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**Counter-hegemonic Social Movements and Neoliberal
Capitalist World Order: A Critical Analysis on the
Mainstream Media's Coverage of Occupy Wall Street**

Master's thesis

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In Prague on 20 May 2020

Gabriel Moreira Vieira

References

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Abstract

Anti-hegemonic social movements have historically had a complicated and conflicting relationship with mainstream media, as it consistently undermines the emancipatory potential of these grassroots revolutionary movements, hence serving the interests of the dominant social forces of the hegemonic order. This work develops a comprehensive and critical analysis of the agency of mainstream media throughout the coverage of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) to understand how and why it consciously and relentlessly worked to neutralize the true dimension of the movement and its occupations, and thus to preserve the neoliberal capitalist world order from the ideological threat and the revolutionary challenge that OWS posed to it. Employing a historical materialist approach based on Gramsci's theory of hegemony - and the emphasis in the consensual aspect of power in the production of the hegemony that it entails - and its use in the study of world orders grounded in social relations, this work aims to investigate the mainstream media's active role in the building of the current neoliberal capitalist historic bloc, and its subservience to the hegemonic social forces throughout every stage of the coverage of OWS and its occupations: from the deliberate lack of interest and the total indifference in the movement to the attempts to manufacture its own condescending and dismissive narrative of OWS and to constrain the occupiers' claims and grievances within the existing institutionalized framework of representative democracy, which ultimately blocks any genuine social transformation in capitalist relations.

Keywords

Occupy Wall Street, OWS, mainstream media, hegemony, cultural institutions, civil society, historic bloc, organic intellectuals, neoliberal capitalism, counter-hegemonic movements

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INTRODUCTION

The long year of 2011 and its rehearsals

The vantage viewpoint of a critical perspective grounded in a historical materialist approach accredits the year of 2011 as one of the most remarkable periods for anti-hegemonic global movements since 1968, for it ushered a new cycle of social revolutionary struggles. A series of horizontally organized, social-network diffused, uncoordinated, consensus-based, fluid, shattering, and emancipatory global-scale upheavals erupted throughout the year of 2011, bringing together people from various ethnicities, social strata, nationalities, and mindsets around the widespread and shared fluid feeling of unease and discontent¹ against the long-standing dominant structures of neoliberal capitalist world order and of oppressive state regimes. These popular uprisings initially broke out in the Middle East and North Africa and promptly spread to Europe and to the United States, threatening the political establishment, the socio-economic arrangements, and the institutional democratic mechanisms that are inherent to the bourgeois-state apparatus². Thereby they were presented to society as potentially world-historical and transformative events³.

The elucidating study of the upheavals of 1968 as the rehearsal for the upcoming systemwide revolutions carried out by Giovanni Arrighi, Terrence Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein⁴ has laid the groundwork for grasping the striking features of these movements that would go down in history as a world revolution targeting both the dominant forces of the capitalist order and the impotent and corrupt anti-hegemonic forces of the past. Although the central features of the upheavals that together made up the world revolution of 1968 are explored in order to assess the year of 1989 as its natural extension in key aspects (albeit the ideological representations of these revolutionary periods are essentially opposed - anti-capitalist and pro-capitalist inclinations, respectively), even more evident similarities can be identified between the series of protests inaugurated in the Prague Spring and the French May and the array of uprisings that appeared globally throughout 2011. Due to the revolutionary potential of the 2011 insurrections, from those in North Africa and in the Middle East - which aimed to overthrow totalitarian and corrupt governments - to Occupy

¹ Žižek 2013.

² Žižek 2011a.

³ Kellner 2013, 251-5.

⁴ Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1992, 21-3.

Wall Street (henceforth OWS) and the *Indignados* in Spain - both targeting the pervasive ascendancy of capital over democracy and ultimately the neoliberal capitalist order - the year of 2011 will long be remembered in history books and in popular memory as the correspondent renewal of the revolutionary movement of 1968⁵.

