

“An act of freedom”: secondary students movement in São Paulo, Brazil, 2015^{1 2 3}

“Um ato de liberdade”: movimento de estudantes secundaristas em São Paulo, 2015

“Un acto de libertad”: movimiento de estudiantes secundarios en São Paulo, Brasil, 2015

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Abstract

The article aims to analyze factors that explain the emergence and spread of the movement of São Paulo students who, in 2015, occupied 219 schools against the project of “reorganization” of the state school system. Data, generated through literature review and semi-structured interviews, were analyzed based on the concepts of protest cycles, contestation repertoires and “citizenship”. Among the results, the approximation between different networks of activists and students stands out. These networks, influenced by the repertoires of the 2010 global protest cycle, developed the movement's main tactics – acts, occupations and locks – and catalyzed latent experiences, expectations and demands among adolescents.

Keywords: student movement, high school students, contestation repertoires.

Resumo

O artigo trata do movimento de estudantes paulistas que, em 2015, ocuparam 219 escolas contra o projeto de “reorganização” do sistema escolar estadual, com o objetivo de analisar fatores que explicam sua emergência e disseminação. Os dados, gerados por meio de revisão bibliográfica e de entrevistas semiestruturadas, foram analisados com base nos conceitos de ciclos de protesto, repertórios de contestação e “cidadanismo”. Destaca-se, nos resultados, a aproximação entre diversas redes de ativistas e estudantes. Essas redes, influenciadas pelos repertórios do ciclo global de protestos dos anos 2010, desenvolveram as principais táticas do movimento – atos, ocupações e trancamentos – e catalisaram experiências, expectativas e demandas latentes entre adolescentes.

Palavras-chave: movimento estudantil, estudantes do Ensino Médio, repertórios de contestação

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo analizar los factores que explican el surgimiento y propagación del movimiento de estudiantes de São Paulo que, en 2015, ocuparon 219 escuelas contra el proyecto de “Reorganización” del sistema escolar estatal. Los datos, creados a través de revisión de literatura y entrevistas semiestruturadas, fueron analizados con base en los conceptos de ciclos de protesta, repertorios de contestación y “ciudadanía”. Entre los resultados destaca la aproximación entre diferentes redes de activistas y estudiantes. Estas redes, influenciadas por los repertorios del ciclo global de protesta de 2010, desarrollaron las principales tácticas del movimiento - actos, ocupaciones y cerraduras - y catalizaron experiencias latentes, expectativas y demandas entre los adolescentes.

Palabras clave: movimiento estudiantil, estudiantes de secundaria, repertorios de contestación

Introduction

In the end, the mobilizations are not so much for the agenda but the most human issue. Entering the school and removing the principal from her position felt like an act of freedom, a good feeling. In a place that locks you in the whole year and gives you the limits, you come to occupy and start saying what the limits are.

(Miranda, São Paulo).

This article brings results from the survey “Secondary occupations in Brazil in 2015 and 2016: formation and political self-formation of the occupants”⁴ about the analysis of the movement of high school students from São Paulo who, between November and December 2015, occupied 219 state schools. The national scope research has sought to understand the political and formative practices of students in the occupations of their schools and the influences of participation in this movement in their political, educational, and personal trajectories.

The objective of this article is to analyze factors that can explain the emergence of the student movement in São Paulo in 2015 and that led to its wide dissemination in space, time, and in the type of public institution: (i) in space, not just because it spread throughout the state, but also for inspiring similar movements, with state guidelines, in Goiás, Mato Grosso, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, and Ceará, and even a similar movement in Paraguay; (ii) in time, as it was repeated in São Paulo in April and May 2016, and also caused the second wave of occupations, which began in October 2016 in Paraná; (iii) in the type of public institution, as it inspires the occupation of administrative buildings (such as Teaching Directorates and the Paula Sousa Center in São Paulo), other educational institutions (such as federal technical institutes and public universities) and cultural institutions (such as Culture Factories, in São Paulo) and political (such as the Legislative Assembly of São Paulo [ALESP]). This objective will be pursued through the bibliographic review of articles, dissertations, and theses that dealt with the occupations of São Paulo and, mainly, the analysis of interviews carried out within the scope of the national research, with ten young people who, in 2015, occupied schools in the municipalities of Diadema, São Paulo, and Sorocaba.

⁴ Survey results and sources are available on the website <https://www.unifal-mg.edu.br/ocupacoessecundaristas/>

After this introduction, the article is structured as follows: presentation of the people interviewed; analysis of the political and educational context of the movement based on the concepts of contestation repertoire, protest cycle, and *citizenism*; analysis of the performance of organizations and subjects supporting the movement; analysis of the experiences, expectations, and demands of adolescents who disseminated the school occupation tactic in 2015; finally, considerations that seek to summarize the main results of the article.

Young *secundas*: an approach

As stated earlier, in this article, based on the experiences of 10 young *secundas*⁵ from the cities of Diadema, São Paulo, and Sorocaba, we intend to understand the causes and motivations of the high school student movement against the “Reorganization” in 2015. The interviews had a semi-structured character, using a script developed by the national research team, composed of questions that deal with school trajectory, political formation, participation in the occupation, and post-occupation. The invitations were made from academic and political contacts of the team members and messages via the occupations’ pages on social networks. Between 1 and 2 hours, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed and analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative analysis software. The first five interviews were carried out in person, in 2019 and early 2020, before the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in Brazil. The other five were done remotely, in 2020, using Google Meet or WhatsApp. The *secundas* chose their pseudonyms, i.e., proper names are not used, according to the project approved by the University’s Ethics Committee. Chart 1 summarizes some of these people’s attributes. These interviews contributed to meeting the São Paulo secondary school movement of 2015 due to the depth of the reports and the profusion of qualitative data about the experience of occupying, without intending to represent statistically the set of subjects that occupied the schools in São Paulo in 2015.

