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# Young People and the Politics of Outrage and Hope

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# The Youth Bulge: Remaking Precarity in Times of Illegitimacy

*Emma E. Rowe*

## 1 Introduction

In 2011, dubbed the ‘year of protests’, it was difficult to ignore the sense of growing social unrest, from the Arab Spring to the Chilean Winter, Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Together. Due to a high proportion of youthful participation within the Arab Spring, the movements were linked to the ‘youth bulge’ (Adams and Winthrop 2011, Austin 2011). Protests, riots, self-immolation, hunger strikes and civil unrest seemed to be spreading like wildfire across the globe, as the Occupy Movement took to semi-permanent occupations of urban space, frequently in central financial districts. The protests were hot on the heels of the 2007/2008 Global Financial Crisis. Certainly, there are distinctions to be made across the campaigning sites, although shared narratives emerged. Whilst the Arab Spring and Occupy Together were concerned with corporate greed, and the remaking of democracy, many protests turned to focus on social welfare and education. The Chilean Student Movement proclaimed the ‘urgent need to recover education as a universal democratic, social and human right’ (Confederación Nacional de Estudiantes de Chile (CONFECH) 2011).

In this chapter I explore states of precarity in times of illegitimacy, in relation to cultural and social movements for education. Precarity is a political, social and cultural endeavour as young people mobilise to ‘invent new ... forms of labour organization’ (Neilson and Rossiter 2008, 57). I explore the horizontal or collaborative methods of democratic participation and how this may speak to the reimagining of education within the ‘technocapitalist’ global landscape (Suarez-Villa 2012, 2000). At the heart of precarity for the young person is a hopeful expression of a new order; and whilst previous generations may cast doom and gloom predictions, I would argue these are not necessarily shared, and rather, challenges to education, democracy and government are expressions of reinvention and hope—a necessary ingredient for any generation.

The concept of the ‘youth bulge’, which refers to a higher proportion of young people within a population, was popularized in the media following

September 11 and grew in the wake of the Arab Spring or Arab Awakening<sup>1</sup> (Huntington 2001, Zakaria 2011, 2001). Before I discuss the youth bulge further, in relation to the Arab Awakening, I will first endeavour to position the discussion within critical perspectives of youth sociology (Furstenberg 2000, Bessant 2014, Patel Stevens et al. 2007).

## 2 Youth Sociology and Critical Perspectives

Do the global cultural uprisings in 2011 and beyond represent *generational rebellions* and the mobilization of youth-oriented social change? Furthermore, do these social uprisings suggest that young people are living within a unique and *critical* moment of illegitimacy?

Indeed, it is difficult to ignore the importance of digitalization for these social movements and the ‘technoscape’ (Appadurai 1990) in which these movements emerged. There are clearly tensions surrounding rapid and globalizing modernity, and as brought forth by the Arab Awakening, a clash between secularity and religion; modernity and traditionalism; poverty and the elites. Intellectuals such as Henry Giroux have argued that free-market capitalism has posited young people and adolescents within a new era of hostile economic conditions. Unencumbered stratum of totalitarianism under the façade of democracy, have risen to unprecedented heights, argues Giroux (2013). The ‘war against youth’ is also a ‘war against democracy’ utilizing ‘special force and intensity against young people’ (16). This ‘special force’ is perhaps most strikingly played out within the battlefield of schools and education, a theme I subsequently explore within this chapter.

Throughout history, young people have frequently been located in precarious states of legitimacy. This is evident in times of conflict but also times of cultural and social transition. During the industrialization era—and continued and perpetuated today in many parts of the world via the rationalities of consumerism—hundreds of thousands of children are regarded as cheap labour (Fisher 2011). During both World Wars, the vast majority of conscripted soldiers were young men and boys, and a large proportion did not return alive. Young people have often been at the centre of political campaigns or utilized as political weapons. The ‘Hitler Youth’ recruited children (from ages 10 to 18) to prepare boys for military service and girls for motherhood. Through these

<sup>1</sup> I refer to the Arab Spring subsequently as the ‘Arab awakening’. I explain this further in the conclusion (Susser 2012).

events, we see how young people may be regarded as vulnerable to the machinations of political, social and cultural change.