The series of protests inaugurated by Mohamed Bouazizi⁶, who set himself on fire and triggered the massive popular insurrections in Tunisia and the wider Arab Spring throughout North Africa and the Middle East, celebrated not only the counter-hegemonic movements that swept various countries in the late 1960s, but also the “rebellion[s] against the specific texture, trajectory, and consequences of globalization that was sparked by many other movements”⁷ at the end of last century. Among the many grievances contemplated by the alterglobalisation movements⁸, those who swelled the ranks of these protests denounced the deleterious effects of capitalist globalization - over economic justice and labour protection, environment and climate change, and civil liberties - and hoped to construct a truly democratic world based on principles of diversity and horizontality⁹. More recently the hopes and concerns of the activists who took the streets of Seattle, Prague, Porto Alegre, and Gothenburg (among many other cities) at the turn of the millennium echoed all over the world in the unison chant of those who challenged the neoliberal capitalism and rose up against military regimes and corrupt dictators throughout the insurrections of 2011.

Though the protest agenda of 2011’s demonstrators encompasses both the discontents and the aspirations seen throughout the upheavals of 1968 and the alterglobalisation movements at the end of the century, it is far broader and more diffuse than those of the previous waves of worldwide anti-systemic revolutionary protests. This is precisely what led to the grabbing of people’s attention and emotions and gave the required momentum to an entire array of upheavals that could possibly have shaped the fate and future

⁵ Kellner 2013, 264-6.

⁶ On 17 December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, set himself alight - in an act of self-immolation - as a response to the confiscation of his wares and the humiliation inflicted on him by a municipal official and her aides. His desperate act would change the course of Arab political history. He died on 04 January 2011 as a heroic martyr of the Jasmine Revolution. For more on the Arab Spring and on the role of Bouazizi, see Sadiki (ed.) 2015.

⁷ Baber 2015, 138-9.

⁸ The term ‘*alterglobalisation movement*’ refers to the series of protests that broke out in various cities all over the world in the late 1990s and opposed the negative economic, political, social, cultural and ecological consequences of neoliberal globalization. For more on the alterglobalisation movement and a detailed investigation of the decision-making process of the movement as an alternative democratic praxis, see Maeckelbergh 2009.

⁹ Maeckelbergh 2009, 3-8.

of contemporary global society¹⁰ by fundamentally altering the forces of socio-political-economic sovereignty in the world-system periphery - North Africa and the Middle East were where the Arab Spring blossomed - as well as in the very core of the neoliberal capitalist world order, the U.S. and Europe - through the emancipatory potential of the OWS movement, its further developments, and various European anti-capitalist demonstrations.

The insurrections of the year - from the Arab Spring to OWS

The protests witnessed during the Year of the Insurrection¹¹ may have taken different forms (with regard to their organizational-structure, tactics, scope, and targets) and had distinct developments (concerning their individual dynamics, direct and indirect outcomes, and legacy), but they all shared the awareness of mutual solidarity¹² and had the same fundamental origins as the previous waves of social movements: the structural crisis of the hegemonic system - in the case of 2011 upheavals, the neoliberal capitalist world order - within which the dominant forces have relentlessly oppressed the masses that would soon rebel and become the counter-hegemonic forces, threatening and shaking the socio, political, economic, and ideological foundations upon which the current world order had been built.

Although the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, who would henceforth become one of the revolution's martyrs, is often regarded as the initial spark that ignited the Arab Spring's revolutionary fire, the central conditions for the psychological exhaustion¹³ that triggered such a massive political insurgency had always been there: the Tunisian people had long lived under the oppressive practices of corrupt dictator Ben Ali's authoritarian regime. All of a sudden, the burden of recurrent human rights violations, poor living conditions (economic decline, unemployment, and extreme poverty), police and establishment brutality, political corruption, and the lack of participation in the political process, just became too heavy to bear¹⁴. Thus the Tunisian people (initially, as the

¹⁰ Kellner 2013, 255.

¹¹ Writing in the wake of the Arab Spring, Kellner (2013) carefully chooses the term 'insurrections' instead of employing the widely-used word 'revolution' to describe the series of events that took place in North Africa and in the Middle East throughout 2011, since at that time he could not assert if these uprisings would properly lead to a definitive transformation of the political landscape in these societies.

¹² Carneiro 2012, 7.

¹³ *Ibid*, 7-8.

