

## **Global Perspectives on Youth and Intergenerational Relations in the 21st Century**

Cécile Van de Velde, University of Montreal

Email: cecile.vandavelde@umontreal.ca

ORCID: 0000-0002-2979-2940

**Référence** : Van de Velde, C. (2024). Global perspectives on youth and intergenerational relations in the 21st century. In : Jenny Chesters (ed.), *Research Handbook on Transitions into Adulthood* (pp. 115-128). Edward Elgar Publishing.

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839106972.00019>

### **Abstract**

Are we witnessing the rise of a global « clash of generations »? Drawing on more than 150 qualitative interviews with young adults aged 18 to 30 in Santiago de Chile, Madrid, Paris, Hong-Kong, and Montréal, this chapter highlights three global trends in intergenerational relations: 1) within the family, intergenerational solidarity is indeed highly mobilized, but pushed to its limit; 2) in society, we observe the affirmation of a ‘generational us’ associated with a feeling of intergenerational injustice that is particularly noticeable among young graduates and directed more against the ‘system’ than against the older generations; and 3) at the political level, where the rhetoric of conflict between generations appears to be the most pervasive, with the rise of a generational voice within social movements. We conclude that while the risk of a “clash of generations” exists, it chiefly affects the political sphere, and mainly concerns young graduates.

**Keywords** : intergenerational relations, intergenerational injustice, global generation, family solidarity, conflict between generations, youth protests

## Introduction

Are we witnessing the rise of a global « clash of generations »? The recent economic, social and environmental crises have reactivated at a global scale the “problem of generation” formulated by Karl Mannheim at the turn of the 1930s. He argued that periods of social destabilization are conducive to the emergence of generational movements, as they can create a common “generational condition” among young cohorts, and thus accentuate a “generational consciousness” mainly forged by experiences in youth (Mannheim 1970). We know that these multiple crises have particularly affected young adults, not only in their present situation but also in their future perspectives: from the Indignados to the pro-climate movement, they have brought in their wake multiple social youth movements marked by strong generational demands on issues of education, democracy and the environment (Della Porta 2019; Bessant et al., 2021; Van de Velde 2023). Over the past decade, more and more research has suggested that "generation" is an increasingly structural divide in our societies (Peugny and Van de Velde 2013; Chauvel and Schroder 2014; Woodman and Wyn 2015; Sukarieh and Tannock 2015; Bessant et al. 2017), and develop new tools to study the risks of tension between "global generations" (Edmunds and Turner 2005; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2009; Philips 2018).

And yet, the very concept of ‘intergenerational relations’ is multifaceted and quite difficult to define in the social sciences. Depending on the approach, these relations are seen to refer to different contexts: either they have to do with ‘family’ generations (linked by filial ties), ‘social’ generations (co-present in society), or ‘political’ generations (in a dynamic of confrontation within public debate). Moreover, empirically operationalizing these intergenerational relations is challenging, since they reflect a shifting temporal reality and the entire life courses of its subjects across successive generations. The concept also brings up important theoretical concerns given that it risks eclipsing numerous inequalities within the generations themselves. For example, evoking conflicts between ‘young’ and ‘old’ could distract attention from fundamental inequalities between ‘rich’ and ‘poor’. As in Bourdieu’s criticism of youth and ‘generationalism,’ generation itself would therefore be no more than a ‘word’ (Bourdieu 1980; Purhonen 2015). As a result, although current research on intergenerational relations is very vigorous, the field remains somewhat compartmentalized in the social sciences.

To properly address the issue of contemporary intergenerational relations, this chapter proposes two major shifts with regard to existing research. On one hand, we argue for a multidimensional perspective of these relations that includes their impact in the family, in society, and in the political sphere. This theoretical necessity leads us to a view focused solely on the younger generations and their experiences of intergenerational

relationships. On the other hand, we take a comparative perspective with the aim of better identifying common trends at the 'global' level: our analysis is based on more than 150 qualitative interviews with young adults aged 18 to 30 from different social backgrounds. The interviews were conducted in Santiago de Chile, Madrid, Paris, Hong Kong, and Montréal. Using this data, we are able to highlight some of today's fundamental global dynamics regarding intergenerational relations: 1) within the family, intergenerational solidarity is highly mobilized, but pushed to its limit; 2) in society, the affirmation of a 'generational us' and a feeling of intergenerational injustice, particularly among young graduates, and directed more against the 'system' than against older generations; and 3) at the political level, a growing rhetoric of conflict between generations that is most pervasive within social movements, particularly environmental movements.