Concern for youth is a generational concern, a 'practice that has a long history' (Bessant 2014, 82), in which young people are simultaneously located as deficient and idealized; at-risk or marginalized; dually in need of surveillance and protection. This is illuminated throughout the literature (e.g., Hall 1904). In the 1950s in post-war United States, Paul Goodman (1956) famously wrote *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, arguing that schooling—amongst other forms of social control—is damaging to young people's sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Goodman maintained that in times of severe adversity for youth, precarious forms of employment, growing poverty and wealth gaps, young men (sic) needed to resist and recapture their own claim to legitimacy and self-governance. With similar tones, Neil Postman wrote *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982) contending that technology (in addition to the women's liberation movement) contributes to the continuous decline and contraction of childhood, and has been the case ever since the invention of the telegraph in the 1800s.

Given this history it becomes problematic to frame the recent protests and actions as occurring in a new/singular time and moment of illegitimacy. Although the time in which these protests have unfolded has its own particularities, it may be more feasible to contend that young people are located within a *continuum* of illegitimacy. With the intensification of formal schooling and the emphasis on school completion dramatically increasing (see, Connell et al. 1982, Campbell and Proctor 2014), this has resulted in a long and protracted transition to adulthood. In rendering the current social and economic milieu as a unique time or moment of illegitimacy, it is thus important to avoid idealized views of the past (such as Donald Trump's nostalgic slogans). Certainly, whilst no means complete or fulfilled, global organizations are attempting to 'protect' childhood in more recent centuries. *The Conventions on the Right of the Child* (UNICEF) was first introduced in 1989—the same year that hundreds of university students were massacred in Tiananmen Square as they protested and starved themselves in their pursuit for a more democratic society.

Furthermore, adopting a comparative perspective and evoking the category of 'young person' is not without its difficulties and constraints, as a social construct frequently framed within essentialist paradigms of age (Bessant 2014, Patel Stevens et al. 2007). Bessant (2014) asks, 'what does the idea of generation mean, and how can that idea best be used?' (7). The construct of 'youth' or 'young person' belies a sense of the in-between and incompleteness, dually in need of surveillance and protection. This points to the continuum of illegitimacy, well captured by a simple paradox:



Advanced industrial societies create adolescence and early adulthood as life stages in ways that inevitably render them problematic. In one way or another, much of the social science research on adolescence has been dominated by this cultural contradiction.

FURSTENBERG 2000, 897

The paradox of surveillance versus protection, and the construction of the 'adolescent', is a useful frame to problematize the youth bulge—as a social and cultural construct centred around the 'risky' aspect of young people. The youth bulge may be useful for emphasizing disenfranchised youth who are immobilized within the transition from education to work.

### 3 The Youth Bulge

The youth bulge refers to a disproportionate percentage of young people within the population, typically males between the age of fifteen to twenty-four, in developing economies (Zakaria 2001, Roche 2014, LaGraffe 2012, Huntington 2001). Albeit, the precise age slightly differs within the literature. Across Northern Africa and the Middle East, there is a higher proportion of young people in comparison to countries such as Australia, the United States and Britain. For example, Egypt is experiencing a significant youth bulge, with fifty per cent of the population under the age of twenty-four (see Figure 11.1),<sup>2</sup> alongside high levels of unemployment amongst formally uneducated and educated young people. In these countries, the concept of the youth bulge is utilized to explain social unrest in the form of political violence, terrorism or conflict (Urdal 2007, Austin 2011, Roche 2014). As Urdal (2007) writes, 'young males are the main protagonists of criminal as well as political violence' and that empirical data points 'to a clear statistical relationship between youth bulges and an increased risk of both internal armed conflict, terrorism, and riots' (90, 91).