¹⁴ Sadiki 2011.

revolutionary impetus would soon spread into a cycle of struggles across Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and other Middle Eastern states - with different intensities because the dynamics in each specific country were dissimilar) took the streets of Tunis to manifest their dissatisfaction and to demand radical change and democratic freedoms¹⁵ by carrying out an emancipatory political platform. The masses of people who had long been oppressed by Ben Ali's totalitarian government rose up against him and his state apparatus, aiming to actively reconstruct the Tunisian political landscape and ultimately to open up new freedoms and democratic possibilities in North Africa and in the Middle East.

The relatively immediate success of Tunisian demonstrators - the overthrow of the authoritarian regime on 14 January 2011 (President Ben Ali fled into exile in Saudi Arabia, ending his 23 years in power) and the consequent expectation for the elections of a Constituent Assembly by the end of that year - reverberated in the form of several further uprisings against authoritarian, dictatorial and corrupt regimes that emerged from a long period of colonialism backed by the main Western powers in the second half of the twentieth century. The most striking insurrection erupted in Cairo, Egypt, and was boosted not only by social media that enabled it to obtain massive public support¹⁶, but also by the violence and brutality deployed by the establishment forces against the demonstrators. Hosni Mubarak's 30-year dictatorship had imposed a permanent state of emergency on Egyptian people and, according to Slavoj Žižek¹⁷, "the rule of law was suspended, keeping the entire country in a state of political immobility, stifling genuine political life". During the '18 Days That Shook the World in Egypt'¹⁸ protesters occupying Tahrir Square in Cairo mobilized around emancipatory dreams and the eternal idea of freedom, justice, and dignity. The Egyptian people could finally claim to feel alive for the first time in their lives¹⁹.

The Egyptian demonstrators were met with even more violent and brutal response from Mubarak's government, yet the establishment forces could not suppress such a powerful and genuinely popular insurrection. A few weeks after the beginning of demonstrations, Mubarak finally stepped down and his authoritarian regime was overthrown. Eventually, the ousting of the one who for 30 years had ruled with an iron fist each and oppressed every form of political resistance and insurrection gave hope to the

¹⁵ Kellner 2013, 255-60.

¹⁶ The role of social medias as a powerful catalyst tool shall be explored further on in this work.

¹⁷ Žižek 2012a, 71.

¹⁸ Kellner 2013, 256.

¹⁹ Žižek 2011b.

masses, who turned this hope into an astonishing expression of grassroots self-organizing people's power²⁰. Nonetheless, the established power vacuum had dragged the Egyptian political landscape and ultimately the whole country into a subsequent struggle between the old establishment, religious elites, military forces, and pro-democracy groups.

The spark that lit the fire in North Africa and in the Middle East in the first months of 2011, or - in order to avoid the recurrent usage of the 'fire' metaphor - the Arab Spring's revolutionary seed, found fertile ground at the very heart of the neoliberal capitalist world order's bastion shortly afterward. Although the particular circumstances were slightly dissimilar from those that encouraged the Arab Spring's demonstrators - their claim for social and economic justice were integrated into the broader demand for genuine democracy²¹ - the capital dissatisfaction with the long-lasting structures of the hegemonic order was also deeply shared among the masses within the U.S. Besides the example of the North African and Middle Eastern insurrections - and a long list of other counter-hegemonic demonstrations around the world²² - the U.S. population joined the OWS movement as the major popular reaction to four decades of imposition of an inhuman neoliberal doctrine which would culminate in economic mass murder²³ - accelerated since the global economic crisis of 2008 - notably remarked by an acutely increasing economic pain for both the poorest strata and the middle class and by an incredible exaggeration of the wealthiest 1% of the population²⁴ - the Party of Wall Street²⁵ and the corporate greed it symbolized.

On 17 September 2011, the revolutionary seed had finally blossomed in the U.S, leading thousands of demonstrators - encouraged by a call for protest proposed by Adbusters magazine on 13 July 2011 - to march towards the citadel of neoliberalism on Wall Street and then to camp out in Zuccotti Park²⁶ setting up a tent city that would become the epicenter - the heart and mind - of the OWS movement for the next months ²⁷. A genuinely heterogeneous crowd - students, professors, workers, celebrities, trade-unions, elderly unemployed men and women, and ordinary citizens - joined the embryonic group of

²⁰ Kellner 2013, 255.