⁵ Abbreviation for “secondary students,” a native term used in the movement.

Chart 1

Secundas from São Paulo schools occupied in 2015 who granted interviews in 2019 and 2020

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Declared data (referring to the time of the interview)</i>	<i>Occupied school</i>	<i>Role in the occupation</i>
Mel	Female, 21 years old, black, does not know her sexual orientation. Family Income (RF) of 1 Minimum Wage (SM)	Peripheral school in Sorocaba	Militant of the Popular Youth Uprising (LPJ). Reference.
Ariel	Female, 20 years old, Caucasian, bisexual. 2 SM RF.	Idem	Independent. She approached the informal reference nucleus.
Augusto	Male, 20 years old, Caucasian, homosexual. 2 SM RF	Idem	Militant of student organizations and the Union of Socialist Youth (UJS). Reference.
Doug	Male, 20 years old, black, bisexual. 1 SM RF	Central school in Diadema	Independent. Reference.
Máximo	Non-binary gender, 20 years old, indigenous race, homo-affectionate. 2 SM RF	Idem	Independent. He worked mainly on the Food Committee.
Su	Female, 21 years old, Caucasian, heterosexual. 3 SM RF	Idem	Independent. She worked mainly on the Communications committee.
Esperança	Female, 22 years old, Caucasian, heterosexual. 8 SM RF	Central school in the capital	Independent. She worked mainly on the Communications committee.
Ruth	Female, 20 years old, black, with no defined sexual orientation. 5 SM RF	Idem	Independent. She worked mainly on the Food Committee.
Miranda	Male, 21 years old, black, heterosexual. 4 SM RF	Idem	Activist of The Badly Educated. Reference.
Berta	Female, 21 years old, Caucasian, heterosexual. 9 SM RF	Idem	GAS activist (Secondary Autonomous Group). She was a scholarship student at an elite private school.

Source: Survey “Ocupações secundaristas no Brasil em 2015 e 2016,” 2020.

It is also worth noting that we sought to ensure that the interviews represented heterogeneous experiences of participation in the movement. Thus, we had four *secundas* from the capital of São Paulo, three from a municipality belonging to the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (Diadema), and three from a municipality in the countryside (Sorocaba). While the school represented by the capital is located in a middle-class neighborhood (and with relative prestige), the school in Diadema has less prestige, although located in the center. Finally, the school in

Sorocaba is located in a peripheral neighborhood. Six interviewees were women and four men, representing the trend of the more significant presence of women in occupations, according to the consulted bibliography. Six *secundas* were independent when they occupied their schools. Four belonged to some organizations, such as activists of autonomist collectives (Miranda and Berta) or activists of partisan youth (Mel and Augusto). Therefore, we sought to interview people who participated intensely in the occupation, 4 of them as a “reference” (a kind of informally recognized leadership, in the case of Mel, Augusto, Doug, and Miranda), six as part of different committees that took care of the occupied school. The ages described in Chart 1 refer to the time of the interview (in 2019 and 2020), not to the time of the occupation (2015) – i.e., they were young people aged between 20 and 21 years old talking about their experience in a protest when they were high school teenagers.

Protest cycle and contestation repertoires

The first line of investigation, which seeks to understand the emergence and spread of the high school movement in São Paulo, analyzes the national and state contexts, especially in its educational and political aspects. It also seeks to analyze this movement’s relationship with the global protest cycle of the 2010s, the movement of squares. Therefore, it seems relevant to dialogue with the theory of political processes (TPP), especially with contestation repertoire and protest cycle concepts.

The *notion of repertoire* has been the most relevant category in Charles Tilly’s growing influence in Brazil (Tilly, 2012). According to Alonso (2012, p. 21), from a structuralist definition of repertoire, Tilly starts to consider an interactionist approach, which “[...] privileges people’s experience in conflicting interactions and the use and interpretation of scripts in performances”.

The word repertoire identifies a limited set of routines learned, shared, and acted upon through a relatively deliberate choice process. Repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape due to political propaganda; they emerge from the fight. [...] (Tilly *apud* Alonso, 2012, p. 26).

Sidney Tarrow developed the *notion of the protest cycle* from Tilly. It refers

[...] to a phase of intensification of conflicts and confrontation in the social system, which includes a rapid diffusion of collective action from the most mobilized to the least mobilized sectors, an accelerated pace of innovation in the forms of confrontation, new or renewed frameworks for action collective, a combination of organized and unorganized participation and sequences of intensified interaction between dissidents and authorities (Bringel, 2012, p. 48).

Thus, we will discuss the repertoires of contestation triggered, recreated, or developed throughout the most recent global protest cycle, which Paolo Gerbaudo (2017) has called the movement of squares, started with the Arab Spring in 2011, having crossed our country with the Journeys of June 2013. We will verify whether the 2015 and 2016 movements of student occupations are part of this cycle and, if so, how they are inserted and employ the repertoires used in this cycle.

