific campaigns or organizations have documented key victories that youth activists have achieved. This literature not only attests to the power of youth activism to effect change but also illuminates the varied outcomes different groups of young people seek, such as advocating for educational reform (Negrón-Gonzalez, 2016; Valladares et al., 2021; Weber, 2016), securing policy changes (Conner et al., 2013; Warren et al., 2011), and shifting attitudes and beliefs of others (Bovill et al., 2020; Negrón-Gonzalez, 2016). In what follows, we briefly review some prominent, successful youth-led campaigns in the US.

US youth have achieved significant curricular reforms in both secondary schools and higher education. For example, the creation of the first ethnic studies department at San Francisco State College in 1969 was precipitated by the longest student strike in US history, which lasted more than 16 months and resulted in hundreds of students being arrested and receiving jail time (Meraji, 2019). Grounded in student organizing during the Civil Rights Movement, the tradition of advocating for courses that better reflect the identities of students has continued with student activists working in solidarity with faculty to win the passage of two recent bills in California (AB 101 and AB 1460) that require high school and college students in the state education system to complete an ethnic studies course to graduate.

Beyond educational institutions and systems, youth-led movements have proven effective in the electoral realm and in policy circles. The Sunrise Movement was created by young people in 2017 to advance climate justice by electing Green New Deal champions to the US government. Sunrise endorsements made national news, and through robust voter registration drives, text and phone-banking efforts, and postcard writing campaigns, they helped to successfully (re)elect one US Senator and nine members of the House of Representatives in the 2020 election cycle (Conner et al., 2021). Another contemporary example is the March for Our Lives movement against gun violence in the US. Born of tragedy after a mass shooting in a high school left 17 dead in 2018, the influential movement has achieved important electoral wins (e.g., Maxwell Frost, the first Gen Z elected to Congress) and policy victories, including the first national gun control legislation in over two decades and hundreds of other gun reform

laws across the country (March for Our Lives, 2023). Youth leveraged their identities as young people to advance this political strategy, simultaneously positioning themselves as powerful political actors and representatives of a demographic in need of protection (Bent, 2019).

In contrast to campaigns aimed at achieving educational or policy goals, youth activists may construe social change as influencing the beliefs and attitudes of others. Broadly, youth activists may explicitly aim to transform the dominant culture in their community or society by trying to disseminate their messages to as many people as possible. For example, a youth-led affiliate of Black Lives Matter, the Youth Vanguard, transformed communities in Los Angeles by promoting conversations about the racialized implications of random searches in schools (Abdullah, 2019). The campaign leveraged social media to challenge prevailing narratives and reframe dialogue, a common strategy for youth activists pursuing cultural change (Wilf and Wray-Lake, 2023). On a more personal level, changing the minds of friends, family, or community members can be a powerful win for youth activists that has broader implications. For example, transgender youth encounter misunderstandings when engaging peers and adults, which can impede gender-affirming care (Puckett et al., 2018) and contribute to marginalization in school environments (McBride, 2021). In response, Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER), a nationwide youth-led organization, conducts workshops with schools to support trans youth in sharing their stories and to foster acceptance in school communities. Their work is aligned with research that shows storytelling can be leveraged to build empathy and understanding about social issues (Swerts, 2015).

Perceptions of Effectiveness

Young people's beliefs about their own abilities to participate effectively in civic activities to challenge injustices is a component of critical consciousness, commonly operationalized as civic self-efficacy and linked to increased civic engagement (Wegemer et al., under review). Scholars have historically described civic self-efficacy as internal, juxtaposed with civic external efficacy, or the perceived responsiveness of social institutions to civic participation (Niemi et al., 1991). The contexts youth navigate shape their perceptions of social institutions, and simultaneously, their identities influence their beliefs about which types of sociopolitical actions are most effective. For example, youth of color who are motivated to participate in politics but do not believe the government will listen to their needs may be more likely to participate in protest behavior than volunteering (Kahne and Westheimer, 2006). Centellas and Rosenblatt (2018) found that after learning about politics, Black students were more likely to perceive that social institutions were unresponsive compared to white students, despite similar initial perceptions and no differences in their beliefs about their own ability to participate and take action. How race, and other dimensions of identity, like gender and sexuality, affect youth's approaches to and feelings about their activism is an important area for further inquiry.

Studies of external civic and political efficacy tend to assess general perceptions of social institutions rather than perceptions of the effectiveness of either specific tactics that activists might employ or their overall work as an activist. By contrast, Conner's (2020) study of college student activists found that the vast majority (75 percent) of participants rated their overall activism as slightly or moderately effective (on a 5-point scale) and 20 percent said their actions were very or extremely effective, whereas only 5 percent believed their actions were not at all effective. Other studies demonstrated that the perceived effectiveness of specific, realistic actions predicted young people's participation in the environmental movement

(Boulianne and Ohme, 2022). Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) argue that some socio-political actions have more impact than others, putting forth that collective actions aimed at external systems change are the most impactful, whereas individual actions aimed at shaping another person's beliefs or actions have a smaller-scale impact. Examining youth activists' own views of their effectiveness can give insight into how youth think about different forms and outcomes of activism and may have implications for whether and how youth sustain their activism over time.

This study intentionally moves beyond researcher-determined assessments of impacts of youth activism and instead focuses on how youth account for their greatest accomplishments as activists. By documenting youth activists' biggest wins using their own voices, and by examining differences in these wins by their civic self-efficacy, appraisals of effectiveness of their activism, and identity and background (race, gender identity, current educational level, and length of time as an activist), we hope to advance knowledge of the range of impacts youth activists can have in advancing social change and the variability in youth activists' experiences in doing this work.

METHODS

Data for this study come from a 2021 ACLU National Advocacy Institute participant survey. A week-long summer program for teenage and young adult activists, the Institute is designed to deepen their knowledge of issues and enhance their advocacy and organizing skills. Although the Institute was typically held in person in Washington DC, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it took place online in 2021. The Institute features keynote speakers, presentations, issue area electives, time to meet in affinity groups (spaces of shared identity), community discussions, and social events. Participants learn about the Institute through ads on social media, email announcements to members from the ACLU as well as from state and local affiliate organizations, and recruitment at pre-college fairs and camp fairs.

The 2021 Institute was open to any US youth from 15 to 23 years of age with an interest in civil liberties and social justice advocacy. No prior experience was required. Interested youth submitted an online application and letter of recommendation. Although there was a tuition fee, approximately 40 percent of the participants received scholarships to attend. The survey was conducted online one week prior to the Institute.

Data Sources

The primary item of interest was a single open-ended item asking respondents, "What has been your biggest win as an activist?"

We also examined three secondary variables of interest. First, a single item asked how long participants had been an activist, with a five-point response scale (from "I'm just beginning with this institute" to "5 or more years"). Second, a single item asked participants to rate the effectiveness of their activism on a four-point scale (from "not at all effective" to "very effective"). Third, we used a four-item measure of civic self-efficacy ($\alpha = .75$).

Demographic information was also collected.

Participants

All 1046 registered participants in the Institute received an email invitation to complete the voluntary questionnaire, and 736 completed it (60.8 percent response rate). The current study sample consisted of 401 youth who responded to the open-ended question, “What has been your biggest win as an activist?” Presumably, those respondents who did not see themselves as activists did not respond. On the survey, we did not define activism, deferring to young people’s understanding of activism and self-identification as activists.

Most respondents were high-school aged (78.3 percent, with 17.2 percent in college, and 3 percent not currently in school), cisgender (84.0 percent, with 4.9 percent transgender), female (69.8 percent, with 18 percent male and 12 percent nonbinary), LGBQ (62.1 percent) youth. Fifty-nine percent identified as only white, with 11.2 percent as only Black or African-American, 8.1 percent as only Asian, 4.4 percent as only Latiné, 3.7 percent as another minoritized racial or ethnic category, and 13.3 percent as biracial or multiracial. One-quarter (25 percent) indicated they had been an activist for less than one year, while 37 percent had been activists for 1–2 years, and 38 percent for 3 or more years. Overall, 95 percent of respondents expressed a sense of civic self-efficacy, with 46 percent indicating very strong civic self-efficacy.

Analytic Approach

The analytic process began with inductive coding to classify win types and issue areas. Three research team members read random batches of responses and jointly developed a coding schema. Two researchers then systematically applied the schema to all responses, comparing and resolving discrepancies after each batch of 100 responses. Once the researchers reached 100 percent agreement on the final codes, dummy variables were assigned to the most common codes for win type and issue area.

We then examined descriptive statistics for the variables of interest and conducted chi-square analyses to explore differences in win types across racial, gender, and sexual orientation groups, and conducted t-tests for civic self-efficacy. We evaluated correlations between win type and issue areas, and between effectiveness and civic self-efficacy. To explore differences in effectiveness across groups, we ran ANOVAs with race, gender identity, current educational level, and length of time as an activist, and t-tests with sexuality.

To help make meaning of our findings, we engaged a Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), a diverse group of seven youth (aged 19–22) who had participated in the National Advocacy Institute at the time of the study. They offered interpretations of our findings, identified implications, raised questions for future research, and helped to strengthen the credibility and impact validity of our conclusions.

YOUTH ACTIVISTS’ WINS

Youth activists’ accounts of their biggest wins varied by the types of wins they described and the issue areas their wins addressed. We first illustrate the most common types of wins that emerged from the data. We then turn to the issue areas in which they achieved these wins and reflect on associations between win types and issue areas. Finally, we consider how

win types and issue areas intersect with youths' perceptions of their own effectiveness as activists. In each section below, we integrate any demographic differences and differences by civic self-efficacy that arose. When quoting a respondent, we include information about their gender, racial identity, and school level, if reported.

Types of Wins

Nearly all participants (93 percent) identified a specific outcome they had achieved through their activism. The vast majority of these wins fell into one or more of seven categories: changing hearts and minds, changing school policies or practices, achieving an electoral victory, securing a (non-school-based) policy change, creating a resource, organizing an event, or providing direct aid to people in need (see Figure 21.1). Chi-squared tests with race and ethnicity, gender, and sexuality revealed no differences between those claiming a certain win and those not claiming it, with the exception of direct aid. Additionally, t-tests with civic self-efficacy revealed no significant differences between those claiming and those not claiming a particular win, with the exception of policy wins. These findings are discussed further below.

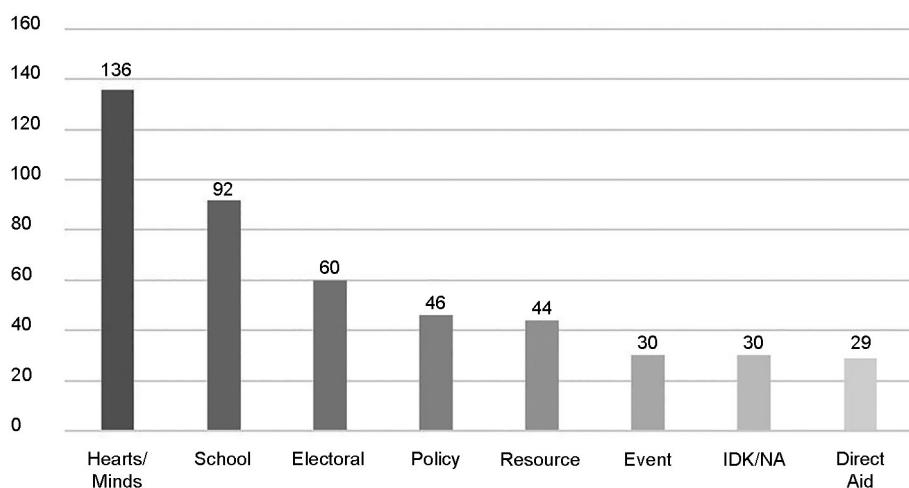


Figure 21.1 Most common types of wins (N = 401)

Changing hearts and minds

Most commonly, youth activists described changing someone's perspective or understanding of an issue (34 percent of respondents). Although this kind of interpersonal win operated on a small scale, its effect was deeply felt for several respondents. For example, one high school student activist shared, "I got my very transphobic dad to accept my trans little brother." This respondent did not elaborate further, but it is not hard to imagine the sizable impact their efforts had on their family dynamics as well as their brother's wellbeing. A cisgender female college student activist similarly reflected:

This may seem small, but one of my teachers and close mentors generally opposes me on a lot of political issues, including transgender rights. I consistently pushed back on his views and debated with him, and he eventually became far more open to the idea and even asked me to send him more information from people within the transgender community. In a very conservative, small town, getting even one person to open their minds to the deserved liberties and basic human dignity of a group of people, such as the transgender community, feels like a massive win.

As this respondent indicated, because this type of win has the potential to affect their everyday interactions, it can represent a profound change in their daily lives. Another activist shared: “I believe these small conversations are what spark change, so these are my greatest accomplishments.” Among the respondents who identified the people whose hearts and minds they had worked to change, 23 referenced family members, 20 pointed to friends, and 17 identified classmates or peers.

Changing school policies or practices

The second most common win type described by 23 percent of respondents pertained to changes in school policies or practices. Most of these wins (19) were curricular in nature. For example, a Black cisgender female high school student activist wrote, “Despite working larger scales with bigger organizations, I think one of my biggest wins as an activist is successfully advocating for the addition of environmental focused classes, such as the re-institution of an environmental science class in my school.” An Asian cisgender male high school student identified his biggest win to date as, “Changing my school’s English and History curriculum to add more texts and literature about or by people of color.” A substantial portion of participants (14) described non-curricular policy wins on issues such as sustainability, police in schools, and dress code.

Participants achieved school-level wins beyond curricular changes and had clear impacts on school practices or culture. For example, one white cisgender female high school student activist cited as her biggest win “changing the Confederate name and mascot of my school, after gaining nearly 25,000 signatures on a petition I started.” An Asian high school student activist who initiated dialogue on human rights abuses in Uyghur camps in China shared, “I think I transformed our school’s environment and made it a more comfortable and acceptable place to engage in activism by doing this, even though it may seem like a small act.” From the variety of responses received, this respondent was not alone in observing how seemingly “small acts”, like starting a petition or circulating a letter, could engender broader cultural shifts within institutions.

Achieving an electoral victory

Electoral victories were the third most common win type, described by 15 percent of respondents. Most frequently, these wins involved phone banking, canvassing, and other campaign tasks to get a candidate elected (accounting for nearly two-thirds of the electoral wins). Some respondents focused on interpersonal impacts they had through campaigning (e.g., a willing listener). For instance, a biracial (Latiné and Asian-American) nonbinary high school student activist detailed how “it was so rewarding when someone was willing to listen and I could guide [them] through the process of voting or encouraging friends to vote.” Others conveyed broader successes due to their campaign strategies (e.g., a successful re-election campaign). Youth described how they worked to oust long-term incumbents, such as one Asian high school student activist, who described her biggest win as “getting a progressive woman of color to

beat an incumbent of 14 years in my town's mayoral race last year." Lastly, some respondents framed electoral wins as voter engagement activities unrelated to a specific campaign, such as handing out ballots, helping people register to vote, and convincing people to vote.

Securing policy change (outside of schools)

Eleven percent of respondents identified policy change as their greatest achievement as an activist, including securing local policy change, persuading a politician to act, or garnering the attention of policymakers. Participants described successful efforts to ban single-use plastics, develop community-based interventions for the homeless, and advocate for protection of indigenous land. Respondents with policy wins tended to align themselves more closely with the happenings in their local setting rather than federal or national policy efforts. One nonbinary youth activist described their biggest win as "getting to network with Kentucky's legislators". Similarly, a cisgender female high school student activist highlighted "having conversations with representatives and senators and feeling heard" as her biggest win.

Youth with policy wins reported significantly higher civic self-efficacy than those without, $4.43 (SD = .55)$ vs. $4.25 (SD = .55)$; $t(397) = -2.11, p = .035$. This sense of civic self-efficacy is reflected in some activists' accounts of their wins. For example, an Arab/Middle Eastern, nonbinary high school student activist wrote, "I have delivered testimonials in my state legislature for assembly bills and senate bills, and 15/20 of those bills passed their committee hearings. 5/20 of them passed all committee hearings and were officially implemented." The highly visible and far-reaching nature of policy change may have engendered greater feelings of competence to make change in these young people.

Creating a resource

Eleven percent of respondents indicated that creating a resource was their most significant win. Resources included both physical and online material that could be used by others to further a cause, such as flyers, toolkits, leaflets, memes, videos, and petitions. Online examples were common. Often, these resources served educational purposes or conveyed messages about one's values and goals. For example, a white cisgender male high school student activist cited "creating an infographic poster about how to be an ally towards black students because I live in a very conservative town." A Latiné youth activist indicated her biggest win was "being able to support DACA students with a university report/study I conducted in Arizona, which I shared at a symposium", and a biracial cisgender female high school student reported that her "biggest win as an activist was helping to make a documentary for the Prison Education Program". Other youth described helping to create a resource center on their college campuses for victims of sexual violence and disseminating resources related to elections. Advocating by creating and sharing resources helped to educate and draw attention to specific causes and also generated a sense of pride and accomplishment for the activists who cited this type of win.

Organizing an event

For 7 percent of respondents, their biggest win involved organizing an event. These events took place in schools and communities, and included meetings, workshops, student panels, rallies, protests, and other direct actions. A white cisgender female high school activist cited "organizing a protest for Students Demand Action (following the Parkland shooting)". Often, events were designed to raise awareness about a specific issue, as a cisgender male Asian activist recounted:

After freshman year at [my] High School, I joined and connected with alumni in a Facebook group [of alumni advocates for change], where we organized a BLM protest to address the school's issues of racial exclusivity and lack of administration response, [during which] I was featured [on our local TV station].

As was the case here, often these events were school-based and in some cases, they overlapped with the changing school policy or practice win type. Many of the events respondents organized served as vehicles for promoting social justice.

Providing direct aid

While direct aid was least common amongst youth activists, representing only 7 percent of responses, it was the only type of win with statistically significant demographic differences. Cisgender female and transgender were more likely to report this type of win than their cisgender male and non-binary counterparts, $X^2(3, N = 383) = 10.56, p = .014$.

Thirty-one percent of respondents who described providing direct aid discussed the needs of women and menstruators, including product drives, fundraising, and securing budgets for equitable distribution of period products in their schools and communities. Other issue areas frequently addressed the LGBTQ+ community, often intersecting with mental health and racial justice. An Arab/Middle Eastern nonbinary college student activist, for example, described “raising over \$5,000 for mutual aid and distributing it among QTPOC [queer, transgender people of color] for wellness and mental health”. Several direct aid wins addressed food insecurity. A college student activist shared:

I single handedly organized a community refrigerator for my hometown. Even though it has been denied many times over and I am still working on getting approval, I reached out to every small business in my community, distributed information about what and why we should have one, created a survey to pool data to incorporate into my proposal for the town board, and gave the hard truth about why we need one and that a single, non-perishable pantry is not enough ... So while it is still being denied today for [not] “being aesthetically pleasing,” I know ultimately my community will come together and demand better.

This account entailed direct aid, changing hearts and minds, and creating and sharing resources, illustrating how the types of wins often overlap.

Through their direct aid work, youth activists organized fundraisers and drives in support of various issue areas, such as organizing a “book donation drive for immigrants”, “[raising] over \$1000 as a club to donate money to foster care”, “fundraising over \$700 for a company that employs autistic adults”, and “[raising] \$18,000 for Black Lives Matter Philly with our student council amidst some opposition”. These examples illustrate the range of causes with which youth activists engage, a topic to which we turn next.

Issue Areas of Wins

Of the issue areas in which youth activists reported wins, education was the most common (18 percent), followed by racial justice (12 percent), politics (12 percent), diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) (9 percent), LGBTQ rights (8 percent), women’s rights (6 percent), and climate or environmental wins (6 percent). Again, responses could receive multiple codes. Racial justice wins were coded as such if the respondent explicitly named issues impacting people of color or issues of race, including police reform and the Black Lives Matter move-

ment. Similarly, LGBTQ wins were those in which the respondent explicitly named issues pertaining to queer or trans people's rights, such as "We've changed policy on deadnaming trans students at graduation". DEI wins, by contrast, used the language of diversity, equity, DEI, or other related terms, without identifying a particular class of people. For example, one respondent wrote, "advocating for the addition of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into our list of school board priorities", and another identified their biggest win as "diversity training for my skating team". A sizable portion (22 percent) of the wins respondents described did not feature a clear issue. We refer to these as "unspecified" issue areas. Examples of such unspecified issues include the following: "educating others", "held a protest", and "successfully hosting a meeting/event".

Overall, there were few demographic differences in specific issue areas. Black youth and youth in our consolidated "other" category (including Indigenous, Arab/Middle Eastern, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and another race/ethnicity not captured in the other categories) were more likely than youth of other racial/ethnic groups to describe a racial justice win, $\chi^2(5, N = 379) = 13.76, p = .017$. Black and multiracial youth were more likely than youth of other racial/ethnic identities to identify a DEI win, $\chi^2(5, N = 380) = 12.68, p = .027$. Queer youth were more likely than heterosexual youth to specify a win on LGBTQ issues, $\chi^2(1, N = 398) = 9.12, p = .003$. The civic self-efficacy of those with and without a specific issue area win did not differ across any of the issue areas.

The patterns across types of wins and issue areas are described in Table 21.1. Several win types were correlated with issue areas. Hearts and minds wins correlated with both racial justice ($r = .114, p < .01$) and unspecified issues ($r = .245, p < .01$). School wins correlated with DEI ($r = .398, p < .01$), LGBTQ ($r = .106, p < .05$), climate/environment ($r = .144, p < .01$), and educational issues ($r = .709, p < .01$). Not surprisingly, electoral wins strongly correlated with political issues ($r = .672, p < .01$). Policy wins correlated with climate/environment ($r = .247, p < .01$). Resource wins correlated with racial justice ($r = .168, p < .01$). Finally, direct aid wins correlated with women's rights ($r = .293, p < .01$).