²¹ Žižek 2012a, 74-5.

²² Carneiro 2012, 7.

²³ Davis 2011.

²⁴ Wallerstein 2011.

²⁵ Harvey 2011. David Harvey employs the term "Party of Wall Street" to refer to the capitalist class that has systematically dominated the policies of the U.S. government and corrupted its institutional apparatus, guided by one universal principle of rule: "there shall be no serious challenge to the absolute power of money to rule absolutely".

²⁶ Castells 2015, 162-3.

²⁷ Kellner 2013, 262-4.

‘occupiers’ (originally composed of highly-educated young adults)²⁸ in the following weeks to hold a new political discourse condemning economic inequalities, corporate greed, the corruption of Wall Street and financial institutions, and denouncing the pervasive influence of capital on the American political system, for the economic recession had directly implied a profound recession of representative democracy itself²⁹. Through the occupations, OWS had “temporarily liberated some of the most expensive real estates in the world and turned a privatized square into a magnetic public space and catalyst for protest”³⁰.

Most notably, besides the occupation at the heart of the Wall Street financial district, the protesters of the OWS movement had ultimately created a new discursive formation built upon the unceasing repetition of the emblematic world-famous slogan “We Are the 99 per cent”³¹. Along with the deep division of the U.S, dramatically revealed and rejected by the movement³² through the juxtaposition of the exploited and oppressed American masses (comprising both the poor and the middle classes - “a new alliance of the dispossessed”³³) in contrast to the wealthiest, corrupt, and greedy Wall Street, the use of social networking tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, to mobilize the masses and to diffuse new dynamics of protests furthered an emerging logic of aggregation (the assembling of individuals from diverse backgrounds within specific public spaces)³⁴ and significantly shaped the form and practices of activism within the movement. Lastly, the excessively aggressive police repression against the peaceful demonstrators who camped out in Zuccotti Park intensified popular support for the movement, which would then quickly ripple across the country and encourage protests worldwide.

Thus, in the following weeks, the protests proliferated throughout the nation and the American people could witness (and participate in) the demonstrations that broke out in various major U.S. cities, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Denver, and Washington. Inasmuch as the OWS momentum continued, popular support escalated and the protests inevitably spread on a global and extraordinary scale - people’s encampments sprang up in almost a thousand cities across over eighty countries³⁵. Although the protests and occupations throughout the world may have had specific dynamics and

²⁸ Milkman 2012, 13.

²⁹ Chomsky 2012a, 14.

³⁰ Davis 2011.

³¹ Reyes 2018, 244.

³² Barber 2012, 14-5.

³³ Žižek 2014, 164.

³⁴ Juris 2012, 259-61.

³⁵ Kellner 2013, 262-5; Carneiro 2012, 8.

contexts due to very particular surrounding circumstances, the focal point of their indignation was clear: the corruption, the exaggeration, and the greed of capitalism symbolized by Wall Street and financial institutions³⁶. In addition, they all embraced horizontalism (a form of consensus-based participatory democracy) and prefigurative politics³⁷; they all obtained strength and resilience from their anarchist anti-authoritarianism³⁸; they all took place outside of the domain of old-fashioned party politics³⁹; they all successfully instrumentalized (and thereby were all catalyzed by) the use of social networks⁴⁰; and they all primarily denounced the current structural crisis of capitalism as a system through the strengthening of the narrative concerning income inequality and corporate greed. All of these fundamental features are now widely recognized as trademarks of the OWS movement.

Eventually, by early 2012, the OWS movement had successfully transitioned from occupying tent camps to occupying the national conscience⁴¹, and was thereby decisive for the full awakening of American people, as the occupations provided their first experience of radical democracy and the movement celebrated the occupiers themselves as the very essence of their collective revolutionary dream⁴². Despite the relentless endeavors of the hegemonic forces to undermine and to delegitimize the revolutionary spirit and the emancipatory claims of the protesters - either through the police and the establishment's brutal repression or through the deconstruction of the narrative that emerged from the OWS movement by the mainstream media - the status quo of the neoliberal capitalism as the hegemonic world order was shaken by the upheavals that broke out during 2011, culminating in the escalation of capitalism's global organic crisis⁴³ after all.