The tactics of occupation

However, it must be recognized that the tactic of school occupations is long-standing, itself heir to factory occupations, as part of general strikes and student strikes (Grosso, 2006). School occupations were essential in the student movements of 1968, not only in the most famous European universities, especially in France, but also among high school students in all parts of the world, including Brazil and the Fernão Dias State High School itself (Carneiro, 2017) – that would once again be so important in the 2015 movement. This tactic would be recreated at the beginning of the 21st century by Chilean students, in 2006 (in high schools), and in 2011 (in schools and universities) (Ruiz, 2017), soon adopted even by autonomist students and dissidents from official student bodies in the occupations of the dean's office of public universities in Brazil in 2007 and 2008 (Bringel, 2009).

In this recreation, however, the occupation tactic would be related to the anti-globalization movement's repertoires from the turn of the 20th to the 21st century – largely autonomist or neo-anarchist – and another global protest cycle. From the 2010s, this cycle was marked by the occupation of public spaces – notably, the squares, as in Egypt, Spain, the United

States, and Turkey, and the taking over of major avenues in the capital of São Paulo in 2013 (Gerbaudo, 2017). Unlike what happened in 1968, but also different from what happened in the anti-globalization movement, occupations, since the Chilean “Penguins” movement of 2006, are not a secondary element that subsidizes tactics seen as central to collective action, primarily acts, protests, and strikes. They become the central tactic, the environment – be it the square, the school, or the university – that welcomes the mass of protesters and the main activities of the movement. However, they also serve as a basis for organizing other protest tactics, such as marches, blockades of avenues, and occupations of other public institutions.

Understanding the repertoires of contestation present in the 2015 occupations demands retaking analyses of *June 2013*. According to Alonso and Mische (2017), *three repertoires of contestation* were used and recreated in the 2013 protests in Brazil: *autonomist, socialist, and patriot*. “Here is the summary for 2013: three groups divided into two opposing camps. In the autonomist and socialist trenches, the demand for expansion and improvement of social policies, transport, health, education. On the patriotic front, criticisms of the hypertrophy and inefficiency of the state, of politicians and the resumption of Get out Collor motto: ‘ethics in politics’” (Alonso, 2016).

The *patriotic repertoire* is essential not only to explain the highly regressive developments in recent Brazilian history but also to understand the change in public opinion and the mood of civil society between the first wave of occupations (end of 2015 and the first half of 2016) and the second (second semester of 2016), i.e., from the position of a majority in favor of student protest to the opposite position. It also explains the formation of shock troops, auxiliaries of police repression, who even brought together a part of the school and the local community in attempts to invade the occupied schools, only sketched in 2015, but very present in 2016, in particular, the “Desocupa Paraná” project.

The *autonomist and socialist repertoires*, on the other hand, helped to found the student movement, especially the autonomist one, whose neo-anarchist form of organization tended to be adopted not only in occupations guided by autonomist collectives but also adapted by (minority) occupations under control from student organizations and partisan youth and, mainly, by independent students. Independent, even though through contact with the autonomous collective The Badly Educated, they started their first occupation in a high school in Diadema on November 9, 2015. Independents, whom Ortellado calls “autonomous students”

(Fachin, 2016), formed the vast majority of students who occupied their schools – alongside autonomist activists in the first occupations in the capital that followed that of Diadema, later, throughout the state, with or without the support of collectives, student organizations, parties and unions. The predominance of independent students will be repeated as a trend in occupations in 2016 across the country.

The massive and decisive presence of independent students, who tended not only to carry out tasks in the commissions in the occupied schools but to participate actively in the deliberative assemblies and to become “references,” highlights the importance of autonomist and neo anarchist practices in the student protests of 2015 and 2016. However, they indicate the presence of another repertoire of contestation, which, alongside anarchism itself, had played a secondary role among progressive ideologies in the 20th century, gaining strength again at the turn of the 21st century: radical democratic populism, heir of French Jacobinism, English Chartism, Russian populism, and even recent experiences of populist socialism in Latin America. Gerbaudo (2017) is the one who builds the thesis that the square movement, between 2011 and 2016, combined neo anarchist tactics recreated by the anti-globalization movement with the guidelines of radical democratic populism. It reappears in the 21st century less around personalist leaderships and more around the call to action of “ordinary” people, thus conforming to “citizenism,” alongside expectations of democratic deepening through personal and direct participation in the protests, denunciations against the excesses of economic and political elites, and aspirations for a democratic recreation of the national state.

In Pablo Ortellado’s (2017) reading of “citizenism” in the *2013 Journeys*, there was, at first, a confluence between activists/militants – both autonomists and socialists, especially the left dissatisfied with the Workers’ Party (PT) governments – and “ordinary” citizens who take the lead in actions, in increasingly massive acts. According to him, the 2013 Journeys were, at first, autonomist, but, given the tremendous people influx, which would have made them, before, radical populists, the autonomist left itself seems to have been scared and even despised the crowd that started to take part in their acts. It would have generated an “orphan dissatisfaction” that “end up being exploited later by right-wing leaders.” Even so, “marginal currents” tried to keep Brazilian “citizenism” alive, seeking to combine populism and horizontality, such as the Horizontal Popular Assembly of Belo Horizonte, the protests against the World Cup in 2014, and, finally, the student occupations in 2015 and 2016,

There is, however, another relevant element to consider, brought by Rosana Pinheiro-Machado (2019), who characterizes the massive phase of the June 2013 Journeys as “ambiguous revolts,” “*rolezinhos*” of young people from the periphery at the turn of 2013 to 2014, and the “truck drivers’ strike” (national stoppage of truck drivers in 2018). They internally present the desire of ordinary people to rebel against the perverse effects of neoliberal policies and the economic crisis and deep dissatisfaction with the political class, expressing themselves with ambiguous agendas and demands from the point of view of the classification “left” *versus* “right.” Considering that the majority of student occupations in 2015 and 2016 were in public schools outside central and middle-class neighborhoods, despite being obscured by occupations in more central schools if we look for the reports of independent *secundas* in the periphery, we find several elements of these ambiguous revolts, like two *secundas* in Diadema who identified themselves, without much clarity, as from the “right” and who saw in the protest the defense of their “right to education” (Su, Diadema).