### **A 'conflict' between generations? Three opposing interpretations**

The "generational conflict" thesis is not new to the social sciences (Connolly 2019), but it has evolved profoundly over time and with the generational dynamics involved: in the 1950s it was explored from the perspective of generational "struggles" (Eisenstadt 1956), and in the 1960s, from the perspective of cultural values and their transmission (Mead 1970). Since the 2000s, this question of conflict has come back in force in sociological work, this time more from economic, social and environmental angles : we are witnessing the rise of the theme of intergenerational injustice, approached from a socio-economic and environmental point of view (Tremmel 2006, Meyer 2012). Nonetheless, the theory of conflict remains a subject of debate, and the research highlights three apparently contradictory theses on intergenerational relations: greater inequality, stronger solidarity, and deeper polarization.

#### ***Greater inequality between « social generations » : the risk of tension***

As currently formulated in the social sciences, the "conflict" approach places the focus on social relations between generations. Even without systematically evoking a direct « conflict », this perspective is based on the observation of deepening socio-economic inequalities between generations, which in turn heighten the risk of tensions.

As Jennie Bristow pointed out, this "script" of conflict is constructed mainly in reference to the "baby-boom" generations (Bristow 2015). In the 1990s and 2000s, many studies noted the emergence of a "downgraded," or "sacrificed" generation. By comparing the trajectories of baby-boomers and younger cohorts, these studies highlight the paradoxical situation in which the younger generations find themselves: despite having more qualifications, they face more difficult social prospects—whether in Europe, Japan, North American societies, or at the global level (Chauvel and Schroder 2014; Putman 2016; Bessant et al. 2017; Heinrich and Galan 2018). These intergenerational "inequalities" arise out of a "scarring effect" wherein difficulties initially rooted in the labour market

reverberate through a cohort's entire socio-professional trajectory (Chauvel 2010), and induce a very specific relationship marked by precariousness and social acceleration (Leccardi 2015). The unequal "fates" of the different generations point to the importance of tackling the issue of generational equity and inclusion of young people in public policies (Bessant et alii 2017; Chevalier 2018; Guillemard and Mascova 2017; Balduzzi and Favretto 2020). They may also lead to the emergence of a "political generation" that forms around a critique of high levels of youth precarity (Sukarieh and Tannock 2015; Andretta and Della Porta 2015; Zamponi 2019).

***Stronger solidarity between « family generations » : is the conflict just a myth ?***

There are two main criticisms to this approach. The first is based on the analysis of family relations between generations focusing on a strengthened "solidarity" between parents and children, which would negate the theory of conflict. From the 1990s onwards, an entire branch of research has looked at the circulation and transfer of money, material aid, and services between family generations. These studies tie in with the idea of a "rediscovery" of family support in what are now multigenerational societies, in contrast with theories proclaiming the end of the family's economic function, or its shrinking down to the nuclear unit. They underline the dynamic flow of resources between generations in a predominantly top-down direction (that is, from grandparents and parents to younger generations), whether in the form of prolonged cohabitation of young adults with their parents, or of financial or childcare support—even if solidarity also travels in the other direction (Attias-Donfut et al. 2005; Litwin and Attias-Donfut 2009; Fingerma et al. 2012). While underlining its profound ambivalence (Bengtson et al. 2002; Brannen 2003) of this solidarity, the research emphasizes its compensatory role within the family. For example, Katherine Newman notes the global emergence of the "accordion" family, which grows or shrinks in line with economic difficulties and in which "boomerang kids" return to live with their parents (Newman 2012). This "return of the family" would compensate, at least partially, for the effects of the economic crisis and changes to the welfare state. In such a case, the very prospect of a generational conflict would be a "myth" (Arber and Attias-Donfut 2007).