These correlations suggest that in the policy domain, youth activists are more commonly reporting biggest wins on the climate and environmental front; that they are more commonly changing people's hearts and minds about racial justice concerns; that they are more commonly crafting resources of which they feel proud pertaining to racial justice; and that they are more commonly funneling direct aid successfully to women and menstruators, typically through free feminine hygiene products. Schools are the spaces where youth activists are achieving wins of the greatest issue area variety, encompassing not only educational issues, but also climate/environmental concerns, LGBTQ concerns, and diversity and equity concerns.

Perceived Effectiveness

When rating the effectiveness of their activism to date, most respondents (68 percent) felt their activism had been "somewhat effective", whereas 15 percent identified their activism as "not very effective", 15 percent as "very effective", and 3 percent as "not at all effective". There were no statistically significant differences in their ratings of the effectiveness of their activism by race/ethnicity, sexuality, or school level. Cisgender females described their activism as significantly more effective ($M = 2.79, SD = .68$) than cisgender males ($M = 2.50, SD = .84$); however, neither group differed meaningfully in their ratings from trans youth or nonbinary youth activists ($F(3, 587) = 4.76, p < .01$). More experienced activists reported greater effec-

Table 21.1 Win types with examples and associations

Win type	Examples	Associations with demographics, issue areas, effectiveness, and civic self-efficacy
Changing hearts and minds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions with family, friends, and classmates • Shifting day-to-day interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated issue area: Racial justice
Changing school policies or practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to make curriculum more inclusive • Changes to school culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated issue areas: DEI, LGBTQ, climate/environment, and education • Perceived effectiveness: Significantly greater than those who did not indicate school change wins
Achieving an electoral victory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvassing and campaigning • Convincing others to vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated issue area: Political issues
Securing policy change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuading politicians to act • Testifying, lobbying, or networking with policymakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated issue area: Climate and environment • Self-efficacy: Greater civic self-efficacy than those who did not indicate a policy win • Perceived effectiveness: Significantly greater than those who do not report policy change wins
Creating a resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create online educational materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated issue area: Racial justice
Organizing an event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing meetings, workshops, panels, or protests 	
Providing direct aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing drives to collect and distribute feminine hygiene products • Fundraising to provide resources for marginalized youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated issue area: Women and feminine hygiene products • Demographics: Cisfemales and transgender youth were more likely to report than cismale or non-binary youth • Perceived effectiveness: Significantly greater than those who do not report direct aid wins

Note: All associations represent statistically significant differences, described in the text.

tiveness ($M = 3.01, SD = .58$) than those who were just getting started ($M = 2.31, SD = .82$) and those who had been engaged in activism for less than a year ($M = 2.47, SD = .69, F(4, 612) = 24.47, p < .001$). Respondents with higher civic self-efficacy tended to view their activism as more effective ($r = .423, p < .01$).

Perceived effectiveness of activism differed by win type. Youth who claimed direct aid wins ($M = 3.21, SD = .56; t[395] = -2.33, p < .05$); policy wins ($M = 3.15, SD = .52; t[395] = -2.38, p < .05$); and school wins ($M = 3.10, SD = .58; t[395] = -2.67, p < .01$) reported more effectiveness than youth without that type of win ($M = 2.92, SD = .64; M = 2.92, SD = .64; M = 2.90, SD = .64$ respectively). Self-reported effectiveness did not differ across five win types (changing hearts and minds, electoral, resource, event, and “other” wins). As we might have expected, youth who were not sure about their wins reported significantly lower effectiveness ($M = 2.55, SD = .69$) than those who specified a win ($M = 2.98, SD = .62; t[31.70] = 3.23, p = .001$). Among the top eight issue areas, only youth who identified education wins reported greater effectiveness ($M = 3.24, SD = .52$) than those without such wins ($M = 2.88, SD = .63; t[394] = -4.47, p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

This chapter set out to explore youth activists' accounts of their biggest wins. Although activists described a wide range of types of wins and issue areas in which these wins were achieved, the most common type of win involved changing someone's heart or mind, such as a family member or friend, on issues of racial justice. This finding aligns with other research that suggests that educating and persuading others is a common form of activism pursued by young people (Logan et al., 2017; Wilf and Wray-Lake, 2021). This finding is especially meaningful when understood in the context of summer 2021, as the nation was still reckoning with the racial injustices that became impossible to ignore after the police murder of George Floyd, alongside the racial inequities evident from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the highly politicized and contentious nature of understanding racism in the polarized post-Trump era.

Viewed through the lens of Watts and Hipolito-Delgado's (2015) framework for the outcomes of sociopolitical action, hearts and minds wins could be characterized as a personal action aimed at an external audience. In contrast, the next three most common win types (school, electoral, and policy) aimed to change institutions and systems. Although Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) contend that institutional and systems-level wins achieved through collective action have the highest impact, our findings suggest that for young people, the more intimate activism of personally changing hearts and minds may have deeper significance. The youth who named this type of win may well have had wins of other types, but when asked to identify their biggest win, they highlighted successfully changing someone's perspective. The salience of hearts and minds wins in our data demands a reconsideration of how the different outcomes of youth activism are valued. Youth may single out this type of win as their most notable for many reasons. They may feel more personally responsible for this kind of interpersonal win than they do for victories in which they played a small part in a larger collective effort; changing a friend or family member's perspective may impact their everyday lives more immediately than the election of a candidate or some distal policy change and so it feels more meaningful; or youth may recognize hearts and minds wins as more durable, compared to educational, electoral, and policy victories that can be undone in the next election cycle. Qualitative research should explore why these types of wins matter to youth, and whether and how youth's appraisals of their significance are influenced by the current sociopolitical moment and exigencies, such as a global pandemic.

In addition to elucidating the various win types that youth report as their biggest and the issue areas in which they are achieved, we explored whether particular types of wins were associated with any specific identity dimensions. Prior research has suggested that youth with particular identities may be drawn to certain types of activism (Anyiwo et al., 2020; Turner, 2021), and we did find that wins in certain issue areas were associated with some identity markers (e.g., Black youth were more likely to claim racial justice and DEI wins; LGBQ youth more likely to claim LGBQ wins); however, we found only one significant demographic difference in *win types*: cisgender females and transgender individuals were more likely than their cisgender male and nonbinary counterparts to emphasize direct aid wins. This finding may have been driven by the prominence of period product fundraisers among direct aid wins, an issue that may be most relevant to cisgender females and transgender individuals. It is also possible that socialization effects, which condition female-identifying people to be more empathetic and caring towards those in need, may also have been at work here. More broadly, though, the lack of differences by other identity groups suggests that hearts and minds, school,

electoral, policy, resource, and event win types are not exclusive to (and can be achieved by) youth with different identities. Future research can explore whether these same win types emerge among samples composed of entirely Black or entirely Latiné youth activists. Scholars can also explore whether the tactics used to achieve the same types of wins vary according to particular dimensions of youths' identities.

Finally, this study considered how win types map onto youth's appraisals of the effectiveness of their activism and their sense of civic self-efficacy as activists. Importantly, although civic self-efficacy and perceived effectiveness were highly correlated, civic self-efficacy tends to be forward-looking, as participants evaluate their capacity to achieve a desired outcome, while effectiveness, as framed in this study, is backward-looking, as participants assess their overall activist efforts to date. Youth activists felt highly efficacious, but they were more tempered in their evaluations of their own effectiveness. Additionally, participants who had successful direct aid campaigns, school changes, and policy changes reported higher effectiveness. Policy wins were also linked to higher reports of civic self-efficacy. Perhaps youth with greater civic self-efficacy are more likely to achieve policy wins, and these wins, in turn, increase their perceptions of the effectiveness of their efforts; however, it may also be the case that those with a track record of effectiveness may be better able to secure policy wins, which in turn strengthens their perceptions of their own civic self-efficacy. Our cross-sectional dataset limits our insight into these relationships. Future longitudinal research is needed to understand not only how feelings of civic self-efficacy and effectiveness relate to one another over time, but also how each shapes and is shaped by particular wins.

Relatedly, while it was not surprising that youth who had been involved in activism for more time reported higher levels of effectiveness than those who were newer to activism, we cannot say whether experience drives feelings of effectiveness or vice versa. The longer one has been an activist, the more time one has had to achieve wins and build up feelings of effectiveness. By the same token, the more effective one feels early on in their journey as an activist, the more inclined one might be to remain an activist over the long haul. More research is needed to understand the relationship between experience and effectiveness; however, our findings may speak to the importance of sustained activism for youth and suggest that one-off activist events, or even semester-long activist type programs, might not be enough to help young people feel effective in their activist efforts.

It may be tempting to interpret our findings as a warrant for encouraging youth activists to concentrate their efforts on direct aid, school change, and policy change, as wins in these areas are linked to greater self-reported effectiveness; however, the powerful accounts youth offered of changing someone's perspective should not be dismissed simply because they appraised their own activism as less effective. Youth activists may have internalized societal expectations of what counts as effective activism, for instance, what is celebrated by the media and historians, and to an extent, by researchers who privilege collective action campaigns directed at policy or systems change over interpersonal efforts and downplayed their effectiveness when their biggest win was intimately interpersonal and educational. Such discounting could be a function of internalized adultism (see Liou and Literat, 2020), which may have been reflected in the hedging some participants provided when recounting their biggest wins (e.g., "I'm not sure if this counts, but ..." and "this may seem small, but ..."). Additionally, youth's perceptions of effectiveness may be influenced by professionalization pressures: it is more acceptable to list successful direct aid campaigns, policy wins, and school changes on

a resumé or LinkedIn profile than it is to include having changed a parent's or friend's mind about a pressing social issue.

One implication of our findings, therefore, is the need for youth activist leaders and others who support youth activists to counter these societal norms of adultism and professionalization and lift up changing hearts and minds as vital work, a form of relational organizing that is essential to shifting public perceptions and creating the conditions for social change to become possible. Increased recognition of the significance of successfully changing someone's heart or mind could help not only to sustain the engagement and commitment of youth activists, but also to transform dominant understandings of the impacts of youth activism and its "radiating effects" (Watts and Hipolito-Delgado, 2015, p. 284).

Practitioners and activist leaders should also emphasize youth's agency and effectiveness across a range of types of activism. The variety of wins of the youth activists in this study makes plain that youth are achieving impact at different levels across many pressing societal issues, and their efforts should be seen as legitimate and noteworthy.

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22. “Real change takes time”: building multi-dimensional youth community power in a participatory design collective

*Kathryn Y. Morgan, Kayla M. Anderson, Joseph KaiKai,
Lema Shaltaf and Brian D. Christens*

Youth participation in local decision-making is crucial for achieving more equitable urban spaces. Youth activists lead local movements, engage in change-making processes, work alongside their peers and adult partners to illuminate youth perspectives, promote community well-being, and subvert systemic inequity (Flanagan and Christens, 2011; Ishimaru, 2019; Prilleltensky and Fox, 2007). In youth-led contexts, activists challenge existing social norms and offer up creative solutions (Flanagan and Levine, 2010; Ozer et al., 2020). Through their involvement, young people move beyond relegated roles of “passive recipients of services” (Checkoway, 2011, p. 341) to become active agents in local decision-making (Arnstein, 1969; Checkoway, 1998).

YOUTH COMMUNITY POWER

In this chapter, we chart how youth activists wield and share community power within a participatory design collective. This novel context incorporates principles from youth organizing and youth participatory action research to support activists in designing for equity as their cities grow and change.

Youth Organizing

Youth organizing is one space where young activists can engage directly in the public sphere. The organizing process supports “the systematic development of youth power to confront inequities that negatively affect young people and their communities” (Rogers et al., 2012, p. 35). In youth organizing spaces, young people identify problems in their communities, research the causes and outcomes, address the identified problems and the underlying power structures through direct action and advocacy, and then reflect on their actions (Christens and Dolan, 2011; Christens and Kirshner, 2011; Conner, 2011; Conner and Cosner, 2016). Through organizing, youth seek to “transform communities and institutions to make social conditions and institutional policies, practices, and procedures more responsive to the needs of young people” (Rogers et al., 2012, p. 36).

Youth Participatory Action Research

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is another space where young people can engage in local decision-making. YPAR is a “critical and iterative process of youth-driven inquiry that is informed by their lived experience” (Domínguez and Cammarota, 2021, p. 3), in which young people train as researchers to study meaningful issues and advocate for changes based on their findings (Ozer et al., 2020). The YPAR cycle includes formulating questions, selecting methods, analyzing data, and reporting findings (Kirshner et al., 2011). Using the research findings, young people take action to improve the conditions they have studied (Bertrand, 2018). By engaging in YPAR, young people work towards second-order change, where they seek to “alter power via shifts in knowledge, knowledge production, and voice (all are forms of power), and open [...] space[s] for young people to have more voice in [...] policies and practices” (Kohfeldt et al., 2016, p. 29).

Psychological Empowerment

Youth organizing and YPAR function as empowering community settings where youth recognize and exert control over their lives, leading to an increase in psychological empowerment (Ballard and Ozer, 2016; Maton, 2008). Youth-led participatory design draws on features of youth organizing and YPAR to center the voices of young people and support them in using design to address issues that directly impact their communities. Therefore, youth-led participatory design has the potential to support psychological empowerment.

Psychological empowerment develops as activists work together to build power within community settings (Cattaneo et al., 2014; Christens, 2019; Zimmerman, 2000). Through psychological empowerment, youth experience positive developmental processes that allow them to exert control over their own lives, have a voice in community decisions, and critically evaluate their sociopolitical environments (Ballard and Ozer, 2016). Research on youth organizing and YPAR outcomes has found that young people who engage in these activities have increased feelings of self-efficacy (Conner and Slattery, 2014), stronger commitments to social change (Conner and Slattery, 2014), higher levels of civic participation (Terriquez, 2015), sustained participation in political processes (Conner, 2011; Terriquez, 2015), greater development of critical consciousness (Christens et al., 2023; Ginwright, 2010; Quinn and Nguyen, 2017), and increased feelings of sociopolitical control (Christens, 2019), all contributing to the development of strong sociopolitical identities (Christens and Dolan, 2011; Kirshner, 2007).

Community Power

In empowering community contexts, youth come to recognize the power they hold in addressing issues most salient to them. Community power is a construct used to explain “the multiple dimensions of domination and oppression, while also allowing possibilities for agency, development, and transformation” (Christens, 2019, p. 40). There are three dimensions of community power that youth activists exercise in their work: situational, institutional, and systemic.

Situational power refers to the ability to engage in the public domain and influence local decisions through collective action (Christens, 2019). Situational power is realized through processes such as broad participation and collective action that seek to challenge the status quo, develop collective efficacy (i.e., social cohesion and control), and establish local leader-

ship and power built on strong relationships. Young people exercise situational power when they are able to develop and leverage strong intergenerational relationships to carry out projects that seek to address issues directly impacting youth.

Institutional power refers to the ability to control the public agenda, such as through determining which issues are worth prioritizing or what grievances are open to public debate. Often institutional power is used against groups seeking to challenge the status quo through processes such as preventing or limiting public participation, gatekeeping, or setting agendas that prioritize the views of some over others (Christens, 2019). With young people, this means that their views and opinions are often negated, reinforcing dominant narratives of adulthood. However, in empowering settings, youth perspectives and opinions are often at elevated levels not seen in traditional decision-making spaces, thus challenging norms. Youth activists exercise institutional power by setting their own agendas and utilizing external cross-sector partnerships to leverage their agendas to more prominent levels, allowing them to engage in more meaningful and impactful civic participation.

Systemic power refers to the ability to shape public narratives and beliefs by controlling what stories are told and disrupting dominant narratives that uphold the status quo. Systemic power often develops through a cyclical process of action and reflection and is a result of increased critical consciousness (Christens, 2019). Through the iterative process of action and reflection, young people start to develop deeper understandings and explanations for why things are the way they are, providing them space to question established power dynamics and longstanding social norms. It is through this consciousness raising that youth are able to construct liberatory counter-narratives that center their own lived experiences and recognize the power and control they have over their own lives. As a result, the traditional narratives about the role of youth in decision-making spaces are challenged, allowing for the construction of new realities; realities where youth play a central role in civic life.

STUDY CONTEXT: THE NASHVILLE YOUTH DESIGN TEAM

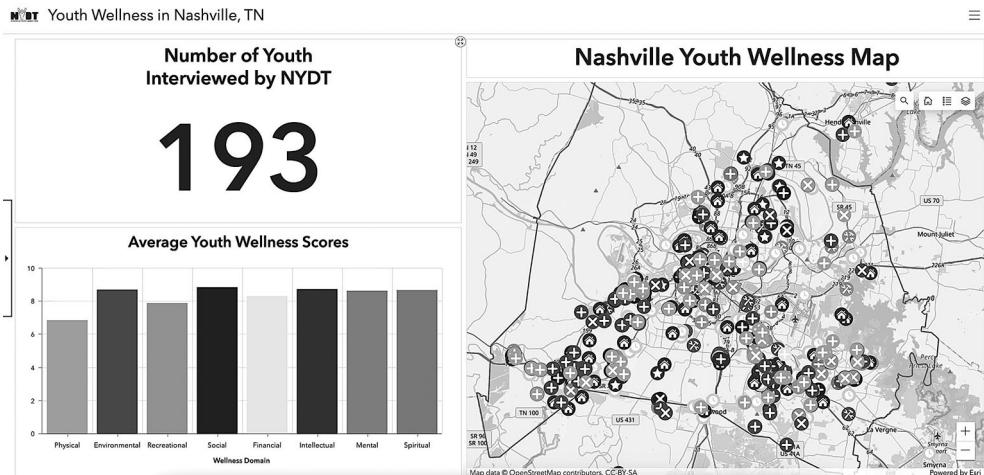
Below, one of the Nashville Youth Design Team (NYDT) members and an author of this chapter, Joseph KaiKai, describes the purpose and goals of the team:

The NYDT is a youth-led participatory design collective that incorporates elements of youth organizing and youth participatory action research to engage Nashville's youth in local decision-making processes. Through a four-year paid fellowship for 9th–12th graders, NYDT provides teenagers with design and research training that we use to address issues impacting youth in Nashville. This collective grew out of a partnership between Vanderbilt University researchers and the Civic Design Center, a Nashville nonprofit with a long history of community work.

NYDT is made up of 14 teenagers from across Nashville who work to enhance youth well-being by improving the built environment through design. The built environment is everything around us that was made by people, such as buildings, roads, parks, sidewalks, community centers, and so on. The NYDT started in the summer of 2020 and has since been working to implement design innovations in the city that will help Nashville residents live more stress- and danger-free lives. In addition to design work, NYDT also seeks to bring awareness to situations that need correcting, advocating for change to local government officials and large organizations that have influence in Nashville's urban design. Each member of the NYDT

brings a unique background and set of experiences that they have acquired from years of living in Nashville. We use these unique perspectives and knowledge to help inform our work and reach our goals.

During the first year (2020–2021) our team focused on collecting data about youth wellness in Nashville. Most of this was done virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We distributed electronic surveys and conducted interviews over Zoom, asking our peers to share how built environment factors (i.e., parks, transportation, food resources, etc.) impact their wellness. After we collected the data, we added it to an online map using ArcGIS (see Figure 22.1). This process included mapping locations that our peers identified in their surveys/interviews as contributing to their wellness, such as community centers or parks, or taking away from their wellness, such as busy roads or no sidewalks, as well as places they visited often, or thought could be improved. By mapping the data, we were able to see what parts of Nashville youth identified as needing improvements.



Source: tinyurl.com/NYDTmap.

Figure 22.1 The Nashville youth wellness map

During the Summer of 2021, old and new team members alike were able to convene in person for the first time. We met at a local university, where we learned more about the built environment and challenges facing Nashville. To learn even more about local issues, we held research actions with powerful figures from various government and community settings. During these research actions, we asked community leaders questions we had about the built environment and what young people need to be healthy and well. We also continued to survey our peers about what they believe young people need to thrive. After finishing data collection, we mapped and analyzed the data to determine what our peers saw as the most important issues facing the city. Once we identified these issues, we brainstormed where we wanted to implement our designs and who the designs would impact the most. From there we got started designing our installations. During the design process we worked to figure out what community organizations we could partner with, what permits we would need, and what the cost of

materials would be to build the design. At the end of the summer, we held an exhibition over Zoom where we shared our designs with family, friends, and community and political leaders and allowed them to vote on their favorite design. The design with the most votes would then be implemented during the 2021–2022 school year.

Our first installation in Fall 2021 was a crosswalk at the most dangerous intersection in Nashville. This installation included temporary artistic pedestrian buffers and glow-in-the-dark beach balls to light up the crossing. We also worked with the Tennessee Department of Transportation to get permanent crosswalks installed at the intersection. After the design was installed, we conducted speed counts to determine the success of the intervention. We also led community walks with community members near the crosswalk to hear their feedback about the design. Through our work we have been able to spread awareness about the danger of areas like the one we chose, specifically the dangers for pedestrians. Overall, the design attracted a lot of attention and some of our team members were interviewed by local news stations who wanted to learn more about the work we do and our design installation (see Figure 22.2). Since we were successful in accomplishing our goals during the 2021–2022 school year, we expect to be even more efficient and effective during the 2022–2023 school year, especially with the addition of new team members. As a result, we will incorporate even more experiences into our ideas, which will influence our projects and only continue to make them better. During the 2022–2023 school year we plan to have a fall design installation, and in the spring we will partner with the local science center to teach other's youth about the importance of an equitable built environment. Though we have already done a lot, our team still has more work to do, and we don't plan on ever stopping. Our mission is to listen to the requests and needs of residents and make the city a better place for all to live.

DATA AND METHODS

Members of the NYDT participated in interviews during the spring of 2022. The semi-structured interview guide was influenced by theory and research on community power (e.g., Christens, 2019; Lukes, 1974). Specifically, the interview guide draws on the three-dimensional model of community power (Alford and Friedland, 1985) to explore youth's evolving sense of how membership in the NYDT impacted their ability to exercise community power across the situational, institutional, and systemic dimensions. We designed the interview protocol by outlining features of community power that are present in the situational, institutional, and systemic dimensions, then formulating these features into questions relevant to youths' experiences in NYDT. We sequenced the resulting questions to move from asking team members about their concrete experiences with NYDT (for example: What is your role in NYDT?) to asking them for more abstract considerations about prevailing power structures within their community (for example: Do you believe NYDT can make lasting change in Nashville?). This sequencing allowed team members first to reflect on their experiences before linking their participation to broader social change efforts.