The occupations also flirted with standard practices in school life, such as bantering – a mix of sociability, leisure, and irreverence that characterizes different behaviors of high school students – that marked the practice of *rolezinhos* (Pereira, 2016). There is an effort by *secundas* who were references that the occupations did not present, at least to the external public, traces of bantering, to guarantee an air of seriousness to the movement, as reported by the interviews of Mel, Ariel, Máximo, and Berta. Also, thanks to these efforts, unlike the previous cases cited by Pinheiro-Machado (2019), in the case of the occupation movement, the tactical approximation between autonomism and independent students was successful, giving a markedly progressive content to the collective action, reviving the “citizenism” outlined in the 2013 Journeys.

Conjuncture and structure

It is essential to highlight the main *conjunctural and structural* elements that, according to the bibliography on São Paulo occupations and the interviews, shape the context where these repertoires of contestation – especially autonomism and “citizenism” – are mobilized by the student movement. Among the conjunctural elements, in addition to the cycle mentioned above of protests in the 2010s, the following stand out:

- Expansion of secondary education, considerably increasing the presence of adolescents from the lower classes at this level of education;
- The growing economic crisis in the country since the first government of Dilma Rousseff (2011-2014), as a result of the relatively late arrival in Brazil of the main adverse effects of the global financial crisis that started in 2008;
- Sociopolitical instability in the country since the 2013 Journeys, undermining the broad but fragile and contradictory political and social coalition patched up in Lula's governments (2003-2010);
- Continuous investment of private interests in Brazilian education systems, which will acquire a frankly managerial and privatizing character since new "reforms" implemented by state governments – announcing the directions of national education policies after the institutional coup of 2016 (Barros, 2017; Catini & Mello, 2016; Fulfaro, 2020; Piolli et al., 2016; Corti, Corrochano & Silva, 2016).

Among the conjunctural elements in 2015, the following stand out, each responding to a structural element:

- The permanence of the precarious living conditions of the working classes, alongside the threat of even more precariousness, affecting especially younger people, which is evidenced by data on impoverishment, unemployment, discouragement, and informal work of this age group (Barros, 2017);
- Dilma Rousseff's difficulties, at the beginning of her second term, to effectively govern, while a political, social, and media front is formed, supported by protests informed by the patriotic repertoire, preparing what would be the institutional coup of 2016;
- Specifically in the State of São Paulo, continuing the process of adopting neoliberal policies in primary education, initiated by the São Paulo government at least since the first "Reorganization" in 1995, Governor Geraldo Alckmin, of the PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party), launches a new "Reorganization" on September 23, 2015. It provided for the closing of dozens or hundreds of schools, the transfer of hundreds of thousands of students with the adoption of single-cycle schools, the dismissal of tens of thousands of teachers under temporary contracts, and the reduction of night secondary education and Youth and Adult Education (EJA), among others (Goulart et al., 2017).

The “Reorganization,” guided by business foundations, sought to justify itself with the argument that the separation of schools by cycles would increase the quality of education, based on a much-contested study carried out by the Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo (Piolli et al., 2016). However, its actual objectives were: cutting costs; opening the way for more full-time schools, “a modality that allows the participation of private companies in school management” (Campos, 2019, p. 79); the continuity of the municipalization of Elementary Education; and the revaluation of urban spaces that were of interest to the real estate market and extensive mobility infrastructure works (Giroto et al. 2017).

It is precisely this last element, the announcement of the “Reorganization,” which gives rise to the student movement, first, in the form of acts and demonstrations in municipalities in the countryside with the encouragement of the Union of Teachers of the Official Teaching of the State of São Paulo (Apeoesp). In a way, the movement continued, after a brief hiatus, the longest-running strike by teachers in the state public network of São Paulo, which began in March 2015. This strike, which opposed the closing of thousands of classrooms and the dismissal of professors on a temporary contract, in addition to salary issues and structural demands, received relevant support from students but ended up failing, after three months, without any dialogue opening by the government (Fulfaro, 2020).

The teachers’ strike lasted a long time. Whenever the teachers went on strike, the students were very against it because of the replacement. But in this case, the students were very much in favor. At a demonstration [during the strike], I met other students who were or were not from the guild, and we decided to found the Sorocabana Union of Secondary Students (USES) (Augusto, Sorocaba).

Here we have a first element of what we can call *latency* (Melucci, 1989) of the 2015 high school movement, precisely, the participation of a relative contingent of students in the teacher strike movement. This student participation, rare in so many Basic Education teachers’ strike movements⁶, also indicates other essential elements of this latency, such as the relationship with the school and expectations regarding teaching, even more strained in the face of one of the

⁶ What in 2015 was a relative novelty would become a focal point in the occupations in 2016, that is, the collective action of secondary students in concomitance or support of the teacher strike, as in Rio de Janeiro, Ceará, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná.

conjunctural elements mentioned above, i.e., the precariousness of the living and working conditions of popular youth.