The reaction of the neoliberal capitalist hegemony to OWS

Although the OWS movement laid the groundwork for the development of a solid anti-capitalist rejection of neoliberal ideas and solutions⁴⁴ it had only produced a subjective

³⁶ Reyes 2018, 244.

³⁷ Milkman 2012, 14.

³⁸ Williams 2012, 19-20.

³⁹ Kellner 2013, 264.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey 2012, 259-61.

⁴¹ Chomsky 2012a, 9.

⁴² White 2016, 1-4.

⁴³ Gill 2011.

⁴⁴ Kellner 2013, 265.

legacy (albeit a thoroughly essential one). It has unprecedentedly influenced both the American national agenda by putting the inequalities of everyday life in the center of political discussion⁴⁵ as well as changing the world discourse, “moving it away from the ideological mantras of neo-liberalism to themes like inequality, injustice, and decolonization. For the first time in a long time, ordinary people were discussing the very nature of the system in which they lived; they were no longer taking it for granted”⁴⁶. Therefore, OWS has fundamentally developed within contemporary society a widespread subjectivity and an authentic belief in being able to bring about the awakening of global social awareness to the escalating crisis of neoliberal capitalism world order.

However, unlike the Arab Spring’s uprisings, the OWS demonstrations did not bring about any immediate, objective, and thereby sizeable outcome. Whereas the insurrections in North Africa and in the Middle East led to the ousting of dictators and to the overthrow of corrupt and oppressive regimes, ultimately filling the hearts of the protesters with the political euphoria of finally building a freer and more representative political system through genuinely democratic election processes⁴⁷, the OWS movement did not produce any real structural change in the basic foundations of the global neoliberal capitalist order - no new regulations for banks or businesses nor meaningful pushes to hold Wall Street executives accountable have stemmed from the protests⁴⁸.

Undoubtedly, the OWS movement had faced threats from the hegemonic forces from its very beginning, but it also had to deal with the risks posed by its own nature and internal dynamics. Chomsky⁴⁹ stressed the need for the inner development of primordial, long-lasting structures to sustain the movement and its achievements in the long run, for the struggle the protesters carried out against the neoliberal capitalist order would be a long and hard one. Davis⁵⁰ urged the occupiers to struggle for the economic democracy - the ‘real prize’ - which allows ordinary people to take part in the macro decision-making process regarding economic power. Žižek⁵¹ echoed these recommendations by warning the

⁴⁵ Chomsky 2012a, 9-11.

⁴⁶ Wallerstein 2012a.

⁴⁷ Although the Arab Spring has resulted in the overthrow of oppressive state regimes in North Africa and in the Middle East, and despite the resulting initial political euphoria, the societies of these countries still have their human rights systematically violated, face the systemic corruption of their political institutions and suffer, especially in Syria, the consequences of a dreadful civil war that resulted in an uncountable number of victims.

⁴⁸ Sorkin 2012.

⁴⁹ Chomsky 2012a, 32-4.

⁵⁰ Davis 2011.

⁵¹ Žižek 2012b.

protesters of the risk of falling in love with themselves and with their sublime enthusiasm within the occupations at the expense of the hard and patient work in the long run, for OWS is just the beginning, not the end of their toil. Most importantly, he emphatically called on the occupiers to think about the alternatives to the hegemonic neoliberal capitalist order and to develop a positive program of socio-political change for the new order to replace the old one⁵². Furthermore, another major threat emerged from the very success of the movement: the more attractive OWS becomes, the broader and looser its messages and claims, which puts at stake its political coherence and thereby its very own existence⁵³⁵⁴.