***Deeper polarization : from inter- to intra-generational inequalities***

Finally, another critique of this theory of "conflict" is that approaching intergenerational conflict in a unified way risks obscuring the intra-generational inequalities that cause rifts within a single generation. Studies taking this position are concerned less with what happens between the generations than within a generation itself: without questioning the existence of economic inequalities between generations, they nonetheless point out that intra-generational inequalities have been building for several decades (d'Albis and Badji 2020). This process is considered to have started at the end of the 1970s—well before the current crisis (Piketty 2013)—but for some years now, it has translated into an

accelerated process of social polarization among the younger generations, to the detriment of less qualified young people. Although perceptible in many Western societies, this phenomenon seems to be especially prevalent within the social regimes of continental Europe (Chauvel and Schroder 2014). The dynamic of inequality is thought to be reinforced by the increased “familialization” of this period of life, i.e. by the growing reliance on family to provide financial support for the young person’s studies and integration into the labour market—both of which may take longer today. It thus sharpens internal polarization within the generations themselves, between those who have access to intergenerational support and those who do not (Van de Velde 2008). Because of this generational polarization, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds would constitute the true “lost generation” that youth studies should not ignore (Mac Donald and Marsh 2005).

### **Relations between generations : A multi-site approach**

In this chapter, we suggest that these contrasted approaches of generational dynamics - inequalities, solidarities et polarization- are more complementary than opposed, because they each deal with different dimensions of the link between generations. To go beyond these oppositions, we mobilize a theoretical approach to intergenerational relations that simultaneously addresses the familial, social, and political spheres. The study focuses on the viewpoint of young adults in different parts of the world, in order to analyse the way they interplay in their discourse.

#### ***Bridging the gap between familial and social generations: A multidimensional approach***

Firstly, we support the theoretical need for a broad and integrated approach to intergenerational relations that simultaneously addresses the familial, social, and political spheres. Our study takes into account the entire life course of its subjects, allowing us to develop this multidimensional view of life courses, and to empirically identify the characteristics of the ‘children of the Great Recession’—to paraphrase a title from the well-known survey on the life course of the ‘children of the Great Depression’ (Elder 2018). We thus present a broad vision of the concept of generation that takes into account generational identities and consciousness (Aboim & Vasconcelos 2014; Edmunds & Turner 2002). Compared to existing paradigms, this approach is original because it is not limited to a comparison of economic ‘scars’ or political struggles, but rather embraces more broadly the existential, familial, or social factors that can affect relations between generations. In order to build a working theory, we take a subjective point of view focused on the younger generations and how they situate themselves within these intergenerational relations.

### ***Bridging the gap between inter- and intra-generational inequalities: Multiple social perspectives***

Moreover, to avoid suggesting the homogeneity of a generation, we argue for the comparison of the generational discourse within different social groups, thus paying attention to intra-generational differentiations. This aspect presents the opportunity to revisit a lesser known dimension of Karl Mannheim's work on different generational levels. According to his theory, 'generational groups' are divided into different 'generation units', which, as entities, are both interdependent and opposed, holding contrasting worldviews (Mannheim 1970). These 'units' exist within a framework of 'concrete groups' in which individuals interact effectively. In this perspective, we will address two key questions. First, within which social groups can we identify a discourse of tension between generations, and why? And second, within which social groups is it less present, and why? This approach responds to the need to analyze types of discourse of generational injustice by looking beyond the most educated or militant individuals—the groups most often targeted by studies suggesting social representations of a 'sacrificed' generation (Andretta & Della Porta 2015; Della Porta 2019; Zamponi 2019).

### ***A comparative perspective: Identifying 'global' dimensions***

Finally, to deconstruct the question of a 'global' generation (Edmunds & Turner 2005), we support the need for a comparative approach that includes several different societies. Comparison is therefore used to highlight common generational dynamics as they emerge across borders. Indeed, we start from the assumption that today, a generation cannot be considered at a national level only, but must rather be thought of transnationally. In this, we follow Ulrich Beck who defends the relevance of a "cosmopolitan" point of view to better identify the "global" generational dynamics at work, even if they unfold differently from one place to another (Beck and Beck-Gersheim 2019). This enabled us to identify the major 'global' trends in intergenerational relations and the different ways in which they are expressed from one society to another (Paugam and Van de Velde 2013).

## **Methods**

To explore these issues, we based our analysis on an international qualitative study conducted with young adults in Madrid, Montréal, Santiago de Chile, Hong Kong, and Paris. This study has two components: a component on life courses and generational relations, and a component on generational rhetoric in the youth social movements that took place in each of these cities. These cities were chosen because they have in common that they have been the epicenter of important youth protests in the last decade. But beyond this common characteristic, they present a great diversity of youth issues in

different social and political contexts: they allow us to create a wide range of contrasts regarding the condition of young people and public youth policies - while opening up to the "Global South", which is often absent from studies on "global generations".