Experiences and motivations

The interviews enabled us to apprehend educational, political, social, cultural, and religious experiences prior to the movement. The school trajectories and political formation of the *secundas* we interviewed bring up relevant aspects that are sometimes not visible in the analyses.

The school and the protest

Regarding school experiences, the three schools to which the people interviewed belonged seem to conform to an *authoritarian, “banking,” and depoliticizing school culture*, especially in São Paulo and Sorocaba. The authoritarian posture of the three directorates stands out, especially at the school in the capital, which Esperança and Miranda severely criticized. At the same time, the post-occupation persecution marks the performance of the direction of Sorocaba, according to Augusto and Mel. Augusto says that, given the persecution and threats from the direction throughout 2016, he transferred to a school in Espírito Santo, where he completed his high school degree. On the other hand, Ariel was constrained by the management to denounce other people leading the occupation under the threat of her bisexuality being revealed to her family. According to Miranda, regarding the capital’s school, which, despite being in the central region, mainly received students from the periphery, the management

[...] treated students as a potential risk to society. The school was there to train them, in the sense that there was a series of prescriptions that were to place the student inside the school space. [...]. There was no other way to deal with the student other than through bureaucracy because there was the rule, the rule mandated. [...] It was that FEBEM management⁷, after all (Miranda, São Paulo).

⁷ It refers to the State Foundation for the Welfare of Minors, the former name of the Foundation Center for Socio-Educational Assistance to Adolescents (Fundação CASA/SP).

The reports about the relationship between teaching and school life are more positive at the school in Diadema. Part of the teaching staff had been involved in the 2015 strike. They supported the first acts against the “Reorganization,” despite some hopelessness after the frustrated strike, according to Doug⁸. However, in the other two schools, we also find reports about some teachers’ importance, especially in subjects such as Sociology, History, and Geography, both in the school trajectory and in the political formation of students.

Three people interviewed reported being bullied, mainly due to *homophobia and fatphobia* (Ariel, Doug, and Máximo). However, most of the reports, including these three people, highlight the importance of friendships, especially with students and teachers in some cases, leading to an affective bond with the school itself.

Thus, if it is not incorrect to say that the occupation movement builds, as a prefigurative action, an “other school” with its political and formative activities, as so many works have shown, it seems rushed to say that it was a collective action against the school. It is a movement that does recognize the limits and precariousness of public schools and criticizes the hegemonic school culture. However, it is constituted, in principle, by defending the school space – against its closure or students’ mass transfer – and the right to education. Indeed, it evolves towards defending students and teachers being heard since they had not been consulted on the “Reorganization.” It also leads to recognizing the *secunda* as a political subject while adding to the original agenda, structural, management, and teaching-learning problems, both general for the network and specific to each school (Barros, 2017; Januário et al., 2016; Soares, 2019).

Training and political mobilization

The reports on previous political experiences show a tendency: the *secundas* who had positions of reference and/or were involved in the movement since its organization had some *previous political training*, arising from family influence or participation in some organization or political action. However, the case of Ariel explains the importance of the contagion effect not

⁸ After the failure of the long teacher strike, the dismay of state teachers was added to the growing precariousness of work, low wages, and a feeling of abandonment, which explains why 11% of the state teaching workforce dropped out in 2015 – more than 26 thousand people, between permanent and temporary (Corti, Corrochano & Silva, 2016). In the interviews, the theme of many teacher absences was recurrent.

only for the large number of schools occupied but for students with no previous political interest to get involved with the action: “My experience was the occupation, I parachuted there” (Ariel, Sorocaba).

The families of the two students with the highest economic income, Ruth and Berta, also had greater previous involvement with party politics and progressive social movements in São Paulo. Mel says that her mother had been affiliated with the PT, and Esperança narrates that her mother, when she was young, had had some involvement with the feminist movement. However, in other cases, the involvement of the *secundas* with politics took place in the absence of their families, whose ethical-political tendencies were more conservative, in some cases under the influence of the evangelical religion (Doug and Ariel), of their father’s military background (again, Doug) or the father’s profession (military police, Su’s case). Part of the *secundas* was Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transvestites, Transsexuals, and Intersexuals (LGBTI+), which aggravated these family conflicts, as in the case of Augusto, who was expelled twice from his parents’ house, first, when he assumed his sexual orientation, and second, by involvement in occupations.

Augusto and Mel participated in political organizations belonging to the popular field: Augusto, after becoming involved in his school’s guild and helping to found USES in 2015, joined the UJS and Brazilian Union of Secondary Students (UBES). Her teacher introduces Mel to the LPJ. Miranda and Berta belonged to autonomous collectives: Miranda, who had met The Badly Educated in the first acts against the “Reorganization,” also reports the approach of members of the GAS - in general, scholarship students from private schools – with students from their school, who organized the second occupation in the state. Ruth was from the GAS, which she had met at an event promoted by the collective at the elite private school where she was a fellow. As for Máximo, he collaborated with the activities of an anarcho-punk group. However, like Ruth, his experiences with the arts are more central to his trajectory – Ruth was also a student of a technical theater course at the State Technical School (ETEC) of the Arts, Máximo was dedicated to dance.