Notwithstanding, in the aftermath of the OWS protests, one can and should attribute the failure of the movement with respect to fundamentally producing a new positive counter-hegemonic order precisely to its very own nemesis: the neoliberal capitalist hegemony itself. This concept of neoliberal capitalist hegemony observes the broadening of the definition of state proposed by Antonio Gramsci and expands it to a global scale. Accordingly, he argues “the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules”⁵⁵. This notion of the enlarged state in Gramsci’s terms must, therefore, encompass the underpinnings of the political structure in civil society or, in Robert Cox’s⁵⁶ words, “all the institutions which helped to create in people certain modes of behaviour and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order”. Thus, the Gramscian interpretation of hegemony builds the bridges to overcome the conventional dichotomy of state and civil society, because it incorporates both the apparatus and mechanisms of the former category that respond for the coercive dimension of power (material and economic forces) as well as those of the latter that account for the consensual dimension of power (ideas and institutions)⁵⁷. Consequently, for Gramsci, the systems of thought (such as religion and common sense) and the social institutions (like the family, the educational system, the media) are as fundamental as the government apparatus/mechanisms for the achievement of hegemony within a particular social formation by the dominant

⁵² Žižek 2012a, 77-82.

⁵³ Wallerstein 2011.

⁵⁴ On the other hand, some scholars (Castells 2015; Tarrow 2011, as cited in Baber, 2015) argue that the strength of the OWS movement comes precisely from this innovative and defining feature: a non-demand movement where the process is the message.

⁵⁵ Gramsci 1971, 244.

⁵⁶ Cox 1993a, 50-2.

⁵⁷ Gramsci 1971, 12.

class⁵⁸. Lastly, since globalizing capitalism has consistently given rise to contradictory sets of social forces worldwide, and expressions of anti-capitalist rejection of neoliberal ideology recently broke out all over the world, the notion of neoliberal hegemony, in Gramscian terms, should be conceived as a totality and thereby cannot be territorially limited⁵⁹.

As for the OWS movement, was it not precisely through the manipulation of ideas, institutions and material forces that the hegemonic forces responded and thus exerted their power against the revolutionary social forces in order to undermine the OWS's emancipatory potential⁶⁰? From the very first occupation in Zuccotti Park, the dominant forces, i.e., Western governments, the right-wing forces, the mainstream media outlets, and the church, all engaged in a relentless ideological struggle whose ultimate goal was to control the attitude and beliefs⁶¹ of the protesters and thereby to preserve the hegemonic order from the challenges once posed by the OWS movement.

Apart from the employment of police brutality and violence to repress the protests, the ruling class also triggered legal repressive mechanisms to evict the occupiers and thus close down the encampments, exhausting the OWS movement⁶². Prominent Western leaders, from Tony Blair to Bill Clinton⁶³ and Barack Obama⁶⁴, worked hard to dilute the protests, reacting to the occupations with political clinching, indifference, or even cynically adopting the occupy language rather than authentically supporting and encouraging the movement. On the other hand, right-wing forces attempted to appropriate and coopt the public rage and frustrations of the protesters with the aim of creating a culture of fear and hate⁶⁵. Finally, the dominant forces of the neoliberal hegemony, through cultural institutions and in a biased ideological operation, artificially added labels to contemporary capitalism (i.e., 'financial' capitalism, 'speculative' capitalism, and the like) and deliberately blamed individuals and their attitudes (personal sins, individual corruption, consumerism, and greed) to eventually shift the discontent and anger of the protests to secondary targets rather than to the real problem of their age itself: an ideological hegemony - neoliberalism - that

⁵⁸ Gill 1993a, 37-8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 41-2.

⁶⁰ Žižek 2012a, 1.

⁶¹ Chomsky 2012a, 43.

⁶² White 2016, 29-33.

⁶³ Žižek 2012a, 73;83.

⁶⁴ Hedges 2012.

⁶⁵ Wallerstein 2011.

encourages such behaviors and expectations, and corrupts and erodes representative democracy⁶⁶.

A critical framing on the mainstream media

Even more flagrant and controversial was the response of mainstream media, though. From the lack of coverage and indifference towards the movement in its initial stage to the deliberately dismissive and condescending frames employed by the major outlets when the protests just became too loud to ignore⁶⁷, the Western mainstream media played the role of central antagonist to OWS. Although counter-hegemonic movements have had a historically complicated relationship with mass media⁶⁸ - which brought forth the need for creating alternative channels and communication systems so that the public could understand the protest from the perspective of its participants ⁶⁹ and thereby to tell their story internationally⁷⁰ - in the matter of OWS, there was an unprecedented and unrelenting media-orchestrated campaign of attacks and misinformation in order to discredit and dilute such a powerful and transformative event. While the demonstrators were depicted by the major outlets as ‘disorganized,’ ‘confused,’ ‘romantics,’ ⁷¹ ‘foolish,’ ‘ignorant,’ ⁷² ‘incomprehensible,’ ‘dangerous,’ ‘revolting,’ ⁷³ ‘nuts,’ ‘lunatics,’ and ‘fascist,’ ⁷⁴ the conservative media without hesitation manufactured its own narrative about OWS - noticeably a critical and unscrupulous one.