The notion of the youth bulge was popularized following September 11, when it was alleged that the majority of hijackers were young males between

2 Saudi Arabia has a similar youth bulge with 46% of the population under the age of 25. The youth bulges are also attributed to significant population increases. Since 1901, Egypt has increased from approximately 10 million people to nearly 90 million people in 2015. This is a higher population growth rate (1.5–2% approximately) in comparison to developed economies in the OECD. For example, United States population growth rate is 0.78, or Australia 1.07% (see, Piketty 2014). Other developing economies have experienced a similar surge, including Nigeria, Pakistan.

the ages of twenty to twenty-four from Saudi Arabia<sup>3</sup> (U.S. Government 2004). Huntington (2001) argued that the 'key factor' in this act of terror was the demographic factor – 'generally speaking, the people who go out and kill other people are males between the ages of 16 and 30'. This is reiterated by Zakaria in another journalistic piece published in October 2001:

A huge influx of restless young men in any country is bad news. When accompanied by even small economic and social change, it usually produces a new politics of protest. In the past, societies in these circumstances have fallen prey to a search for revolutionary solutions. (France went through a youth bulge just before the French Revolution, as did Iran before its 1979 revolution.) In the case of the Arab world, this revolution has taken the form of an Islamic resurgence.

ZAKARIA 2001

In this paradigm, youth are risky—particularly males—and in need of intervention, surveillance and control. Young people are 'posited no longer as *at risk* but as *the risk* to democratic public life' (Giroux 2010, 52, italics in original). Whilst violent action is correlated with young people, so too is the more positive characterization of non-violent action and forms of protest. This is drawn out further by Howie and Campbell (2016) in their theorizing of the '*guerilla self*' and methods of resistance in post-GFC United States, and Castells (2012) in his exploration of revolutionary movements across Egypt, Spain and Tunisia.

Non-violent resistance came to the fore during the Arab Awakening, another social movement linked with the youth bulge (LaGraffe 2012). Certainly, the countries involved in the non-violent and pro-democratic uprisings of the Arab Awakening across the Middle East and Northern Africa—including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen—each retain a higher population of young people, in comparison to developed economies. I endeavour to illuminate this point further in the following graph (see Figure 11.1). Considering the data,<sup>4</sup> it is

- 3 The Final Report of the National Commission following 9/11 (see U.S. Government 2004) alleges that fourteen out of the nineteen hijackers were allegedly males aged between twenty to twenty-five, and predominantly from Saudi Arabia. According to this report, the hijackers were young, with the remaining four under the age of thirty. Only one hijacker was allegedly aged over 30 (a pilot, age 32).
- 4 The graph draws on data sourced from the Centre for Intelligence Agency Website, and triangulated with the literature (Yifu Lin 2012, Urdal 2007, LaGraffe 2012, Dhillion 2008, Zakaria 2011, 2001). The data that relates to the youth bulge and levels of unemployment represents the year 2016. This data is limited in capturing the demographics in 2011, the time of the Arab