According to Januário et al. (2016, p. 23), in 2013, there was the “emergence of a kind of broad willingness to fight among a generation of public school students, which precedes June 2013 and goes beyond the school liberation in December 2015”. Barros (2017) will find this arrangement in the outskirts of the capital of São Paulo, primarily through the combination of

secondary school teenagers from the popular classes and autonomist collectives, social movements, and socialist organizations outside the popular camp – which, in general, were composed of people from the middle social classes. Barros (2017) describes that the Malambe collective and its funded popular pre-college course, arising from its spin-off from Union of Popular Education Centers for Blacks, and Working-Class (Uneafro) in the East Zone of São Paulo, were fundamental to the process of training and political engagement of the adolescents. They carried out the occupation he researched, one of the first to occur, coordinating with the autonomist “Front.”

Campos (2019) states that, for some years now, in the outskirts of São Paulo, a *network of activism*s with little structure, of left-wing opposition to PT, had been composed. This network carried out grassroots work and protests, involving popular courses, cultural movements, trade union groups critical of the union complex loyal to the PT, partisan youth to the Socialism and Freedom Party (Pso), and Unified Socialist Workers’ Party (PSTU), and autonomous struggle collectives for transport and education. The proposition of school occupations was another initiative of this network, the most successful so that such occupations can be considered as they “were the result of the meeting of a willingness to fight that students already carried [...] militancy built up over the years, which knew how to dialogue with that disposition” (Campos, 2019, p. 84), which had The Badly Educated as its leading articulator and informal leadership, “catalyst of the tactical turn” of the movement against the “Reorganization.” (Campos et al., 2016, p. 60).

As of October 9, 2015, the first week of occupations, nine schools were occupied, almost every one coordinated by the Autonomist Front. However, in the second week, when the collective action became viral, it took place outside the control of the Front (Campos et al., 2016).

Half of the ten people we interviewed were already participating in the acts before the occupations against the “Reorganization.” The reports recognize the need for a “*tactical turn*,” given the little repercussion of the acts and the growing police repression:

We didn't start directly with the occupations. We first spoke to some teachers when we received the news on the school's "Reorganization." We tried to check what they could do, but they were utterly hopeless [...]. We went to the Regional Board of Education; we went to the City Council, we made a petition with more than 13 thousand signatures. [...]. And we saw that even though we were trying to use all these instruments, which were already kind of standard political instruments, which were already the basics that we should do when we saw that it wasn't working, that's when we decided to go radical (Doug, Diadema).

These previous political experiences will contribute to a robust process of creating political subjects during the protest.

Political subjects

Practically all the people interviewed were very clear about the movement's main agenda, i.e., to stop the "Reorganization," although not all of them, when they decided to participate in the occupation of their school, like Mel and Ariel. Mel, who had just joined the LPJ, decided to support the movement without knowing much of its reason: "When they talked about the occupation of schools, at first I didn't understand. I joined much because... You know? Everyone goes, and then I went." As for Ariel, this is what she says:

The teacher let anyone who wanted to leave the class. She left, and I called other students in the other rooms, punching the rooms and saying that the occupation was happening. I brought about 100 students behind me, I came ahead, victorious. But I didn't really know what was happening or the movement's reasons. I wasn't much into newspapers. They explained what was happening, the School Reform, which was a political act. Anyone who wanted to could leave, but I stayed (Ariel, Sorocaba).

The occupation of the first school, in Diadema, is marked by its independent character, despite adapting the booklet of *The Badly Educated* and vehemently rejecting the intrusion of student bodies and parties, like occupations organized by autonomists. In their reports, the students of Diadema quickly move from their school's self-defense and the desire to remain there, which would have its night shift closed, to the defense that students who were finishing elementary school could remain in this school: "We got what she wanted, which was to be able to stay well in school for one more year, some more time. Not just for us. Initially, it was a bit selfish, but we managed to do it for other students from other years" (Su, Diadema). In turn,

Doug explains the conjunction between personal and collective motivations for collective action, in addition to the desire to prove the political capacity of such subjects:

I don't know why anyone doesn't fight the closure of 94 schools. To me, this was inconceivable. [...]. This is wrong; there's no way we can just accept it. There are more than 300,000 students who will be relocated against their will, apart from teachers and employees who will be fired. So, it was a collective revolt; we saw that it was wrong and said: "We need to do something!" (Doug, Diadema).

There is another even more general element in the reports, also very present in the bibliography: *secundas* mixed the desire to be heard with the indignation of being disregarded as political subjects, underestimated because they were teenagers and high school students. There is also the public space's expansion – of issues that can be debated and the people themselves who have the right to debate them.

Seeing secondary school mobilization as everyone's struggle, including those not directly related to educational issues, implied questioning at least two aspects: first, the statute of the object in dispute; secondly, the status of the speeches of the agents involved in the debate on the measure. Making the reorganization a subject open to anyone's discussion meant seeing it as something within the public domain, which clashed with the specialist field the project had been relegated to (Soares, 2019, p. 80).

The reports, as said, highlight the authoritarian and arrogant attitude of the government, considering the people most affected by the "Reorganization" as incapable of participating in the formulation of educational policies.

The school "Reorganization" would even affect me; I would have to change schools. For many people, nearby schools would be closed; there would be overcrowding and relocation without asking anyone anything. Are we dolls? Don't they ask anyone? You're talking about public discussion! Then they decide to overcrowd even more. We already had overcrowded rooms. [...]. Nobody put faith that we would make it, that we wouldn't mess up, break things. Where this happened was because there was an invasion of the school. [...]. Seeing a crowd that understood how to be political, wanting to learn, listen, do, was very interesting. [...] We have to understand that it wasn't perfect, but that it was something, that it was a scream, that they came with a slap, and we didn't keep quiet (Ruth, São Paulo).