Arguably, such a dismissive and deliberate reaction to OWS illustrates the utter manipulation of mainstream media by the hegemonic forces of neoliberal capitalism, for the major media outlets serve the needs of corporations⁷⁵, i.e., the needs of the very systems of power the occupiers were condemning and seeking to topple⁷⁶. In addressing this issue in Gramsci terms, it is reasonable to identify the ideological operation of the dominant class

⁶⁶ Žižek 2012a, 77-89.

⁶⁷ Chomsky 2012a, 69-72; Baber 2015, 135; Wallerstein 2011; Gitlin 2013, 5-11; Žižek 2012a, 84-6; Writers for the 99% 2011, 167-176.

⁶⁸ Ferrari 2016, 144.

⁶⁹ Catalano and Creswell 2013, 667.

⁷⁰ Calhoun 2013, 28.

⁷¹ Baber 2015, 135.

⁷² Wallerstein 2011.

⁷³ Gitlin 2013, 5.

⁷⁴ Writers for the 99% 2011, 170.

⁷⁵ New York City General Assembly 2011.

⁷⁶ Hedges 2012.

through the manipulation of the cultural institutions - in this context, the mainstream media - in a resolute effort to undermine the potential and the extent of the challenge posed by OWS to the neoliberal hegemonic order. By doing so, the underpinnings of the consensual aspect of power - the acquiescence in the ruling class dominance⁷⁷ - upon which the current neoliberal capitalism rests prevailed over the revolutionary power of the counter-hegemonic forces whose ultimate goal, in Gramscian approach, is to construct an ethical state and society, in which the democratic empowerment and economic and social emancipation finally become universally attainable⁷⁸.

That being so, the relentless endeavors of the dominant class to neutralize the true dimension of OWS through the manipulation of the mainstream media effectually “killed the radical emancipatory potential of the events [...] and then grew flowers over the buried corpse”⁷⁹. This is precisely why it is so important to carry on a meticulous and comprehensive investigation of the complex relationship between OWS and the mainstream media. Therefore, the present analysis endeavors to unfold the subservience of the latter to the untrustworthy interests of the ruling class of the neoliberal capitalist world order through a careful and critical look into the coverage of the OWS movement in the major Western media outlets. To draw some relevant political and social explanations for the failure of OWS in promoting definitive structural changes in the hegemonic structures of the world order seems to be quite a reasonable and ethical motivation for undertaking this critical analysis, especially for someone who truly believes in the current crisis of the global neoliberal capitalism. Furthermore, the ultimate goal of this work is to contribute to the broad neo-Gramscian debate on the inevitable crisis of neoliberal capitalism and the self-defense of society against it⁸⁰, and to eventually provide helpful insights for future anti-hegemonic movements, because there will be a next wave of popular protest⁸¹, make no mistake.

In order to do so, this work first lays the groundwork for the critical assessment of the mainstream media’s coverage of OWS (to be carried out in the second part of this analysis): the following chapter (first) presents the research methodology to be employed in this social inquiry, as well as the reasons for addressing such an issue; the second chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the Gramscian approach and resorts to its basic tenets

⁷⁷ Cox 1993a, 51.

⁷⁸ Gill 1993a, 24-5.

⁷⁹ Žižek 2012a, 1-5.

⁸⁰ Gill 1993b, 2.

⁸¹ Hedges 2012.

as a guide to carry out this research. The work then goes on to its second part and, in the third chapter, assesses prominent literature already developed on this issue and summarizes the crucial insights provided by these key sources both on OWS itself and on the domain of the complex relationship between media (mainstream and social) and protests. Further on in the fourth chapter, the mainstream media's coverage of OWS is thoroughly and extensively analyzed, through a comprehensive and detailed investigation on the major accounts on the movement. Lastly, the fifth chapter consolidates the key findings of this analysis and then present some useful recommendations for future counter-hegemonic movements.