Twelve of the 14 NYDT members opted to participate in an interview via Zoom with a graduate research assistant. The interviews lasted between 55 and 80 minutes depending on the amount of information the participant wished to provide. Respondents were compensated for participation in the interviews. Interviews took place over a two-week period at the end of the second year of the existence of the NYDT. Zoom audio recordings were uploaded to a secure



Figure 22.2 An NYDT member being interviewed by a local news station

file storage platform hosted by the research team's institution. All interviews were first transcribed by a graduate research assistant using Otter.AI software and then corrected as needed by the first author. Transcripts were not returned to or reviewed by participants following the transcription cleaning process.

The study procedures were reviewed and approved in advance by the human subject's review board at the research team's institution. Because the research team includes members of NYDT, the first author put several checks in place to support confidentiality. Specifically, the graduate research assistant who conducted the interviews de-identified each interview and replaced team members' names with pseudonyms before providing transcripts to the first author for coding and analysis. At the time the interview opportunity was introduced, all team members were made aware that the third and fourth authors, who are NYDT members,

would be part of the research team and that the fourth author would be analyzing their interviews. Some details, including the names of schools or neighborhoods, were obscured in the transcripts to preserve individual participants' confidentiality, and no identifying details are included in this chapter. Instead of sharing complete transcripts with the fourth author for coding, the first author shared only passages that had been coded to one of three dimensions of community power. The fourth author did not have access to the audio files.

Analytical Approach

A flexible coding process was used to analyze the interviews, which allowed researchers to move between inductive and deductive coding (Deterding and Waters, 2021). Interviews were first thematically coded in their entirety by the first author using NVivo 12 software for qualitative data analysis. In this initial coding pass, the first author assigned one of three thematic codes – Situational Power, Institutional Power, or Systemic Power – to each chunk of text within a transcript (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The first author then applied 11 index codes to the data that were rooted in community power theory (Deterding and Waters, 2021). Index codes under the Situational Power thematic code included Broad Participation, Collective Efficacy, and Local Leadership; index codes under Institutional Power included Mobilizing Structures and Issue Assessment Capacity; and index codes under Systemic Power included Root Cause Analysis, Critical Consciousness, and Shaping Narratives.

Following the index coding pass, analytic codes were applied to all text within each of the three index codes by the first and fourth authors separately. The first author created a coding spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel for this coding pass by exporting the thematic and index codes to a spreadsheet that included: (1) the coded chunk of text; (2) the first author's thematic code; (3) the first author's index code; (4) a space for the fourth author to add an analytic code; and (5) a space for the fourth author to add coding memos. Excel was used for collaborative coding because it is cost-effective, accessible, and familiar to all coders on the research team (Bree and Gallagher, 2016; Meyer and Avery, 2009). Once the first and fourth authors finished applying analytic codes in separate Excel spreadsheets, they shared their coding spreadsheets with one another to read, memo, and compare. The two authors met to discuss the analytic coding process and the results, focusing on resolving discrepancies in the application of the analytic codes. The fourth author then applied a final ranking code to the data within each analytic code to select the quotations that she felt were most representative of the team's experiences given her insider perspective (Louis and Bartunek, 1992). The first and fourth authors then met a final time to discuss the quotations the fourth author had selected for inclusion before the first author drafted the findings.

Positionality of Research Team

The research team was comprised of two White, female-identifying graduate students (first and second authors) one Black, male-identifying 12th grade student (third author), one White, female-identifying 12th grade student (fourth author), and one White, male-identifying faculty member (fifth author). Team members had diverse experiences with and occupied distinct roles in NYDT, allowing for an insider/outsider research team (Louis and Bartunek, 1992). Insider/outsider positions within research teams exist along a continuum, with insiders being a part of the group under study and outsiders being unaffiliated with the group (Louis and Bartunek,

1992). The third and fourth authors are NYDT members and occupy an insider position, which offers the research team many unique insights into community power building within this context and allowed the team to interpret the data from the perspective of insiders (Louis and Bartunek, 1992; Thomas et al., 2000). The first and second authors were relative insiders to the NYDT; as adult facilitators for the team, they were deeply embedded in the study context and held an intermediary role since they brought identities as university researchers and adult facilitators to the research team (Thomas et al., 2000). The fifth author was an outsider to the context; he had no direct experience with NYDT beyond attending an exhibition of their work in July 2021. Additionally, the research team invited a White, female-identifying graduate student research assistant from the same research university as the first, second, and fifth authors to conduct the interviews. She had no prior experience with NYDT, positioning her as a true outsider in the context. The research team opted for an outsider interviewer to carry out data collection because doing so has been found to encourage participants to describe their experiences in greater detail than they likely would to another member of NYDT or to an adult facilitator of the team (Christens et al., 2022; Louis and Bartunek, 1992).

To construct this chapter collaboratively, we drew on a process model for organizer/academic co-writing outlined by Zeylikman et al. (2020). We wrote asynchronously in a shared Google Doc, then engaged in a cycle of discussing, commenting, questioning, and re-writing in an effort to build this narrative. Our writing styles vary, and we've maintained that variation because it represents how we are positioned on our research team and in relation to the NYDT. We believe that beyond editing for clarity, erasing the differences in our writing styles would not be aligned with our goals of increasing youth voice, agency, and power in spaces that have historically precluded young people from participating, which includes academic writing.

FINDINGS

Through our interviews with NYDT youth activists, our research team identified multiple mechanisms that enabled the team to build situational, institutional, and systemic power. Below we describe how NYDT members characterize their ability to develop the different dimensions of community power, while also recognizing the obstacles that stood in the way when trying to do so.

Situational Power

To understand the ways NYDT sought to develop and exercise situational power we explored how the team fostered collective efficacy, developed local leadership, and built broad participation. To gauge the role of collective efficacy within NYDT we asked the youth to describe the team's values and whether or not they trusted one another when working together. To assess local leadership development, we asked the young people to identify leaders within the group and describe the actions these individuals have taken to be identified as leaders. And to understand broad participation, we asked each team member to describe how they engage youth and community members in their work.

Collective efficacy

Members in NYDT describe shared norms, beliefs, expectations, and values that drive their work. Many members noted that they believed that team members were all driven by a shared value of “social justice”, “human rights”, or “racial justice”. They also shared a common value of “making a difference” or “creating change”. Others described feeling united in a shared desire to disrupt the status quo, or “make big moves”. For example, one member shared that NYDT offered a sense of “control” over issues that impact young people: “One of the values that does connect us all is the ability to control. By being able to control the world around you ... we’re all kids. And it’s kind of hard to create a change as a kid. So being able to like to do that, it’s empowering.”

Another team member similarly described her sense that activists in NYDT “were compelled to join the group because of the difference that they would be making. And so, I feel like in that way, we all shared that core belief, even if it’s never been fully stated.” This unstated belief contributed to a “deep bond”, even among members who self-identify as “shy” or “anti-social”. Many shared that time spent around NYDT members created a sense that they were “really good friends ... based on what we care about.” Finally, as the team moves into its third year, a commitment to remain active in the group seems to drive feelings of collective efficacy. As one team member described, “I would say we all have dedication because we’re doing this again. Because we’re still doing great things.”

These sentiments expressed by different team members reveal the shared values and social cohesion within the team. Consequently, the commitment to these common values is what enables the team to continue to seek change in their community even when met with obstacles that attempt to limit their impact.

Local leadership

In groups pursuing social justice, leadership is considered a collective approach in which power is distributed broadly to ensure that all voices are valued. This differs from the conventional framing of leaders as those possessing traits that position them to take charge in organizations. Youth in NYDT held varying views of how local leadership is enacted in their group. About half of the team described a few core members whom they viewed as NYDT’s leaders. In interviews, they described the way some members enacted leadership in traditional terms, describing leaders as being “the most invested”, “taking initiative while some of us were busy”, “helping other team members figure out what to do”, “making everyone feel comfortable”, and “always show[ing] a sense of humbleness and dedication”.

Alternatively, about half the team described NYDT as a leaderless organization. For example, one member shared that they felt there was not “one or a few particular leaders ... there was no set hierarchy per se, of this person is in a leader type role, or this person is like a grunt; it’s all equal.” For example, one team member shared:

I don’t really think we have leaders because we all have different skills, and we’re all in charge of different things. But like, even within our own committees, like there’s two or three people, and we are on the same level. We equally hear each other’s ideas, and we take them into consideration.

This team member was among several who attributed NYDT’s lack of hierarchy to their committee structure, in which members “all had a role”, and there is not “a person at the top of the hierarchy”.

These reflections reveal how NYDT members hold conflicting views of local leadership. While some team members continue to subscribe to the traditional idea of leadership, where personal characteristics play a critical role, others have moved to a more collective understanding of leadership, one that relies on strong relationships and leads to the development of community power (Speer and Hughey, 1995).

Broad participation

NYDT creates settings for youth to challenge prevailing notions about whose voices matter in local decisions. Activists in NYDT describe themselves as a small group of dedicated young people who can bring more youth voice into local decision-making. As one member described it, NYDT built broad participation through “connecting other students and community members to our team” and “helping kids think about how their neighborhoods change their wellness”. While NYDT is a paid position only available to only a few young people with the capacity to work on long-term projects, the group gains situational power through bringing together “voices from every corner of the city”. For example, when asked if she felt the team had gained power through being a part of NYDT, a second-year team member shared:

The power that we do have is being able to interview so many different youth around Nashville and collect so many different perspectives. And then being able to make the decision of the most important designs that need to go out and being able to actually implement the design on behalf of so many different perspectives that were given to us from people that we interviewed. We’re giving their voice power.

This quote reflects an evolving understanding of the importance of broad participation in youth-led activism. This team member is describing a value that the team brought into the group very early on: that their 14 perspectives were not enough to make grassroots change in the city, but that participatory research and mapping offered a way to bring many voices in their change efforts.

Institutional Power

To identify the ways NYDT sought to develop and exercise institutional power we explored the team’s capacity to assess issues and their ability to utilize mobilizing structures. To gauge issue assessment capacity, we asked team members to explain the steps they take when identifying issues they would like to address as well as comment on how they believe this process could be improved. To understand how NYDT utilizes mobilizing structures the youth were asked to describe the partnerships that NYDT has with other organizations, including the successes and challenges they have faced while working with these groups.

Issue assessment capacity

Issue assessment capacity involves a process in which NYDT members “strategically prioritize issues to determine possibilities for changes that will help to address these issues” (Christens, 2019, p. 141). One team member offered a very succinct description of how NYDT assesses and selects issues to address: “first we gather data, then we organize the data into the map, then we discuss ideas as to what could be done to make the biggest change. And then it’s solution time.” Other youth emphasized the importance of the map as a living document that holds “so many stories and ideas” and drives the team in selecting issues. One team member shared:

So we start off with our map ... we collected all the data in the map, and then highlighted major problems that we saw, for example, we listed them in a way where we were like, okay, like transportation, sidewalks, food resources ... so we've listed the problems and had that process and time to really figure out the problems that youth are experiencing in Nashville. And then after that, we kind of took those big problems that we talked about, and then looked at specific areas in Nashville to focus on. So, for example, we knew transportation was a big thing. It was brought up multiple, multiple times from students, however, we didn't really know where to focus, so we looked at our map and looked at specific areas that were mentioned for transportation and noted those.

This quote reflects a commitment to ensuring that youth voice beyond the voices of the team is included in issue selection. As another NYDT member described, "we are not just doing something to do it; we are doing something because it's in our data, because it supports wellness, and because it's in the built environment." These reflections reveal that NYDT has developed a rigorous and equitable process for identifying and assessing issues, which allows them to prioritize issues and provide evidence to support their design solutions.

Mobilizing structures

We also see evidence of youth gaining institutional power through their affiliation with NYDT. NYDT membership credentials these youth, offering access to decision-making contexts that have typically excluded them. However, having access to adult-centered spaces does not automatically grant youth institutional power. For example, a team member described her experience representing NYDT at a meeting of planning and transit officials, stating:

I attended a meeting with [the transit group], and it was all adults, and I was very uncomfortable. Because I didn't know when to speak. And I didn't know, like, I didn't understand, all ideas that other people were bringing up. They were bringing up the same thing we were bringing up, but I don't know, they were more aggressive. No, it wasn't as much of a safe space. But [a few weeks later] there was a member of [the transit group], she came to one of our meetings. And she was very nice about everything. She was open to hearing us because she came to our meeting. It was our meeting, so she's obviously expecting feedback. In the adult group, it wasn't as easy to express yourself.

Youth build institutional power through sustained partnerships. They share that "most all of these, actually, are with adults", as intergenerational groups are important for creating mobilizing structures that support youth power. But as this team member describes, youth face barriers rooted in adultism as they build intergenerational partnership, despite working toward the same goal. Many team members shared in this concern as they sought to mobilize adults, and note the lengths they take to ensure they are taken seriously. For example, one member shared that they "work[ed] on like scripts and PowerPoints for days and sometimes even weeks to, like, narrow down everything to a tee on how to ... persuade them on why we're more than just a group of kids", while another stated, "it's kind of scary because it's like, are they gonna like, listen? Or are they gonna think we're just playing around?"

Systemic Power

To understand how NYDT develops and exercises systemic power, we explored how the team conducts root cause analysis, develops critical consciousness, and shapes public narratives. To assess root cause analysis, we asked team members to explain what has caused the issues they have identified and sought to address. To gauge critical consciousness, the young people were

asked how they believe the built environment impacts people’s lives as well as how change occurs, and how these views have shifted as a result of their involvement with NYDT. And to understand how the team shapes public narratives, we asked them to describe the stories people tell that inhibit the team’s ability to make change and how they address those stories.

Root cause analysis

NYDT activists engage in root cause analysis by drawing connections between the well-being of community members and challenges they are documenting in the built environment. Their research, activism, and design work bring attention to health-related issues that are often unjustly attributed to individuals. For example, several members noted how the problems facing the cities were “built into the system”, with one member describing how Nashville’s extreme growth has driven inequity:

Nashville’s infrastructure, in general, is struggling to keep up with the like exponential growth of our population. We’re scrambling to build more houses and build more roads. And I don’t think we’re really focusing on the quality, or equality, or thinking a whole lot about practical solutions to the issues that come with growth. We’re just trying to stretch as much as we can.

NYDT also supports members in understanding the interlocking nature of oppression. For example, one team member shared:

We see how interconnected some of the issues in Nashville are. How every community is impacted by what’s in the built environment, and how these problems began. We are trying to not view those problems as all separate individual problems. Because a lot of Nashville’s issues definitely interconnect and link with each other.

These activists’ analyses reveal how the team engages in root cause analysis and makes sense of the impact of Nashville’s history of neoliberal policies that prioritize economic growth, often at the expense of existing communities. It is through their analyses that they are able to move beyond surface level explanations to a deeper understanding of the role power plays in shaping inequities within their city.

Critical consciousness development

Team members in NYDT described the way that their involvement helped them build systemic power by developing critical consciousness, fostering a space for them to challenge inequitable conditions in the city. In some cases, critical consciousness development in NYDT extended beyond the group itself. Many members shared that they saw raising critical consciousness among the broader public, particularly among adults, to be an important element of their work. For example, when describing the most important outcome of interactions with powerful adults during the group’s research actions, one member shared:

I don’t always focus on the change that it brings. However, I do focus on educating them because when you educate them on a topic that they’re unaware of … even if they don’t change, because it’s not like you’re going to snap your finger, and they’re going to be magically different people, however, the education portion of it is super important, because they’ll just have that background when this topic is brought up or argued about.

Several members described how research actions allowed the team to push back against powerful adults, and in doing so, support their critical consciousness. Another student shared his approach to these interactions, stating:

I don't want to use the word threaten, but like, we can get the government or people in charge of change to realize that there is like something bigger going on, and that we are not going to be quiet about the issues, and we can get a lot of people to care.

This sentiment was prominent among youth in the second year with NYDT when describing how they balance collaboration and conflict in a critical approach to change-making.

Shaping narratives

Finally, NYDT activists increase their systemic power through disrupting narratives about whose voices and perspectives should drive change in the city. In interviews, team members wrestled with adultist expectations of their role in social change. They also shared how they hoped to dismantle these narratives through their activism. For example, one member reflected on an instance when one of their designs that had received media attention was questioned by adults online:

They said, "You are too young ... you're not in power." It's just one big like stereotype ... like, "you're too young to know what you're doing; you can't be doing such big design work; you're too young to actually be given this big responsibility of taking on design work." ... Those are some things that can make me think, "Can I bring this change I want to bring?" ... But the passion that we have for the work moves us forward even when these different things are being said.

Similarly, a second-year team member shared how she hopes, over time, their work will contribute to new realities:

If we continue to operate throughout the years to come, and ... grow a better relationship with [state government offices], and the local government, and have more successful projects, and help gain their trust more, we can begin to push for bigger, bigger changes. Part of that is you have to be willing to fight for change. And not back down at the first no that you get from like, local government or whatever.

Other NYDT activists echoed this idea that "youth can make a change, but real change takes time". For example, one individual shared that "it just takes a lot of determination to help those in the community to actually take the perspective that's being given by the youth", and that the team would need to be relentless in their pursuit of social change in order to be effective. As a result, the passion and persistence of the team reveals their commitment to challenging adultist norms and reshaping the narratives around young people's role in urban planning and civic life broadly.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Youth activists require empowering community contexts that support them as they lead efforts to transform communities, institutions, and society. Our analysis of youth activists' perspec-

tives of the NYDT participatory design collective model reveals opportunities and challenges for community power-building in the situational, institutional, and systemic domains.

Situational Power

NYDT members describe high levels of collective efficacy; they trust one another and have a sense that their fellow team members chose to join due to shared commitments to making change in the city and a shared passion for elevating youth voice. This sense of collective efficacy is an indicator of NYDT functioning as an empowering community context for youth. However, despite their strong relationships, youth activists do not have a shared sense of how local leadership functions in their collective; some youth point to a few deeply engaged, long-term members as leaders. Others find the committee structure to eliminate the need for leaders altogether.

Overall, members describe NYDT as an egalitarian space in which all voices are heard and all opinions are taken into consideration, which informs how they carry out their work. Specifically, their desire to bring many youth voices into local decision-making is reflected in their participatory action research and mapping process. The importance youth place on perspective-taking is reflected in other dimensions of power. It informs their approach to selecting issues in a way that prioritizes the needs of young people. It is also reflected in their hopes that over time, they will contribute to systemic shifts toward greater inclusivity of young people in issues that impact their lives.

Institutional Power

Civic developmental theory suggests that with practice over time, youth will gain skills in prioritizing issues and analyzing how these issues are nested in local power structures (Christens, 2019). Youth are also still increasing their capacity for mobilizing others to engage in community change efforts. Most efforts by NYDT youth to build mobilizing structures center on partnering with adults, not other groups of youth activists working locally, regionally, or nationally. This may change as the group gains autonomy in building partnerships, but for now, many of NYDT’s existing relationships are brokered through their community partner at the Civic Design Center and are therefore adult-centered.

Youth raised many concerns about how seriously they are taken by the adults they are attempting to mobilize. Youth are just beginning to build intergenerational partnerships to enhance their work. Over time, youth may come to see these relationships as generative in building community power. Evidence from the current interviews suggests that in the early stages of this participatory design collective, youth struggled to build power as they integrate into adult-centered spaces. However, NYDT offers activists an empowering organizational context that supports them in mobilizing adults. In the NYDT settings, youth can bring adults into their meetings where they are able to set the agenda. In doing so, they challenge tokenization or exclusion from issues that affect them.

Systemic Power

At the end of NYDT’s second year, youth activists are beginning to develop a shared analysis of the root causes of issues in the built environment they seek to address. Interviews reveal

many instances of youth rejecting individual attributions for systemic injustices, but there is less evidence that youth are considering the varied sociohistorical conditions that have led to disparities in the city's urban planning and design. While deepening their collective understanding of the root causes of Nashville's issues, NYDT members are working to increase the critical consciousness of powerful adults. When describing research actions, which are meetings meant to mobilize or agitate powerful adults, several young people shared how they leverage this space to educate adults about the factors that contribute to inequity in the built environment and to push those with power to include youth perspectives in their work. Members in their second year with NYDT were much more likely to share how they fostered critical consciousness among the broader public than members in their first year, which is aligned with conceptions of critical consciousness development as an iterative cycle.

Through their research, activism, and design work, NYDT youth are pushing for alternative futures for Nashville residents that can be made possible through equitable urban planning. Interviews reveal that youth in NYDT are equally invested in promoting more equitable approaches to public participation that value the unique contributions of young people. Team members define themselves as representatives for elevating youth voice in the public realm. As representatives, they are concerned with reshaping dominant ideologies about the role of youth in civic life. NYDT's work to educate powerful others is connected to their broader desire to create more expansive realities for youth decision-making in the city.

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23. On and off: representations and omissions of youth activism in political campaign ads (Brazil and Argentina, 1980s and 2010s)

Dolores Rocca Rivarola

INTRODUCTION

Exploring the representations of young people in the public debate can help answer broader questions, namely how a society defines its political contours, how it understands itself in a particular historical moment, and how it builds the memory of its past, deals with the present, and projects a future. In a similar way, as this chapter will argue, the portrayal of youth activism (or, conversely, its omission) by a party or a candidate in a TV electoral campaign can be a reflection of a particular political context. It also conveys a form of public self-definition of a leader or a political organization, and, thereby, a specific notion of political linkage.