On the one hand, the study is based on more than 150 interviews conducted between 2015 and 2020 with young adults, aged between 18 and 30, living in each of these five cities at the time of the study. In order to capture multiple social perspectives, we made sure to conduct the study with young people from different backgrounds and life situations (students, employed, or unemployed). In each city, we mobilized different forms of recruitment: we went directly to different public spaces, focusing on neighborhoods and institutions (near universities), while also using social networks. In addition, to reach more precarious youth, we contacted social workers working with vulnerable youth. We visited each city twice between 2015 and 2020 to reach a sufficient representation of both higher graduates, less prestigious students, employees of different levels, and young people in precarious situations. Note that most of the interviews took place before the pandemic, so we will not address the effect of the pandemic in this chapter. The interviews were conducted in two parts: the first part was a "life story," designed to chart their family and social backgrounds; the second part was semi-directive, focusing more specifically on intergenerational relations, perceived inequalities, and generational representations and discourse. We must specify that this device does not, however, cover all young people and that certain social groups are absent from our study : it only targets young people in large cities, and therefore does not take into account territorial inequalities.

On the other hand, in order to better understand the political dimension of these relationships between generations, the second part of the study included an ethnographic study on the generational discourses within the major youth protest movements that took place in each of these five cities from 2011 to 2020: "Los Indignados" in Madrid (2011), the "Printemps Érablé" (2012) and the major pro-climate march (2019) in Montréal, the student movement in Santiago de Chile (2012), the "Umbrella Revolution" (2014) and the pro-democratic movement in Hong Kong (2019–2020), and the "Nuit Debout" movement in Paris (2016). This component was based on the direct and systematic collection of protest writings (slogans, signs, and posters) used within the seven social movements (n=1974). We went to the very heart of these movements to collect these "words of anger" by taking direct photographs. These writings were centralized and translated into a common database in order to conduct a large-scale analysis of them. This device made it possible to better identify how the generational question was politicized in the public space and in the social movements, which we will develop in the third part.

## **Family generations : a solidarity under pressure**

As we know, in most Western societies the increase in financial pressure at the beginning of adult life (linked to rising housing costs, paying for studies, or difficulties in entering the labour market) has resulted in a greater need for familial support. This process has meant an increase in intergenerational cohabitation and financial support for young adults, whether they are students, trying to enter the job market, or even working (Newman 2012). Our international qualitative study allows us to better understand how this solidarity is experienced by young people themselves in different parts of the world. It shows that this need for solidarity does not generally lead to major conflicts between family generations; indeed, when intergenerational relations are difficult, the family break-up often occurs much earlier in the trajectory. And yet, family solidarity appears to be pushed to its limit, and when the need for family support is prolonged, it becomes a major source of social frustration.

### ***Solidarity: Necessary but problematic***

If we look at the experiences of prolonged family support—whether financial or residential—in the different study locations, a common feature emerges: for young people, the “presence” of their family of origin, sometimes continuing long into adulthood, proves to be at times necessary and welcome but may also leave them feeling ambiguous and guilty, because it threatens their growing desire for autonomy. For the younger adults, the family is initially perceived as a blessing: parental support is seen as lifesaving and as a “privilege” compared to other individuals without this support. But when it is prolonged, it is increasingly perceived as a possible “trap” and becomes a source of frustration and guilt. Furthermore, in situations of precariousness, cohabitation means that distress is shared with the parents—who thus become a mirror of expectation—and is accepted only within the protective rhetoric of being “temporary.” “For now, it’s okay because I know that it’s for a limited time and that I’ll leave as soon as I can,” said a 27-year-old Chilean woman who returned to live with her parents, echoing the sentiments of many young people over the age of 25. The older the person in question, the more their family dependence is set within a discourse of an “in-between,” “empty,” or even “dead” time, and a period of necessary suspense in the effort to build independence. Even if parental help does not prevent people from thinking of themselves as “adults,” total independence is still seen as the ultimate goal.