We had this main agenda, which was to end Alckmin's restructuring, but I think there was a much bigger agenda, which was precisely this thing about politicizing young people, creating a political movement, showing that we could, yes, do things, be protagonists of our education, review a teaching model, review this teaching system (Berta, São Paulo).

The first objective, of course, was to stop the "Reorganization." But, beyond that, I think it was to show that public school students are there, they exist, they know about the problems and that they want improvement, so to show: "I am here and you are not going to do what you want with us." (Esperança, São Paulo).

Note that the three previous reports belong to female *secundas*. According to the analysis of the interviews, we can say that the process of *political subjectivation* provided by the occupations was even more powerful. As Pacheco (2018) states about the 2016 occupations in Paraná, student occupations took the identities kept in the shadows or excluded in the school space, so often bullied, as we saw previously, and placed them at the center, in a leading role, through collective action.

Everyone was horizontal, but the girls ended up being more active there. From what I've read and studied, this isn't just something there in Diadema, but in all occupations. Not just girls, but gays too. Girls too, and LGBTI+ boys were generally ahead; they are more active. I don't know why, I still don't know, but we really took charge of things and were already organizing, and that's what happened (Su, Diadema).

In this sense, identities are displaced from the margin to the center. But that builds a place and a process striving for equality, all people's right to act and manifest. Not just women, but reportedly also LGBTI+ people and people of color. The common cause, a general agenda for the defense of the right to education, brought together people from different ideological positions and identities, including those who brought homophobic, sexist, and racist prejudices, alongside feminist, LGBTI+ and black protagonists – leading to the construction of unity or collectivity, in which training practices to combat prejudice and discrimination were fundamental (Campos et al., 2016).

Contagion effect

There is a powerful *contagion effect from the occupation movement*. First, by the relatively planned action of autonomous collectives alongside independent students, followed by a particular effort by student organizations and partisan youth (thriving in a few municipalities, such as Sorocaba). Second, irresistible dissemination by independent students, predominantly autonomous concerning entities, parties, and unions – albeit, in many cases, with their material and political support.

In fact, the first school occupied in Diadema was a largely independent occupation, surprising even the autonomist collectives that articulated the action with greater emphasis on other schools.

In Diadema, they were self-employed high school students, so I think a lot of this inexperience in the political process was the difficulty, but it was also an asset because as we had no idea what the rules of the game were, we did what we understood, which was the right thing to do. So, we didn't get too caught up with legislation, with legal impediments [...]. We weren't all that careful, all these details that many of these pro-government organizations have all the time (Doug, Diadema).

Educational production tends to follow journalistic coverage and the attention of party and union organizations: if, in general, in a brief preamble, they recognize that the occupation at the Fernão Dias school was not the first, then the narrative tends to focus in this central school in São Paulo. The attention is not entirely unfair, as Fernão Dias became the epicenter of the initial phase of occupations, repression, and judicialization. Hundreds of police officers surrounded the school in the first days of the action. In contrast, hundreds of supporters first held a vigil in the streets in front, then fed the occupation of numerous and creative formative and cultural practices.

However, the mobilization began and, after a particular timepoint, spread to independent students, generally in forgotten places, such as schools in peripheral neighborhoods and small and medium-sized towns in the countryside.⁹ However, it should not be forgotten that the student body of the second occupation came, for the most part, from the

⁹ According to Romancini e Castilho (2017, p. 100), in São Paulo in 2015, 87 schools were occupied in the capital (39.5% of the total number of occupied schools), 48 (22%) in the Metropolitan Region and 84 (38.5%) in the countryside and coast.

periphery to the center to study. One account indicates how much independent students, closer to “citizenism” than to autonomist and socialist agendas, would have reduced the ideological ambiguity of their revolt and prevented the occupations from being another ambiguous revolt thanks to the approximation with the autonomist repertoire:

I think that much autonomism, of not fully believing in institutions or any party, even if it is on the left, brought a massive political gain to the people, at least from my school, who participated in the occupations. Because it was a very different view from what I had seen before, I didn’t know that this left existed, so I think that was the biggest political gain (Esperança, São Paulo).

Independent students start to use another practice of autonomists and student entities: the *solidarity exchange among the occupied schools*: “[...] to unite and strengthen the movement, small groups of students from different schools started to visit other schools, to share the experiences they had before and after the uprising for those who had not participated in the occupations and street protests.” (Sordi & Moraes, 2016, p. 4). In this exchange, for example, Su and Máximo discovered that schools even more peripheral than theirs suffered not only more daily precariousness and little support during the occupation. However, they were repressed more severely by the police:

Interviewer: *Did the police raid the school?*

Máximo: *Not our school; the police raided and took pictures in the others in Diadema.*

E.: *Why do you think they went there and not to yours?*

M: *Because we are central [...]. As there was more middle class, you would mess with those who don’t want to mess with.*

E.: *Were the schools on the outskirts organized like yours?*

M: *They were well organized, but I think we had more people to help; I think that made a difference.*

These and other political practices, such as exchanges, which have also become self-training practices, so often conducted independently by high school students, created and renewed the willingness to engage and fight among adolescents and young people, as seen by Januário et al. (2016), not only in São Paulo but throughout the country, as would be seen throughout 2016.