Political linkage, that is, the shaping of political identities and political commitments, has undergone different transformations since the return to democracy in Argentina (1983) and Brazil (1985). Some of the literature on those changes in different countries has shown lower levels of partisan identification, growing electoral volatility, and intense fluctuation in political identities (Manin, 1992). In the cases of Argentina and Brazil, some studies have referred to similar processes – with certain nuances in terms of the Peronist Party in Argentina and the Workers’ Party (PT) in Brazil – (Carreirão, 2008; Hochstetler and Friedman, 2008; Pousadela, 2007) while others have even found a transformation in the activists’ own political connection (Rocca Rivarola, 2021).¹

As part of those processes, as well as other global and technological changes, electoral campaigning in both countries has also experienced a reconfiguration over the years, especially through professionalization. Pippa Norris (2008) outlined a periodization of occidental electoral campaigns, in which in a third moment, from the 1990s, total professionalization permeated every campaign activity, with hired personnel replacing activists, segmented messages and strategies, information and communications technology (ICT), with a substantial increase in campaign expenses. Phenomena such as hyper-personalized campaigning or the emphasis on candidates’ personal attributes over their organizations or parties have received wide attention (Gunther and Diamond, 2003; Manin, 1992). Since the return to democracy, the professionalization of electoral campaigns has followed specific paths and rates in Argentina (D’Alessandro, 2017; García Beaudoux and D’Adamo, 2006) and Brazil (Albuquerque, 2005; Neto, 2007; Ribeiro, 2004).

In other words, the linkage between candidates, grassroots activists, and voters has mutated over time. In addition, this had its correlation with electoral campaign ads on TV (and more recently, their counterpart on social media).

In the twenty-first century, youth seem to have emerged as critical political actors in both countries. Apart from legislation, which allows them to vote from the age of 16,² young people

were key protagonists of many of the mobilization processes that took place in the 2010s in Latin America (P. Vommaro, 2015). These included, in Brazil, the *Passe Livre* movement against the rise of public transportation fares, which then expanded and mutated into massive protests against corruption and the government (Singer, 2013). In Argentina, during Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's administrations (2007–2015), youth became an activism cause and a principle in the construction of public commitments and political affiliations (Vázquez, 2013). It does not come as a surprise that, against this background, presidential candidates sought the attention of young people. But how was youth activism portrayed in campaigns? How did those visual representations change over time? How can we understand those changes?

This chapter examines visual representations of youth activism in electoral TV ads of the most popular presidential candidates in Argentina and Brazil in two different periods: the late 1980s and the 2010s. It is based on content analysis of political advertising from a qualitative perspective, tracking and interpreting messages and the use of images in TV spots in Argentina and electoral TV programs of the HGPE (*Horário Gratuito de Propaganda Eleitoral*) in Brazil.

To approach the TV campaigns, it was particularly useful to review some studies focused on that type of audiovisual material in Argentina and Brazil: among others, Albuquerque (1999); Panke (2011); Pires (2011); Dias (2013); Gouvêa (2014); García Beaudoux and D'Adamo (2006).

As shown in Table 23.1, the corpus consists of a selection of short TV spots, for Argentina, and the longer electoral programs of the HGPE, in Brazil.³ All the electoral programs of the Brazilian HGPE were surveyed and analyzed.⁴ In the case of Aécio Neves's HGPE, I took a random sample of seven programs. For Argentina, all of the samples were composed of material found online, on YouTube.⁵

Table 23.1 Data sources for TV shorts during election campaigns in Argentina and Brazil

	Argentina	Brazil
Late 1980s	1989: Carlos Menem: sample of 33 spots Eduardo Angeloz: sample of 40 spots	1989: Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva: all of the HGPE programs Fernando Collor de Mello: all of the programs
2010s	2011: Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (CFK): sample of 23 spots Hermes Binner: sample of 11 spots	2014: Dilma Rousseff: all of the programs Aécio Neves: sample of 7 HGPE programs
	2015: ^a Daniel Scioli: sample of 67 spots Mauricio Macri: sample of 59 spots	2018: Fernando Haddad: all of the programs Jair Bolsonaro: all of the programs

Note: a.The wider sample gathered for 2015 in Argentina can be explained by the proliferation of spots on YouTube and social media.

Propositions

I will present here three propositions or arguments:

First, the audiovisual representation of youth activism on TV campaigns during the selected presidential elections shows oscillations – an “on-and-off” dynamic – both among the different political forces and over time.

Second, specific ways of conceiving the political linkage between leaders or candidates and citizenship underlie the decision to show (or omit) their own activist bases in their TV campaigns. Flaunting the candidate’s grassroots activism, with its passionate and organic adhesions, involves a conception of the political linkage that is quite different from the one presented by leaders who leave out a representation of their militant bases or make them less visible. In the latter case, the aim would be to present a supposedly direct link and dialogue between the leader and his or her voters, without organic mediation or party apparatuses behind them, thus trying to blur any dividing line between professional politics and “common” (and not politically affiliated) people. It is true that, ever since the return to democracy in Brazil and Argentina, it has been quite common for political advertising to prioritize exhibiting images of “common people” over organized activists. Nonetheless, there are some particular moments and cases when this emphasis is taken to the extreme, diluting any kind of collective reference to the candidate’s own bases of support. That is the case in Collor de Mello’s campaign in 1989, Macri’s in 2015, and Bolsonaro’s in 2018. Exactly the opposite happens on other occasions, when activism (and specifically, youth activism) receives special attention in images and messages conveyed by TV ads: Lula da Silva’s campaign in 1989, Fernández de Kirchner’s in 2011, and Rousseff’s in 2014.⁶

A third and final argument is that, although 2010s’ campaigns seem to appeal to young people more than those in 1989, the audiovisual representation of youth activism is not a continuous feature of the decade. To understand this inconsistency better, it is worth considering the specific political climate in Argentina in 2011 and in Brazil in 2014, in which youth mobilization gained momentum and legitimacy.

REPRESENTATIONS OF YOUTH POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN PRESIDENTIAL TV CAMPAIGNS: THE LATE 1980S AND THE 2010S

1989: Democracy at Stake and Dissimilar Representations of Youth Activism

In both Argentina and Brazil, the 1989 elections can be considered a turning point. In Brazil, this was the first direct presidential election after two decades of dictatorship (1964–1985) and four years of a government (José Sarney) that had not been elected by popular vote (but by the Congress) and experienced serious macroeconomic problems and enormous social inequality. The year 1989 also showed a spike in social support for democracy in Brazil, the so-called Honeymoon effect (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

The Argentine context was somewhat different, as after almost eight years of authoritarian regime (1976–1983), a new president was elected by popular vote in 1983. By 1989, however, the economic crisis was at its peak, and the “democratic spring” was over, against a backdrop

of disenchantment with partisan politics (Quiroga, 1996) that was even more noticeable among young people (P. Vommaro, 2015).

These national contexts intertwined with the aforementioned global trends of disaffection between voters and political parties, personalization of the electoral offer, and professionalization of electoral campaigns, which were to deepen in the 1990s.

The construction of the candidates' image displayed different, and even opposite, notions of political linkage.

Menem's campaign, under the *Frente Justicialista Popular* (FREJUPO) in Argentina, tried to present him as a sort of messianic leader (Fair, 2014), in a close and direct link with voters, even if there were, in fact, very specific party mediations, especially the Peronist Party (PJ). Collor's HGPE, in Brazil, also sought to portray this image of closeness, and depicted him as a morally superior authority in terms of competence, experience, and his stance against corruption (Albuquerque, 1999). At times, he was even depicted as a hero (Albuquerque, 1999; Neto, 2007), albeit, I should add, a solitary one, without being conditioned by groups or party apparatuses. I will return to that feature later.

Lacking Menem's personal charisma, his competitor, Angeloz, was portrayed as a skilled administrator, having been the governor of Córdoba, the country's second most populous province.⁷ His proposals were presented as feasible and realistic, as opposed to the empty promises and the threat of chaos and misrule that a Menem administration would entail. This depiction of the adversary as a threat was also noticeable in Collor's campaign for the second round. An eventual Lula government was associated with words reiterated all the time: chaos, disturbance [*baderna*], disorder [*bagunça*], and disorganization.

Presenting himself as a worker, Lula spoke as someone who personally understood the hardships suffered by most Brazilians, because, as he said, "I lived 20 years of my life as most of the people live." Albuquerque (1999) calls this the construction of an image of "identity" with the electorate. He was also presented as the builder of an alliance of progressive parties, stressing the grassroots activism that underpinned his link with voters.

Taking into account these different ways of presenting political linkage, what were the visual representations of youth activism like in these four 1989 campaigns?

Angelo's party, the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR), had a robust youth branch, the *Juventud Radical* (JR), which had a significant presence, for example, in public universities. His ads portrayed that activist youth mobilized in his rallies. This was not, however, an outstanding feature in the spots, and was limited to brief images in some of the pieces. Moreover, in one of those spots, rallies were portrayed in an almost negative way, as an off-screen narrator associated activist cheering [*agite militante*] in rallies to a "noise" that would hinder the rational and calm reflection necessary for voters to opt for stability and viable change.⁸

Menem's TV campaign put emphasis on his personal leadership, and activists were not represented explicitly. There was, however, an indirect and noteworthy kind of representation: in a series of several animation spots (cartoons), a street band composed of youth and children repeated provocative and catchy songs, generally mocking the rival candidate.⁹ It might be an exaggeration to identify these young characters as militants, but they were certainly not the "innocent" children represented in Angeloz's ads, swinging in the park or drawing little houses on paper. These were children and young people who walked together in the street – next to walls with political graffiti – singing a campaign song, taking a political stance, criticizing the government and its incumbent candidate. They were quite involved in politics.¹⁰

The HGPE programs of Lula's *Frente Brasil Popular* highlighted activist intermediation, exhibited as predominantly composed of youth. This intermediation was valued as a distinctive feature. Recurring images showed rallies with activists singing, cheering, raising a fist (a historical left-wing gesture), and waving their party flags. In the campaign towards the second round, long segments included an off-screen narrator describing a political rally, identifying the presence of young political activists, and listing their respective parties one by one.¹¹

Additionally, youth activism was called upon to form "pro-Lula campaign committees" (with images of young people carrying out proselytizing tasks, sewing a flag and assembling campaign materials); to carry out fundraising activities (in industrial factories, for example); or, in the final stretch towards the second round, when an off-screen narrator called for a day of militancy, with "door-to-door" activities in "your neighborhood". In these last programs, Lula himself summoned activists, thanking them for their involvement thus far and calling for a final effort, to go out to the streets, with "our" flags.

The opposite was true in Collor's campaign. Permanently pondering a supposedly direct link with the people, the candidate of the *Movimento Novo* alliance omitted any mention of his own party, the PRN (to which he had been affiliated shortly before), or to allied parties. Instead, he emphasized that his candidacy was born "pure" and "crystalline", without the tutelage of any group or party. Insisting on this idea when campaigning for the second round, he told the voters that his candidacy "does not belong to any party, but only to you". Moreover, Collor sought to establish an informal and affectionate dialogue with the audience, constantly calling them *minha gente* [my people], forging an "us" (*eu e você*, or *eu e vocês*, in the plural) that excluded the rest of the political class. Attendees of his campaign events were presented as "electors" or as "the people of [name of the town]" and never as organized activists, in a similar way to how Bolsonaro would portray his "followers" in the 2018 campaign. In fact, almost no party flags were seen in the images, but only banners with Collor's name and face.

As an extreme corollary of this strategy of glorifying the supposed absence of mediations between the candidate and his electorate, Collor's campaign for the second round displayed a vicious stigmatization of the Workers' Party's (PT) young activists. After the incidents prior to a Collor rally in Caxias do Sul (in the state of Rio Grande do Sul), Collor's programs started associating PT activism (showing mostly young people's faces) with violence, intolerance, and fanaticism, and even drew a visual parallel to the Nazi youth in Germany in the 1930s. In a repeated segment, a journalist hired by Collor's program, Belisa Ribeiro, highlighted the juvenile character of those accused of political violence: "young people, who never voted for president, breaking everything, hitting". This attempt to draw a parallel between left-wing youth activism and authoritarianism and disorder was invigorated as Collor's campaign assumed an increasingly anti-communist narrative.¹²

Thus, the representation of youth activism in Collor's campaign was non-existent in terms of his own supporting grassroots activism, and categorically negative in the references to the opposing political youth. In one of its ads, Angeloz's campaign also tried to associate the other candidate, Menem, with a violent and authoritarian youth, showing a succession of historic images that included the Peronist Youth's armed organizations in the 1970s. However, that same spot then depicted the *Juventud Radical* (JR), Angeloz's supporting grassroots youth, as already peacefully mobilized in political rallies in a democratic context, a narrative in line with the JR's self-presentation slogan in the early 1980s, "we are life, we are peace". In contrast, in Collor's recurring stigmatization of PT young activists, there was no vindication of other politically organized youth activists, but rather a contrast with "the people".

Visual Emphasis on Youth Activism: The Re-elections of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina (2011) and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (2014)

Many electoral campaigns during the 1990s and 2000s sought to highlight a direct linkage between the candidate and the voters, visually omitting collective mediations (activism, parties). In Argentina, this was the case with Menem's campaign in 1994 and Néstor Kirchner's in 2003. In Brazil, some studies have shown that even some PT campaigns during those years seemed to dissociate the image of the presidential candidate from the party logo, its iconography, and colors (Dias, 2013; Panke, 2011).¹³

However, the situation changed in Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's (from now on, CFK) campaign in 2011, in Argentina, and in Dilma Rousseff's TV campaign in 2014, in Brazil. Both of them showed an especially prominent audiovisual representation of political youth.¹⁴

Their opponents' campaigns in those elections – Hermes Binner (*Frente Amplio Progresista*) in Argentina, and Aécio Neves (*Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira*) in Brazil – did not show a similar feature, even though in both cases their respective parties had some grassroots bases.¹⁵

In Argentina, youth activism was pictured in CFK's TV campaign through shots of massive rallies, young people waving flags and chanting, ovations to the leader, and even through images of activist T-shirts (with the names of Kirchnerist organizations such as *La Cámpora*). But a narrative resource was also exploited, already analyzed in previous work (Rocca Rivarola and Moscovich, 2018): "Argentines", "young people", "housewives", and other social categories mentioned by CFK's off-screen voice were personified or illustrated in the form of *Kirchnerista* activists, who were shown marching in a mobilization, heading to a political rally, wrapped in a flag, greeting the candidate, or crying with emotion while listening to her speech. A spot called "*La fuerza de los jóvenes*" [The strength of young people], for instance, did not portray young people as potential voters, students, or workers; but rather as youth with an explicit political commitment. In the final seconds of several spots, the slogan "the strength of a country" was accompanied by a very symbolic image: CFK's back and, facing her, a crowd mobilized in a staged political rally. Here, the "country" was embodied by a mobilized crowd, and what stood out was the organic and emotional bond with the candidate.

As argued in the introduction, the political context is key. Ever since the so-called farmers' conflict in 2008, the CFK administration assigned a core visibility to its grassroots youth activism. CFK often showed off her political base of militant youth (acting in different associated organizations, such as *La Cámpora*, which experienced a vertiginous growth, especially after Néstor Kirchner's sudden death) as a key aspect of the *Kirchnerista* political project. Several studies have addressed this public and discursive exaltation of its own militant bases, as well as its derivations in the composition of state bureaucracies (Vázquez, 2013; 2014; Vázquez and Rocca Rivarola, 2022).

In Brazil, the use of images of partisan activism in TV campaigns (scenes of street rallies, mobilized crowds, banners and cheers) was a historical feature in the PT's HGPE (Albuquerque, 1999). As discussed before, the 1989 campaign represented a sort of climax in this respect, and visual emphasis on militant intermediation seemed to diminish in the following years. In 2014, however, the representations of grassroots activism regained an outstanding strength, and also a new kind of reference to youth activism was introduced.

In 2014, Dilma's HGPE segments dedicated to supporting activists were longer than in her previous campaign programs in 2010. In addition, we can see, especially in the programs

towards the run-off, a repeated announcement of the new organic support or collective backing that the candidate was garnering (youth organizations, trade unions, and social organizations). Images of rallies in the streets or in enclosed areas were described by an off-screen narrator as “the Brazil that mobilizes” or “that fights for more jobs, more salaries, for political reform”. These images of political activism did not portray young people exclusively or even predominantly. But there were also two other ways in which Dilma’s HGPE programs in 2014 portrayed youth political commitment.

The first one was the reference to the June 2013 protests. These initially consisted of demonstrations, composed mainly of youth, against the increase in public transport fares, and led by the *Passe Livre* movement. A year later, Dilma’s campaign mentioned those events. The HGPE included scenes of a meeting held by Dilma Rousseff with some youth organizations’ leaders, who were presented as protagonists of those demonstrations. The HGPE segments covering the meeting seemed to appeal directly to young voters who demonstrated in June 2013, acknowledging the legacy of those protests. But they also seemed to rewrite their meaning in some way: an off-screen voice presented the organizations at the meeting, all with some degree of affinity with the government, as “movements of young people who took to the streets in the June demonstrations, to defend more progress”. Thus, Dilma’s HGPE tried to redefine the protests, which, eventually, were taking a clearer anti-government turn, as an impulse for her own administration to “continue” advancing. It sought an association with them, and it even retroactively repositioned the pro-government youth in a more leading role than they actually had in those days.

A second way of visual representation of youth activism in Dilma’s 2014 campaign is the pondering and vindication of her own experience as a young armed militant against the dictatorship and later as a prisoner.

In the 2010 election, although Dilma’s past membership in armed organizations was the subject of extensive media coverage, often in the form of criticism and even denunciation (Gouvêa, 2014), her own HGPE avoided references to her militant youth trajectory (Jucá and Chaves, 2015; Rocca Rivarola and Moscovich, 2018). In 2014, in contrast, Dilma’s HGPE took that period of armed struggle (and even her own detention by the regime) and stripped it of the negativity that the press assigned to it in 2010. It was invested with an epic character, depicting Dilma as a heroine in the context of resistance against the military dictatorship, with a slogan that synthesized that symbolic operation: “Dilma, a brave heart”. A range of different resources was used for that purpose. First, two pictures that were repeatedly placed in the HGPE showed her as a political prisoner: one, where she was about to give her statement to a military court, and the other, a sort of mug shot turned into a drawing, where her hair and clothes were digitally edited with a filling of images that alluded to the dictatorship. Both pictures were part of the core aesthetics of the campaign for the run-off and its visual logo. Dilma’s youth activism during the dictatorship was also acknowledged through explicit references to her detention and torture (for example, in fragments of Lula’s and her own speeches in rallies shown in the HGPE). Also, in the aforementioned meeting with young activists, Dilma made explicit the socialist and revolutionary character of her own political background during the dictatorship:

There is a belief that we have in youth, which is something that justifies one’s being in the world [...] I thought that the socialist revolution depended on my being a militant 24 hours a day. And if I stopped fighting 24 hours a day, the socialist revolution would not happen. You would arrive, get up in the morning and say, “I am a revolutionary. Tomorrow everything will be solved” [laughter from

those present]. I think the June demonstrations [2013] have a little bit of that. That's why I found them so interesting.¹⁶

In that statement included in the HGPE, Dilma seemed to bind together two important ways in which her campaign represented youth activism: on one hand, the vindication of her own past as a young militant against the dictatorship; on the other, the attempt to re-signify the legacy of the 2013 protests as a critical input for her administration.

In sum, both CFK's 2011 and Dilma's 2014 campaigns exhibited a distinct emphasis on audiovisual representations of youth activism. This feature entails a specific conception of the political linkage between leaders and voters. But its meaning is also better understood by taking into consideration the particularities of the political context at the time.

Non Activist-Youth on Display and the Rise of the Right: 2015 in Argentina and 2018 in Brazil

The elections of 2015 (Argentina) and 2018 (Brazil) marked the rise of right-wing candidates – Mauricio Macri and Jair Bolsonaro, respectively – and the defeat of Kirchnerism and the PT, both of which had given youth activism a significant visual presence in their TV campaigns in 2011 and 2014.

This general statement, however, needs some nuance. First, the PT had already been ousted from power in 2016, in an impeachment that many read as a political coup, and the 2018 elections took place under an interim and conservative administration (Michel Temer) and also with Lula imprisoned for corruption, since April, and therefore unable to run for presidency. His conviction would be overturned years later. Second, in Argentina, the incumbent candidate chosen by CFK to succeed her in the 2015 presidential election was Daniel Scioli, whose relationship with Kirchnerist grassroots organizations was much weaker.

In the “on-and-off” trajectory that this chapter observes, the presence of audiovisual representations of youth activism in electoral campaign TV ads in both countries, 2015 in Argentina and 2018 in Brazil, were clearly “off” moments. Let us look at how youth activism in particular was portrayed in those campaigns.

The appeal to young voters seemed to be more present in the 2010s than in the late 1980s, especially in terms of how candidates addressed the electorate in their campaigns (informal language, *tuteo* or familiar speech in Argentina, the use of youth cultural consumptions, such as music, etc.), but also in the aesthetics and interaction of TV ads with ICT and online social media. For example, in some of Fernando Haddad's HGPE programs (coalition “*O Povo feliz de novo*”), there was a youthful graphic style in terms of colors and text format, as well as a rapid succession of images and Facebook-like symbols and reactions. Since Haddad was a university professor and former Minister of Education, his HGPE paid considerable attention to PT's education policies (showing young beneficiaries' accounts) and to campaign promises related to young people and high school and university education.

Bolsonaro's HGPE, with almost no air time for the first round (less than 10 seconds per day), showed him in a political street rally, carried through the crowd on someone's shoulders, as a recurring written message told the viewer to “access now” a link. Moreover, social media was a key platform for his electoral campaign, which was even accused by a journalistic investigation and by the electoral justice of illegally hiring, through friendly private companies, mass automatic messaging services on WhatsApp.¹⁷ However, the right-wing candidate's

HGPE did not address young people as directly as Haddad did, and the followers his programs showed were from different generations.

But what about the representations of youth activism? What were they like in both campaigns?