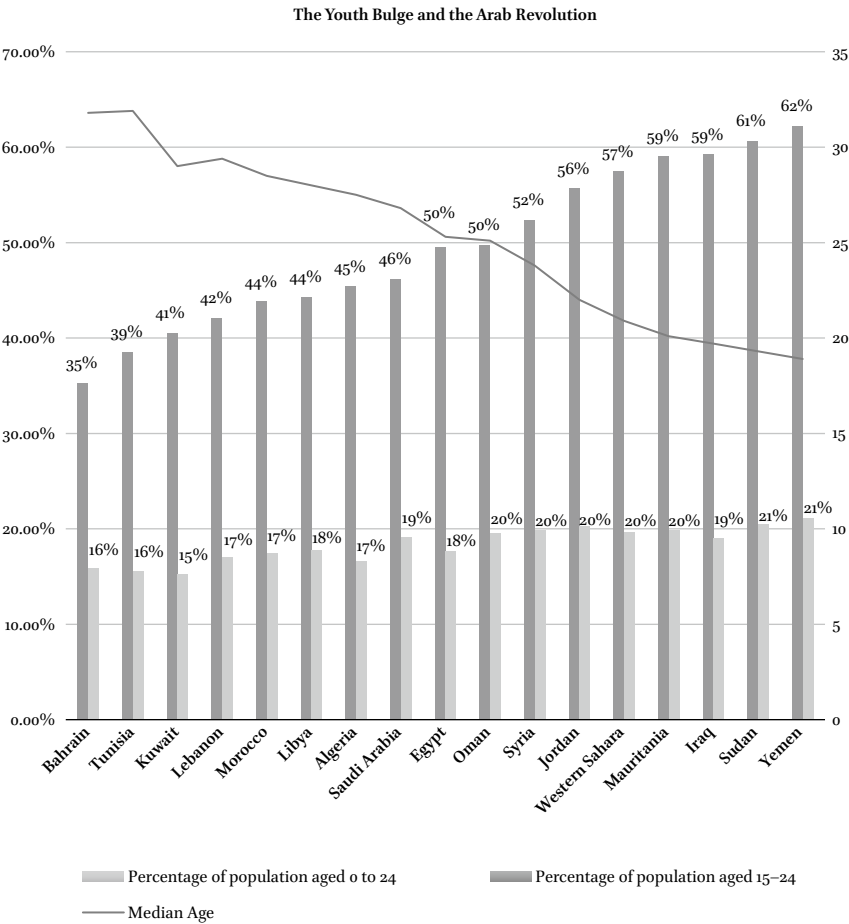


FIGURE 11.1 The youth bulge and the Arab revolution.  
SOURCE: AUTHOR

feasible to argue that the countries involved with the Arab Awakening contain a younger polity:

Young people were clearly pivotal and instrumental in the cultural uprisings of the Arab Spring. For many western commentators this was marked out via the instrumentality and traction of social media in terms of collective organization and resistance. The BBC asserted that the Arab Spring was

Spring. Arguably it is useful in providing a snapshot of the high proportion of young people and levels of unemployment, which is further addressed elsewhere (Yifu Lin 2012, Urdal 2007, LaGrafie 2012, Dhillon 2008, Zakaria 2011, 2001).

a movement born on Facebook (BBC News 2011b), and rather than picking up weapons—like revolutions from the past—these movements organized online, utilizing ‘*technologies of resistance*’ (Milberry 2014, 53, emphasis in original). Although, this ‘clean’ and westernised image of the uprisings largely ignores the violence perpetuated on the protestors (see, Abul-Magd 2012).

In addition to retaining this higher proportion of young people, these emerging economies struggle with high levels of youth unemployment and a lack of meaningful employment opportunities (as do many developed economies also), ranging from 37.6% in Tunisia, to 34.4% in Egypt (OECD 2016b). Whilst many of these countries invest relatively high proportions of their GDP into education, the lowly status of teachers, significant gender gaps, and lack of high-quality, low-cost education has contributed to high levels of illiteracy. The Arab Awakening was partially driven by young people ‘stuck’ and immobilized within the transition from education to employment, a life-stage invariably utilized to mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

In the same year as the Arab Awakening and the Occupy Movement, across the globe and receiving relatively little mainstream press attention, the Chilean Student Movement swelled and struggled in their bid for improved access to low-cost education. Whilst there are clearly nuances and distinctions between the social movements, there is a shared demand for equity, opportunity and improved transparency of governance, as brought forth by a younger generation in their mobilization of critical pedagogical spaces.

#### 4 The Chilean Winter

The Chilean Student Movement was first initiated in 2006 when secondary students took to the streets, marching in black and white attire (referred to as the ‘Penguin Revolution’). In their collective rallies through the streets, and long-term occupations of school buildings, students called for bus concessions for travel to school and increased government funding for secondary school education. University students later joined these protests in relation to the inaccessibility of higher education. In 2011 the movement hit a boiling point, dubbed by the mainstream press as the ‘Chilean Winter’ (gesturing to the Arab Spring).