### ***When starting a family is a luxury: Towards a generational imbalance?***

“Even starting a family has become a luxury,” said a French woman in her thirties, echoing many of the statements collected in this study. Indeed, the real “price” of this prolonged wait is, in many cases, the postponement of potentially starting one’s “own” family. This is one of the profound issues raised by this study: more than relational



cohabitation itself, it is the extension of parental assistance that makes young adults question whether they could eventually start a family. For respondents, it was the hardest aspect to deal with—particularly for those in their thirties who continued to receive help from their parents—and was more prevalent in the study among young people in Spain and Chile, and to a lesser extent among those in France. In short, as young adults grow older, without seeing improvement in their precarious circumstances, the idea of a future family of their own is thrown into question. Although more prevalent among young women, this concern was also raised by young men. Generally speaking, this phenomenon leads to what could be called a “generational imbalance,” characterized by the increased weight of the family of origin and a radical uncertainty about the family yet to come.

***The weight of family support: a growing doubt about meritocracy***

From a social and political standpoint, the pressure of the family question is far from being neutral for young people: it appears to be highly internalized among the young people questioned, adding to their growing doubts about meritocracy. The “value of education” appears to correspond to a basic level of family support: having (or not having) parents “who are behind you” was one of the most cited indicators by which young people situate themselves within their generation. Indeed, the study shows that young generations often strongly internalize success factors linked to their family of origin, such as social background or place of birth. For example, among younger respondents, the family is often mentioned as the “first” factor that determines whether they can study and avoid certain social pitfalls—whether through financial resources, access to information or networks, or the possibility of changing course when necessary. This acute awareness of the importance of the milieu of origin is reflected by a discourse of social and generational injustice: many young people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, report feeling “cheated” by official rules of merit that are biased against them because of their social background.

**Social generations : the rise of a generational « us »... especially among young graduates**

If there is no deep split between generations at the family level, can the same be said for the societal level? Compared to family relationships, social relations between generations show clearer signs of tension. Indeed, our study reveals the rise of a generational “us” and a growing discourse of generational injustice, particularly among the more highly educated individuals. It should be noted that this generational awareness does not, however, lead directly to intergenerational conflict. On the whole, the rhetoric of generational injustice appears to be directed more against the “system” than against the older generations themselves.

### ***A generational glass ceiling?***

Whether in Montréal, Santiago, Madrid, Paris, or Hong Kong, the idea of a generational “glass ceiling,” limiting the possibilities of the youngest respondents, was very much present in the discourse. In Montréal and Santiago de Chile (which, to varying degrees, share certain liberal features), this idea was expressed in the rhetoric of “a long fight,” of being “worn out,” or of a long-term “suffocation” linked to debt or low wages. In Paris and Madrid, where youth unemployment is higher, the salient rhetoric was more that of “closed doors,” “weight,” “closed doors,” and the lack of “place” in society due to the risk of unemployment. Overall, this rhetoric takes the form of a generational “double blow”: already suffering from their experience of greater competition on the labour market, young people also see their opportunities impacted by the effects of austerity. However, this reference to a collective fate does not prevent individuals from relativizing their own situation and maintaining the hope of “breaking through” the generational glass ceiling. This relativization was more clearly manifested in the discourse of young women, who, in Madrid and Santiago especially, compared their life situations with those of their own mothers. In general, the discourses of the most disadvantaged young people demonstrate a more internalized idea of individual failure and a pervasive sense of responsibility, as Jennifer Silva (2015) has shown in the case of young people from working class backgrounds in the United States.

### ***The affirmation of a generational “us,” mainly among young graduates***

The study confirms that, when faced with such perspectives, a strong feeling of generational belonging emerges, frequently expressed in the idea of a generational “us.” This awareness of a common future is always connected to a “pressure”—whether financial or time-based—that weighs on life prospects; as well as to increased social “competition.” It is worth noting that this generational “us” is mainly expressed by young graduates, who develop a discourse focused on generational inequalities. Meanwhile, in other social sectors, young people develop discourses of injustice centred on other kinds of discrimination they experience, such as those stemming from social, territorial, or racial inequalities. Moreover, this idea of a generational “us” takes sharply differing forms according to the societal model. In liberal regimes, it is mainly constructed at the sub-generational level. Expressed primarily among students and graduates, it focuses on social inequalities around access to education and on the burden of “debt,” referring to the high price of studies and ongoing financial challenges. In Europe, where the crisis has resulted in increased youth unemployment, this generational consciousness is also experienced by those with the most education, but it also applies to all “young people” and focuses more on the threat of social downgrading and on a collective “uncertainty.” In this case, generational consciousness can give way to marked discourses of generational revolt, in particular among those in their thirties who are highly qualified

and who, having “played the game,” more often express a sense of “betrayal” or of social injustice between generations.