Especially towards the end of each piece, most of Haddad's programs included some images of political activism in campaign rallies, with red T-shirts and activist flags – although the organizations' names were not clearly shown, as they were in 1989 or 2014 – people carrying signs with the motto "*Lula livre*" [free Lula], and wearing masks with Lula's face. Even some of the supposedly unscripted opinions gathered in the street by the campaign – what Albuquerque (1999) conceptualizes as "the popular" accounts in HGPE programs – were taken at scenes of street protests: protests against Temer's government, or even against Bolsonaro's candidacy (the "*Ele não*" ["Not him!"] demonstration led by women). In other words, these were not mere voters giving their opinion, but people mobilized for a cause. All these features made their political commitment explicit, whereas Bolsonaro portrayed his own followers as spontaneous and unorganized.

When compared with Dilma's campaign in 2014 and Lula's in 1989, however, the weight of youth activism representations in Haddad's HGPE in 2018 seemed much more modest, as was the use of the party logo and identity.¹⁸

Once Bolsonaro's HGPE equaled Haddad's time after the first round, his programs acquired a distinctive mark that would share several features with Collor's run-off campaign in 1989. The notion of political linkage involved in Bolsonaro's portrayal of his followers went in the opposite direction to the PT, and resembled Collor's own image construction. Bolsonaro's campaign pictured him as a candidate without the support of a large party apparatus, and dissociated him from a corrupted party system: "How to overcome a system, a machine so clung to the ground? [...] I knew that I would not have a big or medium-sized party by my side, I would not have TV airtime, I would not have party funds, I would have nothing." Despite having been a congressman for almost three decades, in 2018 Bolsonaro posed as an outsider, seeking to attract the anti-partisan sentiment that boiled up within the anti-PT demonstrations of 2015 and 2016.

Moreover, even though Bolsonaro's HGPE programs repeatedly exhibited scenes of campaign walking tours [*caminhadas*], his followers were not pictured as activists but rather as common people, enthusiastic about his candidacy and possible change in the country. This resembled Collor's 1989 strategy of presenting those at his campaign rallies as mere "electors".

And there lay a conveyance of the political linkage as a direct bond between the leader and the citizens, without any organic intermediation. Drawing on the same narrative, the HGPE presenter declared that "Bolsonaro arrived here with the support of his people, with nothing more than his determination, with only eight seconds of TV" and that "it is from social media that the most important support comes, the support of our people".

Something similar was conveyed in homemade videos by supporters, broadcast in Bolsonaro's HGPE. A young couple in their car said, "We'll vote for Bolsonaro because for the first time in history, the Brazilian cause is more important than the cause of a political party." Bolsonaro's own slogan, "*Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos*" [Brazil above everything, God above all of us], suggested a similar idea: The "Brazilian People" were more important than any partisan interest. This was also something that lingered from the 2015–2016 anti-PT protests, where the general attire was the T-shirt of the Brazilian national football squad. Not only did Bolsonaro's HGPE center its aesthetics on those same national

colors, but one of his musical jingles went: “Blue, white, yellow, and green is our flag. With faith in the people’s strength, it will never be red.” Red as in the PT, but also, red as in communism, as anticomunism was a feature of Bolsonaro’s TV campaign for the second round (with references to the São Paulo Forum, Lula and Dilma’s foreign policy regarding Cuba and Venezuela, and even the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989). In sum, the valued portrayal of young people by Bolsonaro’s campaign was that of nonpartisan voters, fed up with a corrupted political system.

In Argentina, neither Mauricio Macri (*Cambiamos*) nor Daniel Scioli (*Frente para la Victoria*) highlighted, in their campaigns, the youth political commitment that CFK’s campaign had emphasized in 2011. Macri put the emphasis on proximity and a direct dialogue with the electorate, insisting on blurring the boundaries between professional politics and “the people” (Annunziata et al., 2018; Rocca Rivarola and Bonazzi, 2017). This feature was particularly present in the 2015 TV ads, with a narrative highlight on a sort of intimate link between *Cambiamos*’ candidates and the unorganized population, whom they would “visit” in their own homes. This direct bond was pictured not only as lacking organic political mediations, but was also stripped of some typical elements of party politics, as suggested by a spot: “with the heart, not with speeches”. This indirect impugnation of party politics went hand in hand with a visual omission of Macri’s youth activist supporters, as opposed to the hyper-visibilization of young activists portrayed in CFK’s 2011 campaign.

Instead, Scioli’s TV ads did carry an explicit party identity (Peronism/Kirchnerism). But the contrast with CFK’s campaign in 2011 was considerable. In Scioli’s official campaign,¹⁹ the representations of activist youth were much scarcer than in 2011. They were limited to, for example, a young girl making a “V” gesture with her fingers (a sign historically associated, in Argentina, with Peronism); or to a very brief camera shot towards the end of some ads, showing an audience in a theater and the flag of an activist organization seen in the distance.

The political context is critical to the understanding of the contrast with CFK’s campaign in 2011. On the one hand, Scioli’s candidacy did not attract full support from youth organizations that had grown outside the Peronist Party (*La Cámpora* and others). The slogan seen on banners in different mobilizations in 2015 (not in the TV ads, of course), “the [Kirchnerist] Project is the candidate”, seemed to point to distrust of Scioli, a politician whose ideological profile was not the one desired by those organizations, and who had been quite looked down on by the president herself in the past (G. Vommaro, 2015). On the other hand, the 2015 campaign took place after years of public discussion regarding *La Cámpora*. The organization’s political and state practices were often criticized and even stigmatized (for example, when the political opposition compared them to fascism, accusing them of “indoctrinating” young people at school). It is against that specific background that Scioli subtly delimited himself, in his TV spots, from some of the most stinging features of Kirchnerism during those years, including its aforementioned boasting of its own grassroots activism. Presenting himself as someone open to dialogue and reflective about mistakes, he postulated change but also a certain continuity. In that narrative line, Scioli’s campaign focused on picturing common people (including young workers, students, young mothers and fathers, etc.) and relegated the images of politically committed youth that had been so prominent in CFK’s 2011 campaign.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to examine representations of youth activism in the main audiovisual electoral campaigns in Argentina and Brazil in two different periods: the late 1980s and the 2010s.

If we regard the literature on the process of campaign professionalization together with studies related to changes in political representation, there seems to be a trend towards campaigns centered on candidates' personal attributes, which seek to evoke proximity between them and voters. However, this chapter's findings show specific moments when the candidates especially highlighted their supporting political activism in their TV campaigns: Lula's presidential campaign in 1989; CFK's in 2011; and Dilma Rousseff's in 2014. Compared to those cases, the other elections showed different patterns. In other words, between the late 1980s and the 2010s, TV campaigns do not show a linear trend but rather oscillations, or an "on-and-off" dynamic in terms of their audiovisual emphasis or representation of youth activism. As argued here, those fluctuations can be better understood by taking into account two elements.

First, there is the specific conception of the political linkage between leaderships or candidates and the citizenship involved in each campaign. Underlining or even boasting of the candidate's supporting grassroots activism goes hand in hand with a notion of the political linkage defined by militant and organic intermediation. The opposite is true for campaigns where candidates present themselves as lacking a party apparatus and as merely having spontaneous non-partisan followers. In this case, the aim is to present a supposedly direct dialogue between the leader and voters, blurring any dividing line between organized politics and ordinary (and not politically affiliated) people. Although the latter has been a more common feature on electoral TV advertising since the return of democracy in Brazil and Argentina, this chapter showed some moments and cases where candidates went the furthest in trying to dilute any kind of collective reference to their own bases of support: Collor de Melo in 1989 and Bolsonaro in 2018, in Brazil, and Mauricio Macri in 2015, in Argentina. All three of them sought to distinguish themselves from candidates whose own political parties had a tradition of organic activism and mediation.

A second element that we should bear in mind in order to understand the fluctuations on the visual weight or representations of youth activism in TV political advertising is the political setting or context. For example, the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil was hardly the same organization in the 2010s as it was in 1989, as it had undergone substantial transformation in its organization and platform (Amaral, 2010; Hunter, 2010). Therefore, even though the PT was – of all political forces considered in this study – the one that showed most continuity in its portrayal of partisan grassroots activism in the HGPE, it could also have experienced a decline in that representation over time. Yet, findings show considerable emphasis on youth activism in Dilma's re-election campaign in 2014, with even some remarkable references to her own political experience as a young armed militant against the dictatorship in the 1960s.

Therefore, the political context – for example, in terms of youth mobilization and its public legitimacy in 2011 in Argentina and in 2014 in Brazil – should not be overlooked when we draw conclusions about representations of youth activism in electoral TV advertising.

In 2011, the ostentation and legitimization of Kirchnerism's militant youth was a feature that it had been building since Néstor Kirchner's passing in 2010 (or even the agrarian conflict in 2008). On the other hand, both 2015 campaigns, Scioli's and more notoriously Macri's, were a manifestation or derivation of an ongoing public debate driven by the opposition to

CFK's government, about the actions, practices, and insertion in the State of that Kirchnerist activist youth (involved in various organizations but commonly reduced, as the object of criticism, to *La Cámpora*).

In Brazil, the 2014 campaign was also mediated by the political context and the events initiated a year earlier: the June Protests in 2013 and their subsequent drift into mobilizations calling for the head of the government (2015–2016). Both 2014 campaigns (Aécio Neves and Dilma) reflected this process. But Dilma's campaign did so by trying to appeal to the mobilized youth, with an epic narrative about the candidate's earlier political trajectory as a young militant against the dictatorship, and at the same time, showing a "listening" tone by her government, which is also depicted as a recipient of organic and mobilized support.

In both countries, then, the specific portrayal of youth activism reflects both a particular context (and an appeal to different segments of society in that political climate) and a self-definition of candidates and their parties in terms of the political linkage they intend to forge and bear. These features and representations of youth are not only nourished by the context, but, in some way, they might also contribute to shaping or reinforcing, even if briefly, certain social and institutional views and notions regarding young people and youth activism.

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NOTES

1. In previous papers I argued that the fluctuating conditions of political life in both countries underlie a growing contingency, flexibility, and informality vis-à-vis these activists' own political connection, which has become more partial, multiple, and overlapped with other memberships and identities.
2. In Brazil, this was sanctioned by the 1988 Constitution. In Argentina, by a law in 2012.
3. Legislation that regulated TV air time during political campaigns was substantially different in Argentina and Brazil in 1989. For example, parties could buy time for their TV ads in Argentina, whereas in Brazil this was regulated by the State. In 2009, a new law in Argentina determined that electoral advertising on TV and radio would be distributed entirely by the State, prohibiting paid advertising. In Brazil, on the other hand, several laws and judicial decisions have changed the electoral advertising rules over time.
4. Access to the empirical material was different in both countries. In Argentina, the TV spots were found on *YouTube* and also on the Electoral Campaigns Observatory [*Observatorio de Campañas Electorales*], a website organized by the Political Science Department of the UBA that later stopped working, and only went back online at the time this chapter was being revised: <http://xn--campaaselectorales-r0b.com.ar/> (last accessed 16 November 2022). In Brazil, at my request, the Laboratory for Electoral Studies in Political Communication and Public Opinion (DOXA) from the *Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro* (UERJ) provided me with access to their digital archive, and thus to all the HGPE programs of the elections this chapter analyzes.
5. The online search of the Argentine spots was carried out by the author and members of the research Group of Studies in Politics and Youth (GEPOJU): Gabriela Roizen, Viviana Norman and Marta Paredes, as well as Nicole Moscovich (not part of the group). GEPOJU is based at the Gino Germani Research Institute, of the *Universidad de Buenos Aires* (UBA). Partial advances of this analysis

- have been published in individual papers (Rocca Rivarola, forthcoming) and also in co-authored ones (Rocca Rivarola and Moscovich, 2018; Rocca Rivarola et al., 2022).
6. Even considering other PT presidential campaigns not included in this study, such as 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010, the 1989 and 2014 campaigns showed a more significant emphasis.
 7. For example, in the spot “49-Angeloz-burocracia”, Angeloz’s campaign denounced the havoc caused by Menem’s administration as the governor of the province of La Rioja (tripling of provincial state bureaucracy, fiscal and educational crisis) whilst another spot, “52-Angeloz-corte de luz”, contrasted the national energy crisis and frequent power cuts with the more stable situation in Córdoba, where Angeloz was governor.
 8. With the image of the candidate working at his desk, an off-screen male narrator spoke of a “strong, serene, serious” candidate, who knew “where he wants to take the country and how to do it”, and then added: “When the rallies are over [photo of a campaign event with a frozen crowd, photos of activists with flags], and the noises are silenced, when all the electoral promises are over, a man will have to do the hard work of governing”.
 9. For example, one of those songs’ lyrics was: “In this election there are many candidates. You have to look closely, not to vote for short-sighted ones [*chicatos*]”. This is a reference to Angeloz, who wore very thick glasses.
 10. The “us” in his campaign is “the Peronists” versus “the radicals” (UCR-Angeloz), and party logos were displayed. Party identities were, therefore, explicit, in contrast with Collor’s 1989 campaign.
 11. Even though the goal was to argue that Lula managed to widen his electoral front towards the second round, these segments did not just show the leaders of those allied parties (all former adversaries in the first round, now supporting Lula) but also emphasized the grassroots activism behind them.
 12. The Berlin Wall had fallen shortly before the first round and Collor’s HGPE fed on these events, trying to link the PT to the “backwardness” of the socialist Eastern Europe, and declaring that PT activists sang *The Internationale* instead of Brazil’s national anthem.
 13. For example, Dias (2013) measured the representation of the party image in the HGPE programs. Although the PT logo was more present than other party logos, it had a weaker presence after 1989, especially in 1998. It grew in 2002 and went down again in 2006, to rise slightly again in 2010.
 14. CFK ran for her re-election with the *Frente para la Victoria*, and Dilma with the coalition *Com a Força do Povo*.
 15. Binner’s campaign in 2011 pictured some young people in their everyday life and as citizens. Youth active political commitment was almost never represented. Even though the candidate’s Socialist Party had a considerable tradition of youth activism, no campaign rallies and no activist iconography were shown, in a campaign that highlighted, instead, Binner’s skills and experience as governor of the province of Santa Fe. In Aécio Neves’ case, the campaign referred to the 2013 and 2014 street protests and included some images of mobilized protesters there, but otherwise, it was the candidate who was pictured, for example, greeting people who were apparently not politically organized. Historically, the PSD TV campaigns had not shown political activism as an asset (the way the Workers’ Party had), and 2014 was no exception. Furthermore, Borba and Medeiros (2019) argue that Neves, grandson of Tancredo Neves, presented himself in his HGPE programs through personal attributes such as efficiency, leadership, and courage, and as just another Brazilian outraged by government corruption scandals.
 16. Dilma’s HGPE, Program No. 24, 13 September 2014. Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OEeIoaW7Ms&list=PLTFICznn6CeEQ1v3BRCi7OHFwBQW5SVh0&index=46>. Last accessed 18 July 2023.
 17. A journalistic investigation by *Folha de São Paulo* included allegations that Bolsonaro’s campaign had convinced some friendly company owners to hire mass automatic messaging services on WhatsApp with fake-news against his adversary. On this matter, see: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/empresarios-bancam-campanha-contra-o-pt-pelo-whatsapp.shtml> (Last accessed on 26 May 2022).
 18. The PT logo, a red star with the number 13 (voting code corresponding to the party), mutated during the campaign until it became a circle with the number and in different colors. Comparing Bolsonaro and Haddad’s HGPE for the run-off, Menezes and Panke (2020) argue that Haddad mentioned his

- own party on more occasions than Bolsonaro. But, even so, in 62 percent of Haddad's programs, the PT did not appear nor was it mentioned.
19. By "official" here I am referring to ads conceived by Scioli's coordinated campaign. In contrast, we also found two spots that were not broadcast on TV, were not officially part of his campaign and were quite different in their content and aesthetics. One was for the Militant's Day (17 November) and the other (called "From now on") is a kind of ode to the Kirchnerist governments. These two exceptional pieces were much longer and, in them, visual representations of youth activism were slightly greater than in the homogeneous series of spots analyzed as part of the official campaign, in which these representations did not constitute a typical feature or distinctive mark.

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24. #WeAreRemovingADictator: the 2021 Uganda election crisis, the possibilities and limits of youth digital activism

M. Ainomugisha and Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire

We were invited to the Pan-African Activist Sunday School (PASS) and Solidarity Collective by one of its conveners, Nanre R. Nafziger, who was considering ways in which the then newly formed collective could show solidarity with the youth movement in Uganda in the aftermath of the 2021 presidential election. PASS and the Solidarity Collective associated with it form part of a “present day online pedagogical experiment” (Nafziger and Strong, 2021, p. 40). PASS aims at bridging class, cultural, and linguistic divides by using popular education to build a radical movement. In their narration of the growth of PASS, Strong et al. (2022) write that they have expanded the collective’s work beyond Nigeria, where it started with the #EndSARS solidarity, to support burgeoning movements throughout the Pan-African world, including in Uganda, Ghana, South Africa, Haiti, Colombia, the United States, Europe, and Palestine. As of 2022, PASS membership included roughly 75 organizers representing dozens of frontline organizations connected to four continents – all committed to building power across our movements through political education, collaboration, and direct solidarity work (Strong et al., 2022).

We are among the roughly 75 organizers representing two frontline organizations connected to two continents, namely the End Museveni Dictatorship (EMD) mutual aid fund and the Ubuntu Reading Group (URG) collective, involved in the work of the PASS solidarity network.¹ When we were approached to join, we jumped at the opportunity, having observed over time that the struggle for liberation in Uganda wasn’t always plugged into global Pan-Africanist networks. PASS was an opportunity not only to seek global Pan-Africanist solidarity in the face of crisis, but also to join a network of like-minded organizations and comrades and amplify their own immediate struggles whenever they arise. Our joining of PASS, therefore, served both an immediate purpose and a strategic long-term imperative.

In addition, our diaspora location and digital focus as organizers created immediate synergy with the PASS grounding principles. PASS collaborates with grassroots organizers to share political strategy and build solidarity, especially when organizers on the ground are facing violence from repressive governments. PASS, as an intergenerational, popular education series, uses virtual live streams to foster critical dialogue between Black activists and organizers from around the world and political consciousness around Pan-African strategy and movement building through social media (Nafziger and Strong, 2021, p. 45). After the #EndSARS inaugural session of the PASS livestreams, followed sessions on “the movement to defund the police in the United States”, “resistance movements in South Africa”, and “the struggle to end the Museveni dictatorship in Uganda”, among others. PASS is therefore itself a digital intervention in contemporary movements. We worked with Nafziger and Strong to curate the PASS session on the 2021 Uganda election crisis and resistance to dictatorship. To set the stage for

our analysis of the youth digital interventions in the 2021 Uganda crisis, we turn to prominent scholarship and analysis around the Uganda 2021 election.

THE YOUTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA FACTORS IN THE 2021 UGANDA ELECTION

The 2021 Ugandan election brought together key factors that have shaped African politics in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. It was anticipated to be a youth electoral uprising, and it was expected that social media would have a crucial role to play in shaping the process and result (Muzee and Enaifoghe, 2020). So, we need to understand African youth protests as a foundation to analyzing the 2021 Uganda election. According to Krystal Strong (2018), “contemporary protests in Africa are predominantly youth-led, urban, technology-activated, and converge around state grievances, social inequalities, and, increasingly, revolutionary transformation” (p. 266). Strong (2018) sees a “broad escalation of youth-led revolt over the past decade” (p. 266), starting from anti-austerity protests in Europe and North America, through global Occupy movements, to the Arab Awakening, anti-corruption protests in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and the Movement for Black Lives, which have all shifted mass action and fundamental critiques of capitalism, structuralized oppressions, liberal democracy, and white supremacy to the fore (Strong, 2018, pp. 266–7). Crucial to Strong’s (2018) analysis of youth activism in the early decades of the twenty-first century is the rise of a new generation of activists among the youth in Africa that are pushing radical forms of resistance (p. 267).

In particular with regard to African youth, Strong (2018) argues that material realities lock young people out of power in the face of rapid demographic changes that have produced the largest, fastest growing youth population in the world – with roughly 70 percent of the continent’s total population under the age of 30 – making youth protest against gerontocratic leaderships inevitable (p. 267).² While several attempts at removing the gerontocratic leadership of Uganda in the first two decades of the twenty-first century involved youth, it was the 2021 presidential election and the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign that was evidently youth-led and centered.

Extant scholarly engagement with African youth activism has focused on the nexus between youth and violence (Bay and Donham, 2007, pp. 16–33; Kaplan, 1994), although Strong (2018) and Honwana and De Boeck (2005) see possibilities of positive outcomes of youth activism, even when entangled with “strategic” violence. With regard to more recent uprisings, such as the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, Strong et al. (2022) have argued that “most of the [#EndSARS] protesters were young” and therefore these social movements must be understood as youth activism. Given Uganda’s population demographics, which put youth (below the age of 30) at 78 percent of the total population as of 2011 (Youth Policy, 2014), we argue that the 2021 election must be studied as a youth-election in its own way.

Ahead of the election, scholars predicted that it would be determined by the youth and social media factors. For Muzee and Enaifoghe (2020), writing a year before the election, Bobi Wine presented a formidable resistance against the Museveni decades-old regime and had demonstrated the power of social media in political mobilization, which excited the youth in whose language he spoke (p. 198). Bobi Wine was not the only politician to use social media platforms but “his sudden impact in the limelight of Uganda’s political space and his popularity as a musician make him an interesting public figure to follow online” (Muzee and Enaifoghe,

2020, p. 197). To understand the link between Bobi Wine's rise, the youth factor, and the role of social media, requires us to go back to three years before the 2021 election.

The 2018 Arua by-election was a turning point for the Bobi Wine presidential campaign and the People Power movement. A by-election was called in Arua after the assassination of the regime fanatic Member of Parliament, Hon. Ibrahim Abiriga, who had supported the removal of age limits on the presidency from the constitution. Bobi Wine himself had joined Parliament through a by-election in Kyadondo East, held in 2017 after the nullification of the previous opposition-leaning Member of Parliament's election by court (Muzee and Enaifoghe, 2020). Bobi Wine thus emerged as leading a youth-dominant and digitally literate third force in the politics of the country around this time, challenging both the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party and the then leading opposition party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC).