Final considerations

Structural and conjunctural elements, both worldwide and nationally, were fundamental to contextualize the origin of the student occupation movement in Brazil, more specifically in São Paulo at the end of 2015. We find in the global scenario a financial and economic crisis that has dragged on since 2008, whose social and economic effects, along with a growing distrust with the limitations of liberal representative democracy and authoritarian governments, motivated a protest cycle that began with the Arab Spring in 2011. On the national scene, despite some delay in the arrival of the effects of the financial crisis, its effects disrupt the ways of survival of the popular classes and destabilize the political system, something untimely revealed by the 2013 Journeys. At the same time, previous years had seen a significant expansion of secondary education, with the increased expressive number of young people from lower classes at this level of education. Locally, the state government of São Paulo begins a new cycle of neoliberal and managerial policies in primary education after ignoring one of the longest-running teacher strikes, even disregarding that there was at least one new element: the support of a relevant number of students to the strike.

The student movement did not immediately start with the *tactic of occupations*, adopted only when the more traditional tactic of public acts was considered insufficient. For the beginning of these acts, in the countryside, since a small municipality, the teaching union sub-headquarters' performance was important, recreating the alliance between teachers and students rehearsed in the strike. As for adopting the tactics of occupations and blocking roads, the catalyzing effect of collectives and autonomous students was fundamental. Especially the "Front" put together by The Badly Educated in the capital – in which Miranda and Berta participated. Student organizations and partisan youth from the popular camp played an auxiliary or complementary role in several cases, reinforcing the central meaning of the

movement to stop the “Reorganization,” as evidenced by the reports of Augusto and Mel (Sorocaba). However, subjects from the popular field had numerous disagreements with autonomists and independent students, sometimes trying to endow the protest with meanings below or beyond its main motto.

However, the fundamental subjects of the protest were *independent students*: in the first occupations, with the encouragement or organizational support of networks of autonomist and socialist collectives. We saw the organizational support for independents in São Paulo, in the accounts of Esperança and Ruth, and the encouragement at the school of Doug, Máximo, and Su, in Diadema. In a second timepoint, independent *secundas* started to act with total autonomy concerning the organizations and subjects that, initially, mobilized collective action, as attested by the example of Ariel in Sorocaba. Independents were mainly responsible for the rapid and widespread dissemination of the school occupation tactic.

Despite the spotlight on central schools, both in São Paulo and in large cities in the countryside, the importance of schools and subjects that tend to be even more eclipsed than teenagers and high school students from those central schools was enormous. In addition to teenagers and high school students, independents tend to be daughters and sons of working classes, peripheral schools, or small and medium-sized municipalities in the São Paulo Metropolitan Region, countryside, and coast. They are not subjects who just swell or follow protests that others catalyze: in fact, the first action against the “Reorganization” was in the small Rancharia, on 28/Sep, just as the first school occupation was in Diadema, on 09/Nov. This massive adhesion of independent students to the protest – even if it was not the majority of the student body of their schools, but enough to keep the school busy at least for a few days – indicates how much the movement has gained its main contours from a wide range of school, social, cultural, and even political experiences of these high school adolescents.

The 219 occupied schools tell the start of a *cycle of student occupations* throughout Brazil. However, they also tell unique stories, differentiated according to the type of school (prestigious, central, or peripheral), according to the relationship with the school community and the local community (from support to the opposition, through indifference and culminating in the invasion) and the repressive tactics used by the government and police, building, in short, specific guidelines (denouncing improprieties in management, precariousness in the school, or

demanding the guarantee that there will be no persecution at the end of the movement) (Campos et al., 2016).

The reports on *school experiences and the political formation* of the people we interviewed bring several experiences that illuminated the latency timepoint of the 2015 movements. Scripts were formed that explained, even amid heterogeneous and contradictory elements, the reasons for joining the protest and, more than adherence, the leading role of independents in the mobilization of most schools, despite those who were relegated to the position of supporters, such as student organizations, the teaching union, partisan youth, and even autonomist collectives – despite the autonomist inspiration of independent occupations. Among the elements: love for school – an essential part of personal trajectory and friendships – alongside criticism of teaching, management, and the precariousness of the school space; the defense of their school, which expands as the defense of the right to education as an individual and collective achievement; the trajectory through adolescence and through school between the suffering of bullying and opportunities to build one's identity; diverse cultural and political experiences, in the city or in the school itself; support and examples from the family, and the movement of partial or total rupture with the ethical-political heritage of the family group of origin, among others.

Despite the demobilization, the regression of opportunities for activist or militant engagement, the distressing memories of repression in the occupation, and the post-occupation persecution – which led to a report of depression among the people interviewed (Mel) –, the conflicts with family and despite so many other economic and educational difficulties, the people we interviewed never denied full participation in the squatter movement, despite Ruth's disillusioned tone. They carry the *experience as a fundamental, perhaps decisive, ethical-political learning experience* for their lives. They use this learning in their personal lives, educational trajectories, and intermittent political actions. These experiences and these subjects – we hope at least – seem to form part of the latency of future progressive movements.

The interpretation of the latency of a secondary student movement, such as the one from São Paulo in 2015, helps understand the possibilities and difficulties of political action of adolescents from lower classes, students of public high schools. We envision subjects capable of making decisions, with excellent knowledge about the protest agenda and the ability to sew a support network and disseminate the occupations' tactics. We find, far from a merely reactive

collective action, “spontaneous” or directed by adults, a movement led by high school students and capable of expressing the demands, anxieties, and anguishes of the adolescent and student condition. Hence, this movement’s strength and its ability to shape a form of collective youth action adopted across the country in 2016.

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