***“Anti-system”:* Anger directed more against the “system” than against older generations**

Yet regardless of the societal model, the social awareness of generation does not translate into a direct “generational conflict.” As conveyed in the study, this feeling of generational revolt tends to target the “system”—be it educational, social or political—more than it does older generations. The result is not so much a conflict between generations, but rather a split between young citizens from certain social backgrounds and the public authority, “system,” or “society,” which in turn becomes the object of criticism. This sentiment is echoed in a revealing statement by a young Spanish woman: “My society abandoned me, so I am abandoning my society.” Analysis suggests that these expressions of generational anger can follow different paths of politicization, mainly towards “anti-system” parties or towards a discourse of voluntary abstention. Older generations are most often considered to be “responsible,” but “not guilty.” A more direct denunciation of the older generations exists, but it is generally confined to particular sectors, such as professional domains (including certain intellectual or legal professions) in which competition for positions is prevalent and often intergenerational. In most discourses, the older generations are accused of bequeathing a “competitive” and “hostile” world to young people.

**Political generations : a growing discourse of « conflict »**

Overall, the theme of “conflict” between generations seems most present at the level of political debate, and particularly within the youth social movements of recent years. We know that in a context of growing mistrust regarding certain dimensions of representative democracy (Tiberj 2017), the younger generations—especially young students and graduates—have found themselves on the front lines of the mass protest movements of the 2010s (Pickard 2019, Van de Velde 2022a). Furthermore, by analyzing the full range of political discourse connected to these movements, our study shows that the issues of intergenerational injustice, and even intergenerational conflict, are very present. We observe the rise of a generational voice denouncing the burden of a collective “debt” that is too heavy to bear, along with a discourse of direct accusation of the older generations.

***Youth protests : a global discourse of injustice***

“Don’t mortgage our future!” in Montréal, “My parents are crying for me, I am crying for the future” in Hong Kong: in the student, pro-democratic, and environmental movements alike, the claims feature the discourse of intergenerational injustice, alongside more general denunciations (Van de Velde 2023). This theme of injustice is reflected by the

presence in protest slogans of a new actor who, although invisible, must be protected and defended: the “future generations” who will suffer from decisions they had no part in. This generational denunciation is further defined in the criticism of an untenable economic, social, political, or environmental “heritage” unjustly passed on to the younger generations, forcing them to bear the brunt of decisions for which they are not responsible. The result is a rhetoric of collective awakening in the name of generational justice, with the aim of defending the future of the younger generations and those that will follow (“If the present is in the fight, the future is ours” in Santiago, or “Your children’s future is decided today” in Madrid).

#### ***Four key discourses of injustice between generations***

In particular, our analysis identified four rhetorical themes of intergenerational injustice seen in the movements under study. The student movements in Santiago and Montréal both primarily denounced an economic injustice between generations, marked by the increasingly high “price” of studies that impact life choices, sometimes compared to a transfer of debt from the public to the private. The European movements in the study (Indignados and Nuit Debout) revealed a discourse of social injustice between generations, expressed through criticism of the collective downgrading of a generation that is nevertheless educated and qualified, and that is the high price of austerity only to find themselves deprived of opportunities, while the real “culprits” are being protected. The two movements in Hong Kong in 2014 and 2019 denounced a political injustice between generations. The discourse criticized the political betrayal of the young generations, who will live their entire lives under the shadow of decisions from which they have been excluded. Finally, compared to other movements, the Montréal climate march in 2019 bore a distinct generational rhetoric based on environmental injustice between generations. It decried the emergence of a doomed generation, deprived of time and of the quality of life they were entitled to.