In Arua in 2018, Bobi Wine was arrested and held incommunicado after skirmishes where his driver was killed, hence the #FreeBobiWine hashtag campaign. The hashtag #FreeBobiWine became the hymn around the world, and demonstrations in Kampala saw the police using live ammunition, tear gas, and a flood of arrests (Muzee and Enaifoghe, 2020, p. 197). For Muzee and Enaifoghe (2020), "Bobi Wine's social media engagements added flair to the influence of social media on electoral democracy" (pp. 197–8). The hashtag #FreeBobiWine, tweeted globally by influential figures including Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka and musicians Angelique Kidjo and Coldplay's Chris Martin (Magut and Murathe, 2018), showed the centrality of the digital in the rising People Power movement.

Bobi Wine himself, aged 36 at the time, accounted for his increasing popularity by fashioning himself as a voice of the youth, as a worthy representative of the interests of the Ugandan youth against a gerontocratic military dictatorship. In his campaign efforts for Kassiano Wadri in the 2018 Arua by-election, Bobi Wine focused on the People Power movement as youth-led. According to Muzee and Enaifoghe (2020), Bobi Wine "argued that if the youth were to win the presidential election in 2021, the victory would begin by defeating the ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), at the ballot (in Arua)" (p. 198). However, Muzee and Enaifoghe's and other scholars' and analysts' predictions that the youth and social media would turn the electoral fortunes in favor of anti-dictatorship forces did not materialize. In the next section, we turn to what instead happened and how the URG and EMD, among other youth digital organizers, responded.

YOUTH DIGITAL INTERVENTIONS IN THE 2021 UGANDA ELECTION CRISIS

The URG, alongside the PASS conveners, took the mobilizing role to identify and engage other active initiatives, organizations, and campaigns around the crisis of the 2021 Uganda election. Briefly, the history of the crisis is rooted in the origins of Uganda, as a country. Uganda was created through British colonial conquest and thus suffers an innate crisis of legitimacy. The Museveni regime, which started on 25 January 1986 and continues at the time of writing, is merely a phase of this crisis. The violence witnessed during the 2021 Uganda election reflects the larger crisis inherent in the Museveni regime.

Among the unique attributes of the 2021 Uganda election crisis, as we have seen above, are the youth factor, the digital nature of activism, and the extreme violence by the Museveni

regime. According to Abrahamsen and Bareebe (2021), the 2021 election was a foregone conclusion, like previous ones (p. 90). The 2021 election crisis was different, however, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic was deployed as an excuse to clamp down on spaces for free expression, not to mention opportunities to challenge authoritarianism. According to Abrahamsen and Bareebe (2021):

Curfews, partial lockdowns, and physical-distancing regulations were introduced in late March 2020 and remained in place throughout the electoral campaign, providing ample opportunity to curtail the opposition, harass its supporters, and clamp down on civil society and the media. Combined, such measures made the January 2021 election the most violent and least fair in a history of violent and unfair elections. (p. 90)

Despite these unique attributes of the 2021 election crisis, it is important to locate it within the larger history of Museveni's regime's phase within Uganda's (post)colonial crisis of legitimacy.

We, thus, return to Dani Wadada Nabudere's 1987 account of the Museveni takeover of power:

The changes that took place in Uganda in January 1986 are seen by some as the ushering in of a "new era". The leader of the new regime, Yoweri Museveni, has indeed declared that what took place in January was not merely a change of guard but represented a more fundamental change. Many Ugandans, and indeed, those within the high positions of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and its supporting army (NRA), are themselves not sure what the fundamental changes will be. This raises the question of "What next?" in the continuing crisis in Uganda. (p. 54)

Having assumed power after five years of a grueling armed conflict, the Museveni regime did not enjoy majority support. Nabudere was skeptical about the promises of Museveni as having brought a fundamental change. He was aware that Museveni, as a person, had a big hand in the rigging of the 1980 elections as Vice President of the military junta that overthrew the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) broad-based government established after the fall of Idi Amin's eight-year regime in 1979. Idi Amin had seized power in a coup against Milton Obote in 1971. Milton Obote, for his part, had staged a coup in 1966 against Sir Fredrick Edward Mutesa II who had been ceremonial president, abolished kingdoms, and declared Uganda a republic. The British, in handing independence to Mutesa II and Obote, had undermined the earlier electoral victory of the Democratic Party self-government, hence continuing the undermining of the Ugandan people regarding their governance.

The militarism of the Museveni regime must therefore be understood within the context of Uganda's colonial heritage. For Museveni, like his colonial forebears, power is primarily held militarily and not democratically. Coercion is the basis of holding power. And, so, it has been that under Museveni's regime, placing opposition leaders under wrongful house arrest, disappearing dissidents, and rigging and postponing elections are normal. We were aware of this long sweep of structural and historical authoritarianism in selecting speakers for the PASS session on the 2021 Uganda election crisis.

Speakers for the session on the 2021 Uganda election crisis were identified from various formations, namely the EMD, a mutual aid fund started in 2020; the National Unity Platform (NUP), an ostensibly youth-led political party that fronted Bobi Wine for the 2021 election; the Red Pearl Movement, a social media campaign started to create awareness of the 2020 massacre of civilians; and the People Power movement, the social movement formed around

opposing the removal of age limits from the Uganda constitution in 2017. Recognizing that these various formations were recently created to bring a longer historical perspective to the conversation, we invited Dr Moses Khisa, a Professor of Ugandan Political Science at North Carolina State University, newspaper columnist, and think tank contributor with a record of nearly 15 years of political analysis and engagement. We also invited Kalundi Serumaga, whose political activism goes back to the 1980s as a member of the Uganda National Liberation Front (Anti-Dictatorship) political party started by Dani Wadada Nabudere. Khisa and Serumaga, given their seniority in comparison to the other speakers, gave the session the important quality of “intergenerational” dialogue.

Given that Uganda was still under a social media blackout at the time, fewer speakers were based in the country compared to those, like ourselves, who were based in the diaspora. We were both born and grew up in Uganda where we attained pre-university education. One of us left Uganda for higher education in 2013, after which they worked abroad and started organizing through feminist and radical collectives and campaigns in the diaspora both as a student and after college. The other started organizing work affiliated to the opposition FDC political party as a student at Makerere in Uganda. After college, they took to promoting creative writing and cultural production, only returning to direct political organizing work after moving to the diaspora, first as a student in London, and later in Ithaca, New York. Both the URG and EMD are therefore diaspora formations, given our locations for the last decade and during the 2021 election crisis.

Most speakers selected for the PASS session were based in the diaspora as well. Political organizing in Uganda has always had a crucial diaspora dimension. In the 1920s, the anti-colonial Muganda nationalist Reuben Spartas Mukasa garnered the solidarity of the Marcus Garvey-led United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) for the Bataka Party and the Sons of Kintu whose motto was “One God, one aim, one destiny”, shared with the UNIA (Newman, 1983, p. 625). In the 1940s and 1950s, Semakula Mulumba organized against colonialism, working with Uganda-based comrades, by pamphleteering, lobbying, petitioning, and sending telegrams from London where he was based (Summers, 2015). In the same spirit, contemporary organizers based in the diaspora coordinate their work with comrades based in the country. In the internet age, it has become even easier to organize transnationally. The PASS session was live-streamed on the Black Lives Matter Philly Facebook and YouTube channels and a number of affiliates. We were also keen on involving youth activists with roots in Uganda, but active in other radical movements in the diaspora, such as Fiona Lali, who is an active member of the youth communist movement in the United Kingdom.

As organizers in our own right, at the time of convening the PASS session, one of the current authors fell under the category of youth, given that we were then in our late twenties and early thirties respectively. Moreover, as one of us exceeds the legal definition of youth – having crossed the 30-age boundary set by the Uganda National Youth Policy (2014) – in the spirit of the Pan-African Activists Solidarity Collective, to which we belong, we respond to the urgent call to “prioritize intergenerational learning as core to our practices and shared values” (Strong et al., 2022). It was also important to curate that session as part of the URG’s mission to document radical practice as it unfolds.

We recognize that the impetus of any movement in Uganda is youth reliant. The 2021 election was different as Bobi Wine was understood as not merely representing youth interests as previous opposition presidential candidates, but also as a youth himself who had only exceeded the legal limit of youthhood recently. As observed by Alice McCool (2021), “despite

a continued ban on social media in the country, and government threats that VPN users could be arrested, [youth] are using alternative methods of organizing and activism". Several youth-led social media campaigns associated with the 2021 Uganda election crisis include the stopping of the MTV Africa Music Awards (MAMAs) show that was scheduled to be held in Uganda. The campaign to stop the MAMAs show argued that the organizers would be legitimizing the Museveni regime if they continued with the plans to host the show in Uganda. The show, which had been scheduled for 20 February 2021, was eventually postponed.

The Red Pearl movement, for its part, spread awareness about the situation in Uganda in the aftermath of the 2020 massacre through their Instagram and Twitter accounts. The campaign called on social media users to turn their profile pictures red in solidarity with Ugandans. Red Pearl was associated with People Power, the movement affiliated with NUP, the party whose presidential candidate and leader is Bobi Wine (McCool, 2021). For these youth-led protest campaigns, social media and the digital were primary organizing tools. These factors separated the 2021 election crisis from previous crises.

Unaffiliated with NUP, People Power, or Bobi Wine, EMD attracted journalist commentary as part of this wave of youth digital activism because of the unique approach it took to the crisis. McCool (2021) notes that "by the 2nd of February, the EMD mutual aid fund – made up of Ugandans on the ground and in the diaspora – had collected \$2,959 and disbursed \$625 in 'medical, legal and safe housing costs, including relocating at least one activist in danger to a neighboring country'." About their history, EMD told McCool (2021) that:

Before they formed, most of the organizers were providing this type of support on an ad-hoc basis already, and some "have been victimized before by the dictatorship and their medical recovery was funded by individual contributions." While they see their fundraising as an achievement, EMD Mutual Aid said: "it isn't the money that counts."

In the interview, EMD emphasized that their "focus is on showing how everybody can contribute to the struggle" (McCool, 2021). They argued that "to offer Ugandans and their siblings worldwide an option of tangibly contributing to the care of freedom workers as an expression of solidarity in itself builds revolutionary hope towards our collective achievement of freedom" (McCool, 2021). McCool's report also included the earlier referenced PASS event themed "Resisting Dictatorship in Uganda: The 2021 Election Crisis and Beyond" as part of the youth digital activist efforts to resolve the crisis.

The URG, with its focus on popular political education, and the EMD, with its focus on mutual aid, therefore, jointly provide generative case studies that can help to shed light on the digital possibilities of youth activism against tyranny in Uganda. First, the current authors' engagement in these initiatives provides us a vantage point to analyze our own practice, as participants and convenors. This is in no way to underestimate the unique roles of other organizations, campaigns, and movements, with whom we collaborate and stand in solidarity.

Second, the URG and EMD agree on ideological lines regarding a vision for Uganda beyond opposition to tyranny. The core of our memberships overlapped at several key points. Our formations, independent of the registered political parties in Uganda, therefore formally and electorally non-partisan, are interested in a transformation of society beyond a change of government from the current militarist gerontocracy to a palatable younger but pro-imperialist leadership. Our analysis is, therefore, both an appreciation and a critique of the 2021 phase of the anti-dictatorship struggle in Uganda. This chapter, written from a scholar-organizer perspective in focusing on initiatives that we are part of, allows us self-reflexivity. We analyze

the 2021 Uganda election crisis as interested parties and members of the Ugandan diaspora, considered part of the hackneyed youth majority population who are using digital means as primary tools for organizing through popular political education and mutual aid.

In the same breath, we emphasize that our initiatives were not part of the presidential campaign for the election of Bobi Wine and his political party, NUP, who used the #WeAreRemovingADictator hashtag as their rallying call. Our analysis of the campaign and the crisis that the election became therefore is independent, and from an outsider perspective. Our popular education and mutual aid work, however, lent solidarity to the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign alongside other anti-dictatorship formations. We see #WeAreRemovingADictator as a Ugandan case study alongside other hashtag social movements activated and fortified through social media and grassroots mobilizations, such as #OccupyNigeria, #BringBackOurGirls, #RevolutionNow in Nigeria, #RhodesMustFall in South Africa, and #BlackLivesMatter in the United States (Nafziger and Strong, 2021, p. 45). #WeAreRemovingADictator qualifies as a form of youth digital activism. The performance of the campaign, its effectiveness or lack thereof, and its digital methods must be analyzed as a case study of youth digital activism. In the next section, we turn to the challenges met by the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign as a form of youth digital activism.

ANALOG VIOLENCE: DIGITAL SOLIDARITY

The removal of the Museveni regime through the 2021 election was foiled by military violence. For the first time, an election included a massacre of civilians. Abrahamsen and Bareebe (2021) summarize the extent of the violence:

The worst violence of the campaign was associated with Wine’s November 18 (2020) arrest on charges that he had broken social-distancing rules. Footage went out over the internet showing him being hurled into a police van and sent to the notorious Nalufenya Prison in Jinja District. During his two-day detention, protests erupted in Kampala and other towns. Police officers, soldiers, and plain-clothes gunmen killed at least 54 people. More than a thousand were arrested. In another incident, one of Wine’s bodyguards was run over and killed by a military-police truck, though the UPDF (national army) denied it. Wine himself claims that government forces nearly killed him. While campaigning, he regularly wore a helmet and a bulletproof vest, underlining the warlike atmosphere of an election where tear gas, bullets (lead as well as rubber), and truncheons were regular fixtures. (p. 93)

If the role of social media, as predicted by several scholars, was to lead to an electoral win by Bobi Wine and the youth-majority and a loss at the ballot for the dictatorship, it instead became a channel to mass circulate images and videos of the violence meted out to the masses by the regime in efforts to suppress the vote.

This violence turned the election into a crisis. At the time of the PASS session on “Resisting Dictatorship in Uganda” in February 2021, thousands of people had been reported missing and hundreds incarcerated by the dictatorship since the November 2020 uprising and massacre (DW, 2021). Bobi Wine and his wife were under house arrest for weeks, while his children had been flown out to the United States ahead of polling day. Social media remained shut down for over a month.

In situations like the Uganda election crisis of 2021, the Ugandan diaspora, estimated to be 1.5 million according to the UN Human Development Report 2009, plays an important part. We learn from Strong et al. (2022) regarding analogous youth-led moments of crisis

that “closed network communications, such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Signal, became critical information sources, coordinating tools, and mobilizing platforms for those being surveilled on public platforms.” The digital is equally essential as a platform for the diaspora to complement the struggle in moments of intense repression. In the case of the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign and the 2021 Uganda election crisis, the diaspora became a lifeline for the campaign and movement.

The digital tools enabled safe and encrypted communication among activists and organizers during the crisis. They also provided platforms for popular education. The PASS session on resisting dictatorship in Uganda was an opportunity for popular political education. While these strategies reveal the potential of the digital for boosting youth activism, Strong et al. (2022) remind us of the limits of the digital in fostering youth movements, especially when state security forces respond with live shooting at protesters, as happened at Lekki during the ENDSARS movement. They write that while “people around the world expressed their solidarity through the blanket call to #EndSARS, the government suppression that followed the Lekki Massacre was lost in translation on digital platforms” (Strong et al., 2022). In addition, the solidarity with the #ENDSARS movement by the diaspora-based PASS “also struggled to overcome the deep technological divide between organizers in the Global North and South”, revealing the urgent need for “transnational solidarity efforts to adapt and grow if they are to be successful beyond hashtags or viral videos” (Strong et al., 2022).

Digital-based diaspora solidarity efforts with the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign faced similar challenges. While, for example, musicians and celebrities such as Noname, a United States-based rapper-organizer who curates a book club as a form of popular political education, boosted the #RedPearl movement’s call highlighting the massacre of Ugandans protesting the rigging and violence of the election on Twitter, on the ground in Uganda mass arrests and detentions continued. When thousands amplified the canceling of the international star-studded MAMAs award show, Bobi Wine’s supporters fled into exile in fear for their lives. Social media remained shut down in Uganda for over a month, cutting off the entire country from the online space. Digital-based diaspora solidarity with the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign, although important, could not serve as a remedy for the analog means of repression employed on the ground in Uganda.

Beyond the analog violence, diaspora solidarity is also hampered by a digital divide. According to Internet World Stats (2022), 38.4 percent of the Ugandan population as of December 2021 use the internet; meanwhile, there are 2 872 200 subscribers to Facebook as of January 2022, equaling a 6.0 percent penetration rate. This represents a high growth rate. According to Muzee and Enaifoghe (2020), “social media enjoyed a growth rate of 47.400% by 2017; the number of Facebook subscribers also increased to 260,000 out of 19,000,000 internet users in a country with a population of 44,270,563” (p. 197). These statistics do not compare in any way with the internet penetration rates in diaspora locations, for example the United States or the United Kingdom, where a lot of online activity around the election crisis was based.

Despite the digital divide, the hopes for an electoral revolution under the #WeAreRemovingADictator were crushed through the analog shutting down of the internet and state violence. Abrahamsen and Bareebe (2021) historicize this analog crackdown of the digital possibilities for electoral change as follows: ‘In 2016, social-media sites had been blocked on polling day, but this time the government moved to restrict the digital space well

in advance. In 2018, the regime levied a daily tax for using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp on mobile phones.” (p. 95).

The two authors, however, acknowledge that efforts such as those of diaspora-based youth activists through and beyond the election tried to challenge these analog means of repression of digital youth activism. Abrahamsen and Bareebe (2021) write that through “frequent use of the hashtag #WeAreRemovingADictator, Wine’s Twitter feed had acquired a million followers by polling day. It served to document not only his popularity, but also the ruthlessness of the security forces” (p. 95). Additionally, these statistics reveal that digital means are not effective substitutes for offline political action. They must be seen as complementary dimensions to analog organizing. Beyond creating awareness of the violence and brutal repression of the youth activism around the election, mutual aid was another form of digital solidarity during the crisis. We turn to the circumstances of EMD’s formation and modus operandi in the next section.

EMD’S DIGITAL SOLIDARITY

Mutual aid, as defined by legal scholar Dean Spade (2020), is a collective coordination to meet each other’s needs, especially when resourced systems of power that claim to mitigate crises for people fail in their responsibility. Examples include the Black Panther Party’s survival programs in the 1960s and 1970s that offered free medical clinics and ambulance services, free breakfasts for children and care for the elderly, and free education programs to liberate black people from racialized state violence as a form of revolutionary care. Mutual aid practices also exist among the different indigenous Uganda peoples. For example, there are *nigiina* circles where peasant, working class, and small-scale trading women contribute amounts of money to a common fund and distribute dividends amongst themselves in rotation on an agreed-upon schedule. These monies serve as financial safety nets for households to fall back on during harsh economic times.

The End Museveni Dictatorship (EMD) mutual aid group formed in December 2020 after the brutal state-sanctioned massacre of over 54 civilians between 18 and 19 November 2020 by security forces in and around Kampala, Uganda. One concerned individual reached out to another in the aftermath of the massacre, wondering what could be done in the circumstances. They shared material on the ways in which mutual aid operates as a form of solidarity and source of immediate relief and explained that these practices were already ingrained in indigenous strategies for dealing with catastrophe. This nucleus of two then approached other members of their activist network. At its biggest, there were seven members in the group, while at its lowest, it comprised only two.

Media reportage on casualties and the deceased from the massacre portrayed them as “riotous”, thus constructing a narrative that justifies unbridled violence visited upon civilians, many of whom were not engaged in any political activities at the time of the shooting. A diaspora and home-based network therefore convened to materially support the injured and their loved ones. Operations commenced during the January 2021 polling week when the communications regulatory body, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), required that telecommunication companies suspend all internet access to the public until the electoral procedures were finalized and results officially announced (Presse, 2021). During the six days of the total internet shutdown, security forces abducted and disappeared members and supporters

of opposition parties, many of them youth. Mobile money, an online payment processing and funds transfer service used by over 63 percent of the population, was affected by the blackout. This left millions unable to provide for themselves and their communities as they relied on the proper functioning of the system. EMD was therefore a direct intervention in a situation where youth activism was suppressed through militarized violence.

Mutual aid as was practiced by EMD, interposed as an alternative to large donor-funded Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) structures in Uganda. NGOs are non-profit entities that operate independently of governments to address social issues. As Arundhati Roy (2014) has written in *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, NGOs serve the aim of muting popular resistance against the liberal order by claiming to address the deficits of neoliberal state policy that has abandoned social services. They are also known for lengthy bureaucratic standards that limit access to resources for those most in need as they remain accountable, foremost, to donors. In the Ugandan context, many NGOs, especially those funded by the Democracy and Governance Facility (DGF), refused to extend services to victims of the political crackdown, citing a requirement to be non-partisan and apolitical.

In the face of this neglect, EMD was established to extend direct care for the bereaved, injured, and imprisoned during the 2021 election crisis, and to provide an avenue for the Black diaspora, including Ugandans, Africans, and beyond, to show solidarity with the struggle to end tyranny in Uganda. In addition, EMD aimed to raise radical political consciousness among those targeted by the dictatorship through material support. Care was a political act for the organizers of the mutual aid fund.

EMD met the immediate needs of torture victims living in precarious circumstances under the force of state-sanctioned violence and passivity from NGOs regarding the political crisis. EMD's scope of coverage included medical aid, legal aid (which included paying bail and police bond fees), safe housing in partnership with individuals and organizations in solidarity with the movement, psychosocial services, nutrition and transport costs, and other miscellaneous expenses to support life in the carceral, surveillance state of their reality. EMD appreciated that support could manifest in excess of the financial support. All posts on social media were punctuated by pleas to share and amplify the calls for mutual aid support as an act of solidarity to remind us that our work was seen and felt and to reach wide audiences too.