The students protested against the disproportionate cost of education, calling for an end to profit-making in education. Students have consistently maintained their commitment to non-violent protest, although a young boy

was reportedly shot and killed by the police during the 2011 national strike day (The Internationalist 2011, BBC News 2011a). Students are calling for free and quality education, often using imaginative means and consistently relying on social media to both distribute and build their movement. For '1800 consecutive hours', through day and night, the students ran an unending relay race around the presidential palace to 'symbolise the 18 billion Chilean pesos necessary to finance 1 year of free higher education' (Stromquist and Sanyal 2013, 167). The students employ non-violent protests involving: large-scale kiss ins (extended kissing between couples) to demonstrate their 'passion for education'; a mass-performance entitled 'mass suicide by education' in which students performed death; or collective choreographed dances where students dressed as zombies and danced to Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. This dance was used to illustrate 'death by debt' in reference to their imminent education debt (Barrionuevo 2011, Stromquist and Sanyal 2013, The Internationalist 2011, Taylor 2011, Bellei, Cabalin, and Orellana 2014).

The excessive education debt that faces young people forecloses the possibility of higher education to the broad majority. Chile is a largely privatized education system, following the Pinochet rule through the 1980s (Hsieh and Urquiola 2006, Harvey 2005). In comparison to other OECD countries, Chile retains a far higher proportion of students who attend private schools, with a percentage of students who attend public schools well below the OECD average (82%). Only 37% of the Chilean population attend public schools (otherwise known as municipal schools), with the remainder enrolled at private institutions (OECD 2013b). However, this is further obfuscated by the 'derivatives' of public schools, such as for-profit and non-profit charter schools, which are government-funded yet exclusive and often difficult for the broad majority to access. Chile records high-levels of student segregation within their schooling system as based on socio-economic status, in comparison to other OECD countries (Rambla, Valiente, and Frías 2011). This is illuminated by the Chilean Student Movement, who write on their website:

Education in Chile is going through an acute crisis. We have a discriminatory system that perpetuates inequality through segregation and exclusion [and] operates from the schools to universities undermining democratic coexistence. There is an urgent need to recover education as a universal social and human right ... This right must be guaranteed ... and be based upon a new National System of Public Education, one that is to be Free, Democratic, and of High Quality, organized and financed by the state. (Confederación nacional de estudiantes de Chile (CONFECH) 2011, capitalized in original) [Chile Student Movement Union].

Long-term and sustained social movements for education across OECD countries, including the Chilean Student Movement, demonstrate the fractured scope of education in the post-Fordist context. A lack of access to quality low-cost education exacerbates societal inequalities. The restructuring of public schooling contributes to higher levels of segregation and structural disadvantage, across the lines of socio-economic status, gender and race (Wells, Slayton, and Scott 2002, Roda 2015).

As the public school is increasingly reoriented in the logic of the market, the social movements potentially illuminate education as a structural mechanism reinforcing institutionalized precarity. Fisher (2011) describes schools as facing a ‘crisis of legitimisation’ in which the ‘logic of privatization has diminished the role of schools as vital public spheres’ (382). She writes:

Fast-forward to the current moment and this theatre of absurdity has taken on entirely new proportions in the lives of all children and youth, but particularly those who are poor and/or minority ... thanks to the emergence and intensification of neoliberalism since the 1970s.

FISHER 2011, 380

As a social, economic and cultural institution that principally serves young people, low-cost and high-quality education theoretically enables and empowers more vulnerable individuals to advance and improve upon their economic and labour conditions. Education as an accessible and authorizing social institution can potentially interrupt and destabilize pre-determined classifications around employment and income.

## 5 Disassembling Public Education

Public schools are historically understood as ‘non-market’ or located outside the purview of the market. Since the 1980s, and across OECD countries, the public school (also understood as the state, municipal or ‘common’ school) has experienced a series of fundamental policy shifts, emphasizing autonomy, decentralization and competition vis-à-vis the rationalities of free-market economics (Picower 2013, Hursh 2015, Whitty, Power, and Halpin 1998). Precarious policy conditions engender consistent pressure

...in rearticulating the public school in alignment with the market, producing tensions in serving the more historical conceptualizations of public schooling, coupled with contemporary profit-driven concerns.

Conflict points are visible in global social movements and social activism around public education.

