

The Chilean Student Movement and the Crisis of Equity in Large Cities: A Socio-Spatial Approach to the Formation of Resistance in a Post-Dictatorial Country

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In 2011 thousands of students filled the principal streets of major Chilean cities over a seven month span to demand a profound transformation of the educational system -one of the main reforms of Pinochet's government. Like students in Quebec, England, or Mexico, the Chilean Student Movement was and is struggling against the pervasive effects of neoliberalism on the educational system, aiming to recover public education for the people. Due to the power of this movement, understanding how it emerged is of scholarly interest. Most scholars of the movement have tended to focus on the neoliberal features of Chilean education to explain it, and have been inclined to use secondary sources of evidence. However, few address the question of how the movement's ideas were historically forged, and the places and actors involved in this process beyond educational institutions. In other words, researchers have focused more on how the educational system itself and its economic relations have shaped the emergence of the social movement. But they have failed to address the actual formation of a critical consciousness of the activist students, particularly, how the educational spaces—including family and other significant territorial communities- shape the formation of radical student movements. Despite the Chilean student movement is opening new avenues to resist the neoliberal hegemony introduced by Pinochet's dictatorship, it has mainly been analyzed as a recent and ideologically homogeneous phenomenon, and as spatially neutral.

In this paper I initiate a discussion regarding these key, but still understudied aspects of social movements, from the case of the Chile, which is also the first and most comprehensive case of neoliberal orthodoxy put into place in either the developed or developing world. This paper seeks to deepen the theoretical understanding of the Chilean student movement, from a socio-spatial logic of analysis of radical social movements (Parraguez 2010a, Parraguez 2010b), integrating into it the main findings from my doctoral dissertation (Parraguez 2016). Particularly, the paper proposes that the formation of this movement, especially the high-school branch, is intimately related to the crisis of socio-spatial equity of metropolises under neoliberalism. In this context, the high-school movement itself has related the severe crisis of the Chilean educational system with the crisis of socio-spatial equity of Chilean metropolises. Specifically, the effects of municipal devolution and "voucherization," introduced by the dictatorship, and consolidated by the democratic governments, are denounced since they sharpened the territorial inequalities of large Chilean cities. This is the historical process that explains why Chile has become one of the most school-segregated countries in the world. However, the spatial dimension of this problem has scarcely been debated in the public sphere.

In this context I propose that all these socio-spatial processes have also shaped both the particular claims of the high school movement, and its internal ideological divisions, i.e. Reformists vs. Radicals. Both propose the leadership of the "community" in the educational management. Therefore, with the emergence of the high-school movement, school communities pass from being conceived as spaces of capitalist domination to becoming spaces of social struggle and radical transformation. However, the meaning and spatial experience of "community" differs between Reformists and Radicals. I propose this is related with the paradoxical consequences of the active students' economic class and location in the city, and their respective opportunities to access good quality high-school education. In Chile the school system does not

require parents to enrol their children in neighbourhood schools. But in the poorest areas of the city, there is no choice. Educational communities necessarily have a territorial base, which paradoxically is believed to be related to the formation of radical critical consciousness. Conversely, in “emblematic” public high-schools¹ students are exposed to the formation of school communities without a territorial base. They derive from families with a strong ideology of social mobility (Parraguez 2016). Moreover, if they come from a low-income municipality of the city, the issue is necessarily associated with spatial mobility. Thus, paradoxically, that the best students from the poorest sectors of the city develop their process of critical consciousness formation largely outside their territories of origin could help to explain the moderate nature of their critical consciousness. This also leads to the political role of the family in the formation of critical consciousness of active students (Parraguez 2016), which is supposed to be a key actor within the educational communities of high schools.

All in all, in this paper I systematize the theoretical basis of ongoing postdoctoral research that seeks to demonstrate that the Chilean student movement, along with other radical student movements, should receive much more attention from the critical urban studies because of the lessons we can obtain from these students to understand how conflictive the endeavour is of bringing down a dominant paradigm of neoliberal urban management, with the end goal of reaching an egalitarian distribution of opportunities within the city. Understanding that the equitable distribution of opportunities in the city is of great importance for critical urban thought, I highlight the importance of connecting the crisis of territorial equity in major Chilean cities with the crisis in the educational system and the emergence of the student movement.

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¹Traditional public high schools that select the best students of the city, generally located in the richest municipalities of the city.

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