The mutual aid fund also published regular accountability updates to the public detailing how financial contributions were allocated to political activists and their loved ones. This practice of transparency is in line with the overall ethos of mutual aid that aims to foster trust among contributors to the project. Transparency is opposed to the alienating character of non-profit organizations where the community served may not always know the amounts available in the organization's reserve or their distribution pattern. EMD therefore built on the legacies of traditional methods of community-based organizing, for example the Kiganda "munno mukabi" practice, loosely translated as "your friend in hard times", and the Acholi "mukonomoko", loosely translated as "one hand cannot work itself". These indigenous ways of knowing were the ideologies at the center of the fund's work for almost two years until the break in October 2022 so the organizers could recuperate their energies and focus on other projects.

Enforced disappearances, torture, and political incarceration continues in Uganda. The crisis has been normalized. The EMD mutual aid fund was therefore a time-bound digital intervention to harness solidarity of the Black diaspora towards the majority-youth victims of the Museveni military regime's violence during the 2021 election crisis. Upon reflection, it

was acknowledged that while the crisis of the 2021 election bore unique attributes, it was part of a longer continuum, and thus the mutual aid initiative could not resolve the foundational cause of the crisis. As a result, the fund was paused. In the next section, we turn to the lessons learnt and notes on the possibilities and limits of youth digital activism in uprooting tyranny.

CONCLUSION: REMARKS ON THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF DIASPORA YOUTH DIGITAL ACTIVISM

Scholarship on African youth activism is mostly academic generated, rather than based on the scholars' own lived experience. Irene Ikomu (2019), a youth activist herself, argues that youth political participation transcends traditional politics³ (p. 1). She argues that youth activism takes other forms, such as public protest utilizing social media and other digital technologies. For example, the 2010 Arab uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as the citizen nonviolent movements in Senegal and Burkina Faso, all led to changes of government (Ikomu, 2019, p. 3). Change of government, especially regarded as dictatorial and undemocratic, was predicted by scholars and analysts for the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign in Uganda.

The campaign, led by and organized around a much younger musician-cum-politician in his thirties, pitted against the septuagenarian age of the “dictator”, made the context a simple “youth overwhelm gerontocracy” narrative. The predicted youth quake, however, did not materialize.⁴ This result vindicates Ikomu's (2019) analysis, which emphasizes the fact that youth activism is more effective outside traditional (electoral) politics.⁵ For Ikomu, besides overthrowing governments through citizen uprisings outside electoral processes as happened in Tunisia, Egypt, and Burkina Faso, youth digital activism is also effective on policy issues. She mentions the 2015/2016 #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa, through which university students organized against a proposed tuition fees increment and succeeded, as an example of youth activism attaining results outside traditional politics (p. 4). We learn from Ikomu that more attention must be paid to youth activism outside electoral processes because the bulk of youth activism is non-electoral.

Relatedly, we learn from Mathias Kamp (2016) that “successful social media campaigns have in the past years helped lift otherwise overlooked topics to the public agenda and to mobilize support and resources” (p. 6). As we have argued in this chapter, our interventions from a triadic perspective combining youth activism, digital media, and diaspora positioning in EMD and URG did not directly engage with the 2021 election in Uganda. We were more concerned with larger questions around providing care and relief to the youth activists persecuted for their political work and building transnational solidarity and political consciousness as foundations for a revolutionary transformation of the country beyond electoral change. It is important to introduce an ideological lens towards digital youth activism.

The extreme brutality of the Museveni tyranny in Uganda is enabled and directly funded by the United States through anti-terrorism strategic partnerships. The blood of Ugandan and other victims of the Museveni military dictatorship is therefore also spilled at the behest of United States imperialism. The same imperialist United States in the digital age engineers color revolutions, even against its own puppets, to protect its interests. A color revolution is a “non-violent” regime change operation carried out by the United States for its imperialist interests, branded with a color or other superficial feature including a season, as seen with the

so-called Arab spring or even a “youth quake” (Hanenkrat, 2011).⁶ According to Global Times (2021):

Whether it is the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia in 2003, the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine in 2004, the “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, or the “Arab Spring” in Asia and Africa in 2011, the past decades have seen the US plan and implement “color revolutions,” or wars without gunpowder in many places around the world, frantically exporting “American values.” Instead of launching military operations directly in the name of “democracy,” the US prefers to use color revolutions as a tool to intervene in other countries’ internal affairs to subvert governments in order to reinforce its global control, which the US has found more efficient and economical.

There were elements of a color revolution approach by the United States regarding the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign. One of the manifestations of the United States’ infiltration of the campaign emerged when Bobi Wine posted an endorsement of Juan Guaido, a United States supported figurehead for intervention in Venezuela. As Jemima Pierre and Nefta Freeman (2021) pointed out: “even as we aim to support movements on the ground, we should also be aware of the new imperialist methods over the last few decades that have worked to co-opt, redirect, and deradicalize grassroots movements in the Global South”. On its own, the youth factor is not an ideological basis for activism and transformational change. Ideological education is crucial to avoid the subversion of revolutionary opportunities by United States imperialism.

Yet on the other hand, youth who are brutalized, tortured, imprisoned, and persecuted for their political opposition to militarist, gerontocratic dictatorship can’t be ignored or left uncared for because they may not be ideologically oriented toward radical, transformational, political change. A focus on popular ideological education must therefore be accompanied by mutual aid to sustain activists and victims of state violence. Ideological differences between diaspora-based activists and their continent-based colleagues are not new, regarding youth activism and political activism more broadly. Writing about the experience of working to support the #ENDSARS movement from the diaspora, Strong et al. (2022) mention that they “realized early on that, while calls to defund or abolish the police had gained momentum in the US, in Nigeria, the police are already underfunded and ill-paid. Organizers there were more invested in reform than abolition.” Similarly, while our ideological line as URG and EMD goes beyond the end of the Museveni dictatorship, perhaps even beyond establishing an anti-imperialist, Pan-Africanist, Socialist and Feminist government, most of our comrades on the ground are content with ending the dictatorship. Instances where beneficiaries of our work have praised the United States model of liberal democracy, for example, are legion. In our analysis, among other factors, the #WeAreRemovingADictator campaign was majorly flawed because of a pro-United States imperialist ideological orientation. It is, however, fruitless to focus on a postmortem of a missed opportunity. We must look at the past, only to learn from it and prepare for the future.

The URG and EMD initiatives will continue to contribute to a vision of ideological popular education through digital media campaigns alongside mutual aid support for activists and victims on the frontlines in Uganda, from our diasporic locations. It is the only way to confront liberal imperialist propaganda that exploits a sizable refugee and exiled Ugandan population to scaffold interests of the United States empire. Through its infiltration into opposition movement spheres, it purports to oppose the Museveni dictatorship while simultaneously fueling its

rule, thereby resulting in the apathy of Uganda's youth towards the US-supported operations that enable military dictatorship.

The struggle for liberation in Uganda must not be isolated from broader diasporic and continental Pan-African struggles for liberation. The heyday of global Pan-Africanist struggles in the mid-twentieth century was characterized by continental and diasporic solidarity and were fundamentally struggles led by youth. Today's struggles for liberation must therefore utilize digital means to attain identical objectives of freedom from imperialism. The digital, however, cannot be regarded as a stand-in for collectivized analog action and organizing efforts. That would not be sustainable or deliver a wide-reaching effect, especially in a context where internet access is privileged and can be disconnected at the whim of an oppressive regime. Youth is not an ideology; however, our interventions through popular education and mutual aid initiatives have led us to situate ourselves in the robust ideological foundation elucidated above, to attain true liberation and resist co-optation.

NOTES

1. PASS member organizations include Black Lives Matter (USA), Pan-African Community in Action (USA), Afrosocialists and Socialist of Color Caucus (USA), Black Alliance for Peace (USA, Haiti, Colombia), Coalition for Revolution (Nigeria), Socialist Workers League (Nigeria), End Museveni Dictatorship Mutual Aid (Uganda), Red Pearl Movement (Uganda), and Ubuntu Reading Group (Uganda) (Nafziger and Strong, 2021, p. 45).
2. Strong's analysis marshals evidence from Tunisia (2011), Egypt (2011), Burkina Faso (2014), Democratic Republic of Congo (2015), and Burundi (2015) to support the fact that African youth have aimed at removing gerontocratic leaderships.
3. Ikomu (2019) sees "traditional politics as the formal participation mechanisms that make up a democratic government: voting, joining a political party, running for office, election campaigns, and representative legislation" (p. 1).
4. Earlier in 2017, Bobi Wine had won a parliamentary by-election on the wings of a youth quake, although he did not utilize digital media as much then. It was this success that was envisaged to be replicated at presidential level.
5. Ikomu (2019) also mentions youth campaigns whose primary aim is to increase youth participation in traditional/ electoral political processes such as the Y'en a Marre Movement in Senegal, #NotTooYoungtoRun in Nigeria, among others (p. 4). Boniface Mwangi's parliamentary election campaign also organized around youth and social media activism did not succeed (Ikomu, 2019, p. 5).
6. Kaley Hanenkrat (2011) writes that:

In Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine, activists built non-violent Social Movement Organizations (SMOs), named such things as 'Otpor' meaning 'Resistance' in Serbian, 'Kmara' meaning 'Enough' in Georgian, and 'Pora' meaning 'It is time' in Ukrainian. Bulldozer, Rose, and Orange - these 'revolutions' were vibrant in color, massive in size, and changed the world's understanding of what it takes to bring down a dictator. Leading the movement, though, were primarily young activists who were born behind the Iron Curtain, raised in the instability that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, and who unified with the goal of electing democratic governments that were free of corruption. (p. 4).

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25. The White Ribbon movement and its achievement in uprooting the conservative Thai state

Kanokrat Lertchoosakul

Amidst the success of youth movements and activism in many parts of the world, there have been many cases of mass youth protests and uprisings that could not achieve structural change or reach their initial goals. However, their activism left a legacy, which later became an engine of change in the longer term. On the one hand, the recent victory of the Green Party in 2021 partly reflects the waves of efforts of younger generations in Germany to transform their anger, ideas, and demands into concrete proposals in parliamentary politics. In addition to party politics, individuals like Greta Thunberg, Luisa Neubauer, and many other youngsters have raised environmental awareness among ordinary people and institutions. Outside the western world, youth forces played crucial roles in the Arab Spring (Cloughton, 2021; Financial Times, 2021; Hoffman and Jamal, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2018).

On the other hand, many youth movements and efforts failed to achieve their mission to effect structural change despite their extraordinary success in mobilising mass support and developing powerful campaigns. The remarkable “Umbrella Movement” led by high school and university students in Hong Kong has been unable to achieve political freedom and democracy against the forces of the mainland Chinese government up until today, despite its long march. Similarly, the movement in Myanmar against the 2021 military coup still struggles against the oppressive military dictatorship and sees hardly any sign of victory despite the marvellous, courageous, and astonishing mobilisation of the younger generation throughout the country, including university students, doctors, schoolteachers, and so on. In Ukraine, meanwhile, the younger generation initially managed to end the pro-Russian government of President Yanukovych through their three-month mass protest in the Maidan in 2013. However, by mid-2022, the earlier triumph of “the Maidan Uprising” or “the Revolution of Dignity” was blown away by the military aggression of the autocratic government of Russia (Ku, 2020; Mei, 2021; Nikolayenko, Chapter 5 in this book). Amid the immediate failures of the various youth movements, this chapter looks beyond the short-term results and examines the effects and impacts of youth activism on society and the political structure. It uses the case of Thailand’s 2020–2021 successful mass youth movement as another example of a mass youth mobilisation that was unable to enforce their radical demand to uproot the conservative Thai state and structure, but still caused institutional, social, and political change in a repressive state.

In early 2020, Thai youth managed to mobilise one of the most significant mass protests in Thai political history. Because of their use of a white ribbon as a symbol, they have been widely known as the “White Ribbon” youth movement (Lertchoosakul, 2021). Nevertheless, by the end of 2021, after two years of protest, they had not been able to achieve structural change. Both leaders and participants in the movements encountered robust suppression measures and

violence by the authoritarian government. The mass protests were gradually suspended. This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the significant contributions of the 2020–2021 youth campaigns to Thai society and the seeds of change that, despite the temporary setback, have challenged the conservative Thai state in a way it has never been challenged before. This analysis is based on data from nearly 400 youth. The focus group and in-depth interviews were conducted during 22 protests, and some were online in 11 provinces, including Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Songkhla, Khon Kaen, Kalasin, Surin, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, Samut Songkhram, and Pattani. All data were collected between February 2020 and October 2021. From this information, this chapter found, first, the youngsters broke the earlier norms of centralised, party-line, static political movements and moved to more creative, decentralized, and dynamic mobilisation, thereby setting new standards and offering inspiration for further democratic action. Secondly, these adolescents institutionalised the Future Forward Party (FFP), a new breed of politicians and the first political party representing their generation's demands, spirit, and anger. Youngsters were a significant part of the party from its beginning, played crucial roles in its performance in the 2019 election, and pushed the party in a more radical direction. Even after the movement terminated, the party continued to push for changes and reforms in parliamentary politics. Lastly, the youth movement and its activism promisingly and extensively mainstreamed liberalism and ideas of radical change among the younger generation beyond the alternative media to a degree that none of the earlier youth movements had managed to do.

CREATIVE AND DYNAMIC MASS YOUTH MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY THAI POLITICS

During the 1970s, university students created a legend of youth power by organising the first youth mass movement in Thai political history. In 1973, they managed to mobilise the biggest mass protest in Thailand to date and successfully overthrew a nearly two-decade-long military dictatorship. Between 1973 and 1976, the youth movement expanded. Both university and high school students collaborated with farmer organisations and labour unions to promote democracy. Some started working with leftist political parties and collaborated with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Nevertheless, after retaliation by state-organised, ultra-rightwing groups, culminating in the massacre at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976, more than 6000 students ran into the jungle and joined the armed revolution with the CPT. By the early 1980s, when the CPT collapsed, the youth movement declined. All the students returned home and were unable to revive the movement and activism (Lertchoosakul, 2016).

After that, mass youth movements disappeared from Thai society. Although several small groups of politically active students remained, they were never able to regain a leading role in the major political movements that came later and were led by new political forces like political parties, grassroots people, NGOs, and the Red-Shirt and Yellow-Shirt groups. Other activities were relatively minimal and amounted to little more than strategic alliances (Lertchoosakul, 2018).

Only after the 2014 military coup did university students reappear out of the blue as the sole leading force against the military junta. Despite limited political freedom under the state of emergency, small groups of university students in several locations protested against the junta's rule. As gatherings of more than five people were banned, countless symbolic actions

were promoted, such as wearing shirts with anti-coup slogans like “PEACE PLEASE” and “Respect my Vote”, organizing a “Sandwich Picnic Party” campaign, reading 1984 in public, and giving the three-finger *Hunger Games* salute (BBC News, 2014). They also organised many flash mobs and protests calling for a democratic election, abolition of Section 112 of the criminal code (the *lèse-majesté* law),¹ and an end to the non-democratic 2017 constitution. These campaigns successfully attracted the attention of both national and international media. Nevertheless, the prominent student activists were small in terms of numbers. They could never promote mass protests and mainstream political activism among broader groups of the younger generation.

Only by early 2020, right after the verdict of the constitutional court to dissolve the anti-military Future Forward Party, the whole of society was shaken by the explosion of flash mobs springing up in countless locations both inside and outside universities and schools throughout the country. Within 17 days between 22 February and 7 March 2020, more than 73 flash mobs were organised in 33 provinces, 55 universities, and eight high schools (iLaw, 2020). The protests were temporarily suspended owing to the first wave of COVID-19.² The movement immediately resumed in July when the pandemic situation had abated. This time, a new wave of more extensive youth protests cropped up outside the universities. The first was organised by a small group of university students called “Free Youth” (Yaowachon Plot Aek) in the middle of July 2020. Unexpectedly, thousands of youngsters joined the protests. This was the most prominent street demonstration since the 2014 coup. More than 161 sit-in protests, flash mobs, and rallies occurred between July and December in more than 50 provinces (out of 75). The overnight sleep-in protest on 19 September attracted an attendance estimated between 20 000 and 100 000 (Bangkok Post, 2020).

In terms of demands, the first concrete proposals were launched by Free Youth at the first significant mass demonstration on 18 July and included the dissolution of parliament, an end to intimidation of the people, and the drafting of a new constitution. Nevertheless, by 10 August, the earlier reformist proposals were superseded. At a rally at Thammasat University, Rangsit campus, another student group, United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD), shocked the whole of society with their declaration of ten demands to reform the monarchy (Phaholtap and Streckfuss, 2020).³ BBC analysts even called it revolutionary in Thailand’s history (BBC News, 2020). Because the monarchy has long been seen as untouchable and the king as a semi-divine authority, their demands were radical. Since then, monarchy reform has become the dominant demand of the movement.

Aside from the number of participants and radical demands, the combination of adolescents involved in political activities was far more diverse than in any other youth movement. In earlier movements, most youth groups were students from leading universities and high schools concentrated in Bangkok. Between 2020 and 2021, students from private universities, provincial universities, teachers’ colleges, high schools, and vocational schools played leading roles in independently organising flash mobs and sit-in protests throughout the country (Lertchoosakul, 2021). Besides youngsters in educational institutes, poor youth and informal child labour in Bangkok became a significant force in the “Talu Gas” grouping [breaking through the tear gas], the most militant movement confronting state violence between August and October 2021 (Lertchoosakul and Kengpaiboon, 2021). Apart from youth, young adults or the so-called “Generation Y” surprisingly turned out to be the majority of participants in many major protests in Bangkok. The result of an on-site survey from the mobile research team called “Neighbour Nerd” (Nerd Kang Baan) showed that in three major protests in

October and November 2020, around 60 per cent of the participants were “Generation Y”, aged between 23 and 40. Meanwhile, youth, “Generation Z”, and “Boomers” constituted 20 per cent, 14 per cent, and 10 per cent, respectively (Matichon Weekly, 2020).

Although after two years, the youth movement was still unable either to overthrow the military-led government, amend the constitution, or reform the monarchy, the new style and dynamics of their campaign challenged the power of the conservative state and established a new norm and frontier for future democratic movements. In illustrating these impacts, the next section looks at the three significant developments of Thailand’s 2020–2021 youth movement.

Turning Online Campaigns into a Real Political Weapon

The 2020–2021 Thai youth movement went beyond the conventional pattern of online methods and campaigns by setting the agenda in a public space, putting pressure on the government, and making arrangements for mass protests. Their use of social media, exploitation of online mechanisms, and the waging of cyberwar against the government successfully suspended a policy to suppress online freedom, supported and helped victims of arrest and prosecution, and tracked the authorities during rallies.

F5 toppling the single gateway surveillance policy

In late 2015, the military government initiated a proposal for “a single gateway”, an internet “gateway” to control and restrict internet flows, allowing the government to monitor and more easily censor Internet content (Palatino, 2015). This caused anger and frustration among young online users. In response, young online activists and individuals deployed various forms of electronic civil disobedience, including online petitions, virtual sit-ins, and virtual blockades. More than 166 554 people signed an online petition, “Oppose Thai government’s use of a Single Internet Gateway”, on Change.org (Coconut Shell Thailand, 2015). The Twitter hashtag #SingleGateway became the top trend. Moreover, several Facebook groups, such as Citizens Against Single Gateway and Gamers Taking Power Back, promoted distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks against government websites through a “press F5” campaign. Hundreds of thousands of users pushed the “F5” button on their keyboards while visiting government websites, despite warnings by the government on violations of the Computer Crime Act. Overloading the websites’ capacity to handle internet traffic caused the websites of the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, the Prime Minister’s Office, the Internal Security Operations Command, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, and the Government House to go dark several times over a few hours. The Minister of Information and Communication Technology admitted its website was inundated with more than 100 000 users, compared with the daily average of some 6000 (Palatino, 2015; Pornwasin and Mongko, 2015). After several rounds of online protests, the Minister announced a retreat on the controversial single gateway plan (Pornwasin and Mongko, 2015). This is the first time in Thai political history that campaigners had successfully pressured the government to abandon a policy through an online campaign.

K-Pop power

In 2019, Thai K-pop fans were ranked the second most numerous online K-pop consumers after Indonesia, the US and Japan coming third and fourth (Sudsapda, 2019). Like their peers

in the US, who used social media power to support the Black Lives Matter campaign and sabotage a re-election rally for President Donald Trump (Hollingsworth, 2020), Thai K-pop fans emerged as a potent political force in Thailand's anti-government and democratic movement. Thai K-pop fans share more than just a love of Korean music and drama. They are young, educated, tech-savvy, and came of age in a post-deference digital era (Rawnsley, 2021).

First, Twitter is a platform that K-pop fan club members use to share their political concerns and demands with the public. Both prominent K-pop stars and fan groups spoke out about the protests from the beginning of the rally. They used hashtags like #whatshappeninginthailand and #stopoppressingpeople to draw both national and international media attention. They knew that if their hashtags reached the top 10 in the daily trend, they would become news in the mainstream media. At the same time, they used hashtags to mobilise immediate support to protect leading activists. For instance, when the plainclothes police plotted to arrest Parit Chiwarak, a leader of UFTD, the hashtag #Saveparit hit the top Twitter trend at his dormitory. Hundreds of people were alerted and rushed to encircle the dormitory to prevent the police from arresting him (Prachatai, 2020). Hundreds of thousands of Thai netizens used the hashtag #banTharidorssinSouthKorea to boycott famous Thai K-pop idols in Thailand who failed to speak up about the pro-democracy movement happening in their own country (Maneechote, 2020; Sinpeng, 2021).

Secondly, taking advantage of their prominence on social media platforms, fans of South Korean pop groups collectively managed to raise funds and became the single biggest donor to the 2020–2021 pro-democracy protests (Rawnsley, 2021; Tanakasempipat, 2020). In October 2020, when police used the first water cannon, reportedly laced with blue dye and a tear gas chemical, to disperse a group of protesters, K-pop fans raised more than 4 million baht (US\$111 000) in three days. These donations went towards buying protective gear for the protesters: helmets, goggles, raincoats, gloves, and umbrellas (Rawnsley, 2021; Tanakasempipat, 2020; Wangkiat, 2020). The most significant chunk of their contribution was donated to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), a pro-bono legal service (English, 2020a; Rawnsley, 2021). Within a few days of the fundraising campaign, TLHR received more than 10 million baht (US\$321 440) to assist more than 90 protesters and activists arrested since mid-October in court and to get them out of jail (Tanakasempipat, 2020).