ROWE 2017, 1

The dismantling of the traditional public school is strikingly played out via the numerous ‘derivatives’ of public schooling. The list of public schooling ‘derivatives’ is incredibly extensive and broad: charter schools in the U.S., mini schools in Canada, private voucher schools in Chile, free schools and academies in England, the *friskolor* in Sweden, self-managing schools and Independent public schools in Australia, partnership schools in New Zealand (Yoon 2011, Lubienski 2001, Lubienski, Lee, and Gordon 2013, Whitty and Power 2000, Arreman and Holm 2011). Whilst there are differences between each model, public school derivatives share a commitment to autonomy and decentralization, a separation from the traditional public school, although they continue to receive government funding.

Traditional public schools are reoriented within the logic of the market as private capital to be consumed and acquired. This is a type of *rebranding* or re-fashioning of the traditional public school within the post-Fordist economy—differentiated and specialized for the individualized consumer (Harvey 2008, Amin 1994). Although the rebranding of public schooling may be endeavouring to move away from ‘factory models’ of schooling, creating differentiated schools for the differentiated consumer, schooling across OECD countries simultaneously and paradoxically grows more homogenous and standardized. For many countries, particularly Australia, there is heightened segregation of the student cohort (Windle 2015). Gorur (2014) argues that standardization by stealth is a means of measurement, in order to render education as simplified, evidence-based, quantifiable and entirely calculable.

The dismantling of the public school is structured and enabled via government policies, and largely financed and directed by the private, corporate sector. This is the global education business which has been valued by corporate bodies such as Apple, Intel and the World Bank as a trillion dollar industry (Verger, Lubienski, and Steiner-Khamsi 2016a). These authors write:

We are seeing the emergence of the idea of education as a sector for investment and profit making, where organizations, practices and networks engaged in these endeavours take on an increasingly global scale ... Now we are witnessing the emergence of whole trade associations dedicated to optimizing opportunities for investors looking to capitalize on the education sector.

VERGER, LUBIENSKI, and STEINER-KHAMSI 2016a, 3

The global education business (Ball 2012) or the global education industry (GEI) is dominated by private and transnational entities, such as The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Pearson Affordable Learning Fund and Teach for All. These private bodies are incredibly influential in reshaping and redirecting educational policy—from the administration and design of standardized testing, to the professionalization and working conditions for teachers, to how schools are structured and funded (Hursh 2015, Ravitch 2011, Verger, Lubienski, and Steiner-Khamsi 2016b). In the United States, tax concessions and rebates are granted to encourage private corporations to convert existing public schools to charter schools (Lipman 2013). This is only one example of the policy machinations that aim to increase financial revenue and profit-making from education, whilst simultaneously claiming to work towards greater quality, equity and low-cost education. The generational uprisings of the Arab Awakening and the Chilean Student Movement indicate the temerity—or possibly the weakness—of these claims.

The generational uprisings of the Arab Awakening and the Chilean Winter are symptomatic of widening inequality, the fracturing of social services and the commodification of education. They also point to the crisis of representative democracy.

## 6 Representative Democracy and Technocapitalism

A growing proportion of young people are locked out of meaningful employment, access to affordable and high-quality education, house ownership or stable housing (OECD 2016a, 2013a). Economists argue that inequality is rising, and whilst living standards have largely improved in developed economies, the gap between the rich and the poor is greater than the post-war years (Atkinson 2015). Wealth is increasingly concentrated. Piketty (2014) contends that forces of convergence and forces of divergence are wider and stronger in the contemporary economy, than ever before. It is not only that the rich are growing richer, and the poor are growing poorer, but that economic growth is stagnant or declining for large proportions of the population. The OECD (2015) reports:

In recent decades, as much as 40% of the population at the lower end of the distribution has benefited little from economic growth in many countries. In some cases, low earners have even seen their incomes fall in real terms ... Just as with the rise of the 1%, the decline of the 40% raises social and political questions. When such a large group in the population



gains so little from economic growth, the social fabric frays and trust in institutions is weakened. (20, 21)