#### ***Environmental injustice: an « inversion » of generations ?***

It is interesting to note that compared to the other movements of the decade, this pro-environmental rhetoric was particularly concerned with the generational conflict, and presents a junction of economic, social and environmental injustice between generations. Slogans such as “You are stealing our future” and “You will die of old age and we will die of distress” testify to a strong sense of urgency and a shortened future, a factor that we know structures the younger generation’s relationship to time (Leccardi 2015, Van de Velde 2022b). The generational injustice denounced here is also existential, as it translates into collapsed life prospects for younger generations, who find themselves in a now irreparable environmental situation: “Not my mess to clean.” As Ben Bowman pointed out regarding the British pro-climate movements, there is a major misunderstanding between young people and adults (Bowman 2020). Indignation was

directed at the indifference of a generation guilty of murderous inaction on environmental issues, especially the generation in power: “How dare you!” Slogans even asserted the inversion of roles between children and adults, holding up as an example the younger generations required to be responsible and mature too early, faced with the older generations’ inaction: “I thought adults were supposed to be responsible.” This is an example of the inversion of transmission between generations that Margaret Mead described in relation to educational and cultural issues (Mead 1970).

## **Discussion.**

This chapter has revealed focal points of intergenerational tension at the global level, which exist despite strong family solidarity. To sum up, we can draw four main insights that help us better understand the current driving forces behind these intergenerational relations, and draw some avenues for future research in the pandemic context.

### ***While the risk of a “clash of generations” exists, it chiefly affects the political sphere***

Our research shows that it is above all in the public space that the "generation clash" is most perceptible. It confirms the rise of a “generational voice” at the global level : Whether in the pro-educational, pro-democratic, or environmental movements, the generational discourses share the common denunciation of an untenable burden of “debt” for young generations that have been excluded from the decision-making process. We observe a phenomenon of convergence of rhetoric to feed a discourse of social, environmental and political injustice between generations, and make a more direct accusation of the older generations. Going forward in a post-pandemic world, it will be important to follow the development of these “political generations” who are particularly active in social movements (Boumaza 2009, Braungart 2013, Zamponi 2019, Van de Velde 2023).

### ***The feeling of generational injustice is the most marked among young graduates***

Our study shows that the rhetoric of conflict is rarer in life stories : it appears that the discourses carried in social movements cannot be generalized to the whole generation. Nevertheless, we can affirm the rise of a generational "us" structured around the crisis and a feeling of injustice between generations : this kind of generational consciousness has appeared to be a “class privilege.” That is to say, young graduates—especially Europeans—develop a discourse focused on generational inequalities; meanwhile among other social backgrounds, younger generations develop discourses of injustice centred more on social, territorial, or racial inequalities. This could reanimate more silent forms of conflict within the younger generations, whether they take the form of revolt against the system, muted anger, or social withdrawal (Pickard and Van de Velde 2021).

***Generational resentment is currently directed more against the “system” than against the older generations***

Another point to note is that these shared grievances are directed more against the "system" than against the older generations. The problem is rather the place given to young people in public policies, creating a feeling of abandonment or even contempt, rather than a real conflict with the older generations. Ultimately, the level of conflict will depend on how public policies respond to the social issues affecting younger generations, and how they integrate social and political equity issues into their social investment programs. These results call for a reflection on the possible evolution of public policies towards young people : at the theoretical level, it is all the more important to continue studying the multiple forms of intergenerational equity (Gosseries 2008; Meyer 2012; Balduzzi and Favretto 2020), and thinking together the issues of environmental, health, and social justice between generations. Going forward, it will be also relevant to analyze how the public policies instituted since the pandemic began will shape relations between generations: to date, several studies have shown the extent to which welfare states are also intergenerational “regimes”, which engender different kinds of social and family relations between generations (Van de Velde 2008; Saraceno and Keck 2010; Albertini and Kohli 2013).

***Intergenerational solidarity does not prevent political conflict between generations; in fact, it can fuel it***

Yet the study also shows that the existence of “family solidarity” does not reduce the risk of political conflict between generations. Even before the pandemic, we saw that this imposed family solidarity could, on the contrary, increase social frustration and fuel criticism of the meritocracy and the lack of a level playing field. Of course, for those able to benefit from them, these forms of solidarity have had a compensatory role at the economic level. However, they appear to be pushed to their limits because they conflict with a growing expectation of autonomy within the younger generations. Compared to the existing literature, this result suggests that family “solidarity” and “social” conflicts between generations should not be seen in opposition, but rather in complementarity. Future research on intergenerational relations should provide a better understanding of how family solidarity and social struggles between generations can be thought of together, and not in isolation.

In the end, there is a risk that the recent economic and environmental changes will reactivate the political question of justice between generations. If we are to better understand these developments, more work on intergenerational relations is needed, not only at a national level, but mainly at a comparative and at a global level.

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