Lastly, K-pop fan clubs applied their fundraising as a political weapon to threaten and pressure those who were suppressing the democratic movement. K-pop fans have high purchasing power (since they can buy concert tickets, albums, and merchandise). They expressed their frustration with the operators of the underground and Skytrain systems for following the government's instruction to temporarily shut down services to prevent protesters from attending demonstrations. K-pop fans ended the practice of buying advertising space in train stations to support their idols (English, 2020a; Wangkiat, 2020). Instead, they moved their adverts to the pro-protester tuk-tuks, three-wheel auto rickshaws. Subsequently, for a couple of weeks, there were several empty walls at several major underground train stations, known to be the most crowded (Wangkiat, 2020).

A big curry pot of mocha, black iced coffee, and broccoli

The Thai youth movement employs social media to trick and humiliate state authorities. From time to time, when the government readied mass deployments and threatened to use violence, protestors would deceive the police and military into the wrong location by suddenly changing the protest site or cancelling the protest without prior notice. To embarrass the authorities, the

protest leaders developed a secret code to communicate with their fellow protestors and make the public aware of their triumph with creativity and a sharp sense of humour:

- *Mocha*: Police, the khaki police uniform can be mistaken for chocolate-flavoured coffee.
- *O-liang*: Riot Police, literally Thai iced coffee, but in this context, the word *liang* means to take care of by someone, and *O* is the nickname of King Rama X.
- *Broccoli*: Military, green is the colour of military uniforms.
- *Kaeng The Pho*: Fool The Police. *Kaeng the pho* is a spicy Thai curry with green spinach.

Protesters gave each of the words a new meaning: “*Kaeng*” (curry) also means “to trick or fool someone”, “*the*” (pour) also means “throw away”, and “*pho*” is used as an abbreviation for police. This phrase means tricking and stirring confusion among the police by sending them to the wrong protest location, away from the real protest site (English, 2020b).

On 15 October 2020, youth activists confused the police about the protest location and posted on social media, “Urgent! We found a big pot of curry in the middle of the Ratchaprasong intersection. Because today we moved our protest stage to the Pratumwan intersection. Didn’t you know?” (Aobotor, 2020). On 20 October, after week-long daily protests, the leaders announced a new pattern of protests by asking all supporters to gather at Skytrain and underground stations at 5:15 p.m. and to wait to see a big surprise. After learning that the authorities had started to deploy massive forces, including nearly 2000 police, 33 police cars, and a high-pressure water truck, they decided to call off the protest by posting a picture of “*Kaeng The Pho*” on social media with the message, “Big surprise is no surprise. Please take a rest today. Thank you for being so brave during the past seven days” (The Bangkok Insight, 2020).

Decentralised and Dynamic Small Groups and Leaderless Movement Organisation

While earlier mass movements since the 1970s were somewhat hierarchical, centralized, and rigid toward change, the 2020–2021 youth movement has been far more decentralised and dynamic in terms of organisational structure and resilient in responding to a suppressive state. The youth movement started with a loose network of small and independent groups from day one. Each group worked independently to promote each gain. From time to time, they collaborated to organise festive mass protests and join rallies organised by other groups.

Began loose and small

From February 2020, independent flash mobs of small groups of university and high school students mushroomed. In mobilising students within their institutions, the youth came up with distinctive and imaginative hashtags. Each of these hashtags expressed a political idea and was linked to the identity of each institution. Students in the oldest university, Chulalongkorn, expressed their disagreement with the conservative political stand in support of the military government by turning the university’s motto, “pillar of Thailand”, to “#pillarswillbeno longerbebroken #Chulacrew”. These sarcastic hashtags were used to mobilise support from Chulalongkorn students and differentiate them from other movements. Those at Chiang Mai University in the North of Thailand took the white elephant, the symbol of the university, to represent themselves in the hashtag, “#whiteelephantwon’tstandforit”. One of the leading female high schools in Bangkok, Satriwithaya, played on its location beside the Democracy Monument, “#SWisonthesideofDemocracy”. The private University of the Thai Chamber of

Commerce (UTCC) linked its symbol with the direct attack on the government's effort to buy submarines amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, "#utccSailboatisnotsubmarine" (iLaw, 2020).

Unpredictable movement versus rigid authority

Without a single line of command, it is difficult for security forces to estimate the numbers at a protest, its duration, and its location. It was also hard for the protest preparation. In earlier movements like the Yellow and Red Shirt movements, the mobilisation of mass supporters was systematic and centralised through either their parties or leadership organisations. Thus, it was feasible for the state authorities to access the line of command of the movement. They at least knew each group's position and whom they should negotiate with. Above all, they could prepare proper forces and methods of dealing with protests.

But the 2020 youth movement, with its decentralised, loose network of individual and unofficial small independent groups, was unpredictable and unidentifiable. It was difficult for the authorities to get inside information and prepare for and deal with the protests. From day one, the size of the first protest outside the university organised by Free Youth in July 2020 surprised the police with several thousand protesters at the Democracy Monument. The authorities prepared several hundred personnel to manage the next rally at the Bangkok City Hall without any inside information. However, only around 20 people showed up. This unpredictable pattern continued throughout the two-year-long movement.

A dynamic and resilient movement against suppressive riot control

Besides unpredictability, the decentralised nature allowed the movement to survive and continue even though its leaders were arrested and detained. During the three-month-long ongoing youth protests, the authorities mainly used house visits, summons, and arrest warrants to threaten and attempt to tame the movement's leaders and supporters. By mid-October, the police changed their protest control methods to arresting essential leading figures of Free Youth and UFTD, a method it had used to end earlier movements. However, the result was the contrary. Instead of being intimidated, individuals and small groups turned themselves into movement leaders. While key leaders were either in jail or hiding in safe houses, leading members in small groups and independent participants developed improvised strategies to protect themselves from the security forces, invented activities to continue their campaign for democracy, and mobilised resources to sustain the movement. In a similar way to the protests in Hong Kong, thousands of Thai youngsters lined the streets in rows, fearlessly passing helmets, teargas goggles, and water bottles provided by various independent donors like K-pop FC. The long-distance leadership used Telegram and Twitter to communicate with participants without the main protest stage. Meanwhile, hand signals were used among participants to convey messages without leading commands from the main protest stage (Jha, 2020). Other issue-based groups such as the Dancemocracy (Rassa Dance), the People's Drum (Rassa Drum), the People's Skate (Rassa Skate), Free Craft-Beer (Sura Plot-Ek), and Femiliberaterth (Feminist Plot-Ek), organised performances of dance, drum shows, skating rallies, LGBT+ exhibitions, activities opposing the monopoly in the beer industry, and so on (Lorwattanatrakul, 2020; Prachatai, 2021b).

Militant Poor Youth Striking Back at the Thai State

August–October 2021 is the only time the urban poor youth in Bangkok stood up to lead their movement, “Breaking through the Tear Gas” (Talu Gas). On the one hand, this was the first time in contemporary Thai history that the younger poor had organised a mass movement. Most of the earlier youth movements in Thailand were dominated by middle-class youngsters from educational institutions. On the other hand, it is also the first time a mass movement has employed a militant strategy to express their anger, disrupt the suppression of protests, and promote change and democracy. While violent means had previously been used to fight Thai conservatives, like the CPT’s armed struggle and the Southern Thai separatist movement, Talu Gas fought against the Thai state with conventional and guerrilla warfare (Lertchoosakul, 2021; Lertchoosakul and Kengpaiboon, 2021).

Unlike the peaceful 2020 middle-class youth movement, the Thai security forces had been very careful about employing heavy-handed methods and were somewhat reluctant to work out how to handle the poor militant youth. But after being attacked, the riot police started to use more robust and suppressive measures. At first, to prevent Talu Gas from moving further toward the PM’s residence, the riot police used water cannons, tear gas, and, later, rubber bullets. In reacting to these, the protesters used catapults and small explosives like firecrackers, ping pong bombs, and firebombs. At the peak of the violence, they burned tyres to light up the road and burned down symbols of authority such as police boxes, CCTV cameras, and police vehicles. In response to these actions, riot police scaled up their measures against the protesters with repeated severe physical attacks, snatch arrests, and arrests in homes. After three months of protest, nearly 400 people, including 192 protesters under the age of 18, were arrested on various charges at the protest site and their homes (TLHR, 2021).

From the beginning, Talu Gas was shunned by the 2020 middle-class youth owing to a disagreement over their strategy of confrontation. The middle-class youth had long tried to promote peaceful, symbolic, creative, and intellectual activism. These lower-class youth fearlessly confronted and attacked riot police. Many were worried that violent action would reduce the legitimacy of the youth movement and allow the authorities to use heavy-handed measures against the youth movement. Nevertheless, the 2020 movement leaders gradually learned to accept the different nature of the Talu Gas movement and its success in disrupting state aggression (Lertchoosakul, 2021; Lertchoosakul and Kengpaiboon, 2021). Eventually, they accepted that despite the negative impacts of using violence, Talu Gas disrupted the conventional crowd control norms of the Thai authorities.

INSTITUTIONALISING A PRO-YOUTH POLITICAL PARTY

Besides organising the most creative, decentralised, dynamic, and militant movement in Thai political history, Thai adolescents advanced the process of uprooting Thai conservatism by establishing and instrumentalising a successful political party. They were not only part of the Future Forward Party (FFP) from day one, but the younger generation was also the reason for its successes in the 2019 general election, with pressure on the party to collaborate with the mass youth movement and move forward in the radical direction initiated by the youth movement.

Establishing Future Forward

Key figures of the 2020 movement were with the FFP from the beginning and were a part of its initial development. However, many of them left owing to a disagreement with the compromising approach the party had had with various radical proposals from the youth wing. For example, Parit Chiwarak, who later became the leader of the UFTD, was one of the key founding members of the FFP. Tattep Ruangprapaikitseree, a vital member of the Free Youth group, was a staff member of the FFP youth wing. Nonetheless, both broke with the FFP because of differences over monarchy reform, socialist economic policy, and LGBT campaigns (Thai PBS, 2019).

Main Voters for the Success of Future Forward

In the 2019 general election, first-time voters comprised approximately 8 million out of 51 million eligible voters (collectively, enough to win some 100 constituency seats). The surprising and immense successes of the FFP were mainly driven by the support of first-time voters desiring a new political option. From the beginning, the FFP seriously targeted this demographic through its policies, new media, and campaign platform. Policies primarily aimed at embracing the younger generation included the abolition of military conscription, promoting LGBT rights, and decentralisation (Lertchoosakul, 2019). To appeal to young cosmopolitan voters and netizens, the FFP made being anti-establishment cool and modern through social media and social platforms (McCargo and Chattharakul, 2020). Its election gains were not the only triumph of the FFP. It also laid the foundation for a sense of belonging among young voters. Many felt they were the ones who won this party seats in parliament and expected it to push change according to their desire. Therefore, when the party was dissolved in February 2021, while the party was still reluctant to move its struggle from parliament onto the streets, its young voters overtook the party and organised their own mass protests.

Radicalising and Instrumentalising Future Forward

After the dissolution, the Move Forward Party (MFP), the successor to the FFP after its dissolution, was somewhat vulnerable. Nevertheless, the MFP and its members had to step out of their comfort zone to join the protests, provide indirect support, and highlight radical issues like monarchy reform by reconciling with their leaders and regaining the trust and support of their youth constituency. The MFP youth wing organised youth workshops that helped link activists from different universities and schools to meet and be empowered. MPs facilitated youth protests in their localities by coordinating with the local authorities not to threaten the protesters and to provide minor protest equipment such as speakers, microphones, and tents. MFP MPs used their political positions to bail out countless activists after the state had arrested them (Wilson and Satrusayang, 2020). Former FFP and MFP members appeared at several significant demonstrations as ordinary participants (Thairath, 2020). Meanwhile, the youth movement managed to instrumentalise the MFP as their political tool to campaign for their radical demands in parliament. Since the 10 proposals of monarchy reform launched by the UFTD, the topic of monarchy reform has been widely popular and has become a significant concern among younger generations. Subsequently, after long avoidance of the monarchy issue, eventually the MFP directly and openly criticised the arbitrary power, intervention in parlia-

mentary politics, and lack of transparency of the monarchy. MFP MPs walked out in protest at an increase in the budget allocation for the Royal Office in the Budget Expenditures Bill debate. The MFP publicly proposed reform and amendments to the *lèse-majesté* law (Section 112 of the Criminal Code) (Thai PBS, 2021). On top of that, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit engaged in a public campaign on the government's mishandling of COVID-19 vaccines. On a live Facebook stream, he denounced the government for giving an unfair advantage to Siam Bioscience, owned by King Maha Vajiralongkorn. As a result, he was charged under the *lèse-majesté* law (Reuters, 2021).

MAINSTREAMING LIBERALISM

Although, after a two-year-long protest, the youth movement was still unable to uproot the official power and structures of the conservative Thai state, criticism and the drive for change in the previously untouchable institution had already turned upside down the whole political perception of the conservative state, the power relationship between the authorities and subjects/citizens, and public aspirations for political participation. In short, liberalism and democracy became mainstream values among the public and the younger generations.

Liberalising and Democratising the Media

The success of the mass youth movement made the media more interested in the power and voice of the younger generation. Also, pushing monarchy reform and democratic issues not only broke the norm of thinking for the public but also expanded the boundaries of freedom of reporting for both mainstream and alternative media.

Before 2020, all mainstream media were silent about reporting on the anti-coup movement, criticism of the monarchy, and the victims of the *lèse-majesté* law, while alternative social media that dealt with these issues were threatened by the state. But after the rise of the youth movement and the monarchy reform proposal of the UFTD on 10 August 2020, the Thai media landscape was turned upside down. Mainstream commercial media paid more attention to the youth movement. They were frustrated with the six-year-long government suppression of media freedom. But the younger generation is also a major new customer. It was the first time since the coup that the mainstream media reported and did live broadcasts of nearly all major protests, investigated the state suppression measures against protestors, and opened a public space for debate on sensitive issues such as monarchy reform, the suppressive norms in school, the ineffectiveness of the government, and so on. Even ads of commercial products turned to liberal ideas in support of the self-esteem of the younger generation, which had long been put down and extinguished. In one advertisement, an influential beauty care brand started a #LetHerGrow campaign to end forced haircuts in Thai schools for the negative effect it has on students' confidence (The Nation, 2022).

Liberalising the Younger Generation

Besides overtaking mainstream media and creating their own media to legitimise and challenge the conservative state, the two-year-long youth movement successfully mainstreamed liberal and democratic ideas among the younger generation to a number and degree that

had never before happened in Thailand. It generated round after round of new leadership, long-term protesters, and an endless practice of everyday life struggles.

A new generation of leadership

Although many youth leaders were arrested, detained, or sought political asylum abroad, the whole process of the movement managed to bring new generations of leadership to feed continuing trends and political campaigns. UFTD and We Volunteer were good examples of organisations that could recruit new members and turn them into a new cadre of leaders. Benja Apan, a female student from Thammasat University, bravely went on stage to replace Parit and other leaders who had been arrested again and again since October 2020. Nevertheless, by mid-2021, she was also seized and jailed (Prachatai, 2022a).

Innumerable ordinary and leading school students continued their activism when they went to university. Supitcha Chailom, known as Maynu, an iconic school figure, carried on with her activism once she gained a scholarship to pursue her computer gaming undergraduate programme (Maharani, 2020). In 2022, her campaign became even more radical. She and her friends initiated a new group called “Breaking through the Royal Palace (Talu Wang)”. They campaigned chiefly on monarchy reform. Their main activities were conducting opinion polls on various questions about the monarchy, such as: “Do you want to pay taxes to maintain the monarchy?” In May 2022, she and her colleagues were arrested and jailed (Thai PBS, 2022).

In 2020–2021, university protesters and activists turned themselves into leaders to promote activism in their institutions. Even without big demonstrations, earlier university activists and movement supporters did not cease their political activism. They instead went back to their universities and started mobilising long-term supporters. There were many like Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal, an outspoken activist since high school. Once he got into Chulalongkorn University, the oldest and most conservative university in Thailand, he was elected President of the Student Council. In 2020 and 2021, he was voted President of the Political Science Student Union and President of Chulalongkorn University’s Student Union (SUCU) with a landslide victory. He provided support and organised countless political activities inside the university through his position. Students at other institutions followed suit, not only at leading universities but also at smaller and provincial universities, such as Srinakharinwirot University and Khon Kaen University.

Long-term active citizens and protesters

Post-movement life is not life without movement. Many have kept their eyes on the political situation and activism. The middle-class youth who had joined the 2020 movement were disappointed with their failure to end the regime and win immediate reforms, as expressed in their campaign “#Let it end in our generation”. Many confessed that the mass protests might not be effective enough with the current oppressive regime. So, they temporarily stopped joining and organising protests. Instead, they scrutinise the political situation very closely, actively participating in online campaigns, searching for alternative plans and ideas to deal with the conservative Thai state, and looking forward to the next elections to fight the regime through electoral and parliamentary politics. In the meantime, the movement leaders are planning a new round of mass activities once on-site classes begin after the end of COVID-19 restrictions (Lertchoosakul and Kengpaiboon, 2021).

Meanwhile, the poor youth from Talu Gas who participated in the later anti-government protests in 2021 have been charged, arrested, detained, and assaulted by the authorities during

their rallies. Due to the continuing economic downturn and the absence of any response from the government to relieve the immediate difficulties for the poor, these young people have carried on fighting. They continue to participate courageously and fearlessly in every later protest organised by groups, whether youth or older Red Shirts. They have become a significant and permanent faction supporting all anti-establishment activities (Lertchoosakul and Kengpaiboon, 2021).

Practising everyday life struggles

The political activism during 2020–2021 set up the new standard and practice of “daily life struggle” for the younger generation. Besides joining sit-in protests and rallies, the 2020–2021 youth movement created many new patterns of daily life practice for ordinary people to express and challenge the conservative state structure and authorities. Giving the three-finger salute during the national anthem, tying a white ribbon to bags and wrists, and going to school with non-uniform clothes were easy to practise but powerful acts of resistance among school students. Even after the protests were discontinued, these anti-establishment daily life practices were mainstreamed among youth and people in public.

In the past, cinemagoers faced legal action and harassment if they refused to stand up during the royal anthem. Recently, this taboo has permanently ended. Only a few people now stand up (South China Morning Post, 2021). Tax donations to political parties are another popular political act of resistance to the government and support of the MF Party. In an income tax refund scheme, the taxpayer is allowed to nominate 500 baht each to any political party. In 2021 and 2022, Move Forward was granted the highest amount of taxpayers’ cash donations out of all the other parties. While other older and bigger parties such as the Democrat Party, Palang Pracharat Party, and Pheu Thai Party earned only 3.2 million, 2 million, and 1.4 million baht, respectively, the MF Party received 12.6 million baht (Thai Newsroom, 2021). Moreover, from early 2020 until today, daily 122-minute protests have continued in Bangkok and other provinces such as Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya, and Ubon Ratchathani. Anyone can protest any day to call for the release of youth activists from jail through this practice (Prachatai, 2021a; 2022b).

CONCLUSION

Although we have not seen any new mass youth protests since the end of the Talu Gas protests in October 2021, the mission of “#Let it end in our generation” has not ended, and the state authorities continue to threaten, charge, arrest, and detain young political activists. The whole process of the 2020–2021 Thai youth movement had profound effects and left legacies challenging the very repressive and conservative Thai state. First, their creative and dynamic movement broke the norms and patterns of earlier Thai social movements. These youngsters managed to turn online campaigns into real political weapons. Their hacking stopped the Single Gateway surveillance policy. The K-pop fan club used social media and financial power to voice their demand for democracy. The movement leaders exploited social media to deceive and delegitimise state power. Moreover, the decentralised and resilient nature of the organisational structure of small groups and a leaderless movement was unintelligible for the rigid framework of the suppressive state authority. Furthermore, the poor youth broke the

earlier norm of peaceful demonstrations and developed their own militant collective actions, striking back at the Thai state.

The new younger generation of social movements also triumphed in institutionalising their political party, the Future Forward Party, in a way that earlier generations would not have been able to do. Active young people were with the FFP from the very beginning. The party's success in the 2019 election was based on the support of first-time voters. On top of that, the radical demands and pattern of movement pushed the FFP in a more radical direction, particularly on monarchy reform and uprooting the conservative and suppressive state.

Eventually, the two-year-long youth movement was successfully mainstreamed among the younger generation and the wider public. Given mounting frustration with the suppressive government and the increasing significance of young consumers, mainstream and commercial media paid careful attention to the youth movement. The advanced technology and patterns of the decentralised movement allowed and empowered ordinary participants to act as independent journalists and reporters. Above all, the movement resulted in political consciousness being uprooted in favour of liberalism and democracy among the younger generation in an irreversible change. It managed to regenerate new leadership round after round. The protests left a legacy of a vast number of young, active citizens turned into long-term and active protesters. The initiative of everyday life struggles during the 2020 protests continued to have an effect, and newly invented easy and decisive symbolic actions were reproduced.

NOTES

1. The taboo on criticising Thailand's royal family is backed by a draconian law: Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code – the *lèse-majesté* provision. Under this charge, protesters face up to 15 years in prison for their involvement in the movement.
2. The outbreak of the first wave of COVID-19 in Thailand started from January and ended in May 2020.
3. The ten demands to reform the monarchy include: (1) strip the monarch of legal immunity; (2) revoke the *lèse-majesté* law and pardon all those jailed for the crime; (3) clearly define which assets are held privately by the monarchy; (4) reduce tax money supporting the institution; (5) abolish all royal offices; (6) open all money donated to royal charities to public scrutiny; (7) forbid the monarch from expressing political opinions; (8) cut all royalist propaganda; (9) investigate the disappearances and murders of critics of the monarchy; and (10) outlaw royal consent to coups.

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