Widening inequality is hindering the democratic process, to such an extent that representative democracy is largely an illusion. As reflected in the social movements of 2011, the demands for improved social services and political legitimacy reflect a broader polity call for meaningful, authentic democracy. As put forth by the Occupy Movement, there is a demand for elected individuals to more closely represent the biddings of the polity. There is an increasing belief that representation stands for the wealthy minority, rather than the broader majority (e.g. we are the 99%). Suarez-Villa (2012) argues that we have entered into a new era of capitalism defined by the rise of corporate power and corporate control. This era maintains a lesser reliance on physical labour, depending more on 'intangible resources' (9) such as creativity and technological innovation. He writes:

Technocapitalism's global reach depends on a new ethos of corporate control over technology and science, and on the unfettered expansion of corporate power, with consequences for humanity, life and nature that are all too often irreversible (8).

The rise of corporate power, but also the relationship between business and government, is clearly relevant within the context of the 2007/2008 Global Financial Crisis and the social movements that followed closely after. The interconnectedness of these events is mapped out by Castells (2012). The question becomes whether 'fast capitalism' (Castells 2012) and 'fast accumulation' (Suarez-Villa 2012) is contributing to a rapid decline of social democratic welfare measures, and public trust in social institutions. McWilliams and Bonet (2016) write,

Scholars have argued that in the post-industrial moment, precarity has become 'unexceptional' as the social institutions of the welfare state that once guarded against the ruthless vagaries of capitalism have eroded and left the majority of the world's population exposed to free market caprice.

CROSS, 2010; NEILSON & ROSSITER, 2008

With the growth of capitalism, there is little protection for social institutions—such as public schools—from the 'ruthless vagaries' of the market. Precariousness is thus a 'capitalist norm' (Mitropoulos 2011) constructing volatile economic and labour conditions. Smyth (2016) builds on these assertions:

My proposition is: what if precarity were not so much an aberration or dysfunction of the fordist (or even post-fordist) system of work, but rather as people like Mitropoulos (2011) and Neilson and Rossiter (2008) argue, an inevitability of capitalism? ... What would such a reading mean for the lives of young people caught up in being displaced by capitalism? (130, 131).

The new era of capitalism, as corporate controlled democracy, disenfranchises young people via diminished, or perhaps less meaningful, participatory and representative democracy, and the capacity to influence political decisions. This was recently made evident via the Brexit vote, with young people disproportionately voting to remain in the European Union (Moore 2016).

The current state of education offers little hope for many young people, in that it guarantees generational debt, due to the excessive and rising costs of education. However, it is necessary to issue these arguments with caveats. In thinking about the displacement of young people, it may be more accurate to capture this as a structural, institutional and systemic war on *disadvantaged* youth—Indigenous youth in Australia; African-American youth in the United States; and, youth living in poverty and hardship. Whether one experiences disadvantage largely depends on sociological categories around race, gender and socio-economic status. In countries such as Tunisia, Egypt or Libya, females remain under-represented in formal education, and over-represented in unemployment and measures of illiteracy.

## 7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the notion of precarity in times of illegitimacy, as framed by social movements such as the Arab Awakening and the Chilean Winter. I sought to position the discussion within a critical sociology of youth and the concept of the 'youth bulge' to examine how social and cultural uprisings may represent generational rebellions and resistance. The call for accessible and high-quality education is a prescient demand that is routinely and consistently threaded through social movements and cultural uprisings, across OECD countries (see, Rowe 2017). As I have argued in this chapter, the corporatization of education has contributed to higher education debts, segregation and insurmountable gaps for a proportion of the population.

It is important to acknowledge that comparing the uprisings across the Middle East, with the Chilean Winter and Occupy Together, may function as an act of essentializing. There is a need to recognize political and cultural differences across the geo-political sites (Susser 2012). Indeed, the naming of the Arab

Spring as a 'spring' points to the dominant western lens. Susser (2012) explains that the 'Arab Spring' was a term primarily adopted by western commentators, although activists 'cast it as a "revolution" (*thawra*)' or an 'Arab awakening' (Susser 2012, 30, 34). The term 'spring' connotes the Prague Spring and the 'Spring of Nations' in Europe—national secularist uprisings that fought for liberal and democratic government. Although there were factions of the Arab Uprising fighting for secularist governance, Susser (2012) argues that the Arab revolution was far more complex than this westernised imaginary, and it

...is a striking case of "false universalism," due to its remoteness from reality and a flawed vision reflective of the inability, or unwillingness, to recognize the cultural difference of "the other". The deep undercurrents of Middle East political culture differ from those of the liberal/secular Western world (30).

In a journalistic piece, Fareed Zakaria (2001) writes about the conflicted nature of modernity in the Middle East—the 'clash of civilizations'—as the global West meets the Middle East. America 'thinks of modernity as all good' (Zakaria 2001). The hegemony of modernity and globalization is imposed upon myriad religious and cultural settings, positioned in tension with religious and social traditions. Modernity is imagined and provoked as progressive, neutral and intellectually superior (Rasmussen 2015).

The widespread use of social media sites and technology within the Arab awakening, in particular, signalled the global rise of modernity for certain commentators (e.g. Sakbani 2011). It is clear that young people effectively harnessed the transformative potential of social media during the Arab awakening, the Occupy Movement and the Chilean Winter. In holding up smart phones during rallies, organizing protests or capturing violent encounters and posting the images online, tools of technology built momentum but also enabled broad distribution and transparency. In this way, the movements were democratized and accessible for a wider audience. This is a collaborative (horizontal) means to gather, negotiate and generate alternative visions, hopes and ideas for society. Marina Sitrin (2012) writes about *horizontalidad*, horizontality, and horizontalism,

*Horizontalidad* is a social relationship that implies, as its name suggests, a flat plane upon which to communicate. *Horizontalidad* necessarily implies the use of direct democracy and the striving for consensus, processes in which attempts are made so that everyone is heard and new relationships are created. *Horizontalidad* is a new way of relating, based in affective politics and against all the implications of 'isms'. It is a dynamic

social relationship. It is not an ideology or political program that must be met so as to create a new society or new idea. It is a break with these sorts of vertical ways of organizing and relating, and a break that is an opening.

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The notion of '*horizontalidad*' further pushes back against critiques of the social movements in lacking specific demands, and criticisms that the movements were ineffective in producing desired change (see, Kitchen 2012, Lawson 2012, van de Sande 2013). For some protestors, the social movements elicited physicality, dialogue and collectivism—such as Judith Butler's claim of 'we the people' (Butler 2012). Thereby, *horizontalidad* or *horizontalism* is emulative of prefigurative politics—subversive, disruptive and open-ended. It is experimental and 'actualised in the here and now' (van de Sande 2013, 230), rather than institutionalized, vertical and objectified.

So too, technology can be transformative for opening up *critical pedagogical* spaces as problem-posing, dialogic and collaborative (Freire 2012). By utilizing social media, young people are able to create and control spaces not necessarily subjected to adult surveillance and vertical power structures. An example of this is during the Occupy and the Spanish Indignados movement. Both movements posted online to organize face-to-face collaborations (referred to as 'IRL' or 'F2F', meaning In Real Life and Face to Face) (Castells 2012, Sitrin 2012). The face-to-face collaborations and events routinely involved long and drawn out debates around democracy and the constitution of democracy. For the Occupy Movement, these events were understood as General Assemblies, and utilized detailed processes around how to select speakers (ensuring broad participation) and multiple hand gestures to enable constant interaction between the speaker and the crowd. Boler et al. (2014) discuss the General Assemblies during the Occupy Movement,

To participate in any of the assemblies taking place throughout the United States, and in many places around the globe, means to stand or sit in a circle, with a handful of facilitators, and speak and listen in turn, usually with general guidelines and principles of unity, and then together attempt to reach consensus ... [This is] something like direct, real, or participatory democracy ... (444).

This is a highly valuable educative process in which young (and old) people are exchanging their ideas, negotiating and articulating their values, hopes and ambitions. This is the expression of hope amidst the context of outrage. In this

exchange, young people are articulating their expression of the future—the political, social and cultural future—and engaged in provocative exchanges and articulations to reimagine the status quo. These spaces offer innovative and new visions of how to imagine education and educational spaces as critical, cooperative and democratic.

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