1. METHODOLOGY: ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY APPLIED TO SOCIAL INQUIRY

1.1. How to explain the mainstream media's coverage of OWS?

As briefly presented in the Introduction, the general quest of the present work is to explain the role played by the mainstream media during the OWS wave of protests and to answer how and why the former contributed to undermine and delegitimize the movement, and thereby to counterbalance its revolutionary potential. It is especially worth noting that this research endeavor - the critical assessment of the behavior of the mainstream media towards OWS - must be placed within the broader debate on neoliberal hegemony and world order from the neo-Gramscian perspective (this theoretical framework shall be explored in-depth in the next chapter).

Those who advocate such a theoretical approach essentially state that class relations - and consequently the reproduction of the neoliberal hegemony - are not limited to the economy and the political aspect of the state; rather they also encompass the cultural and ideological linkage with the civil society - therefore, an extended and integral concept of state is introduced, reflecting the organic fusion between the former and civil society⁸². Accordingly, cultural institutions, (political parties, unions, the church, the media, etc.) are essential instruments for the ruling class to perpetuate its dominance and to build the active consent of those over whom it rules⁸³. Thus, the mainstream media's coverage of the OWS movement (the subject of study in this work) shall be analyzed under these lenses, as this work presupposes - based on the theoretical background briefly presented above and on prior observations - that the major Western outlets deployed a conscious, unrelenting, and orchestrated strategy in order to manufacture their own narrative about OWS whose ultimate goal was to kill the radical emancipatory potential of the movement⁸⁴.

Furthermore, the research design to be employed in order to carry out this social inquiry is of primordial relevance and thereby must outline the conceptual framework and the methodological operations drawing on multiple accounts that illustrate the strategy

⁸² Gill and Law 1993, 93.

⁸³ Rupert 1993, 78-9.

⁸⁴ Žižek 2012a, 1-2.

deployed by the mainstream media throughout the coverage of the occupations and their further developments. It shall observe the main features and the contextual conditions of the phenomenon under study (the OWS movement and its relationship with the mainstream media) as well as how they relate to methodological concerns and method procedures. Accordingly, the outline of this research agenda stems from the metatheoretical (ontological and epistemological) position assumed in this work, which informs theoretical choices and thereby narrow down possible methodological choices - and, consequently, the proper methods - that best suit carrying out this critical analysis of the mainstream media's coverage of OWS.

Therefore, clarifying this research strategy and addressing the further issues that may arise in consequence of the premises and the argumentative logic that support its development is precisely the aim of this chapter, which is structured as follows: after this brief elucidation on the general topic to be addressed in this work and on the explanations to be given for this phenomenon, the next section presents a philosophical discussion on the Gramscian metatheoretical approach - its ontological and epistemological positions; once the metatheoretical foundations have been laid, the third section introduces the selected research methodology and the assumptions that underpin its research agenda (objectives, methods, and data sources); lastly, the fourth section provides the justification for the case selection and discusses its political and social relevance as well as scholarly applicability to the discipline of International Relations.

1.2. Metatheoretical reflections: ontological and epistemological dimensions

As outlined in the Introduction, the next chapter is exclusively devoted to introduce and discuss the prestigious work of Antonio Gramsci (1881-1937) and the application of this critical theory to the study of International Relations by some of the most prominent advocates of neo-Gramscianism (the works of Robert W. Cox and Stephen Gill are especially worth noting within this theoretical strand). Nevertheless, it is of great importance to analyze Gramsci's metatheoretical dimension at this stage - and thereby the ontological and epistemological positions it presupposes (that should be understood in terms of the

reality status and the “knowability” of the subjects of inquiry⁸⁵, respectively) and its reverberations on knowledge, reality, and social relations - for this is the very first phase of the research strategy that will set the foundations for the critical analysis carried out further on in this study.

Metatheoretical approaches are part of the broader debate on the philosophical issues involved in determining the theoretical framework that will guide research and, obviously, the way in which research is to be conducted and evaluated - methodology and methods. Therefore, philosophers of social science and International Relations theorists tend to understand it in terms of ontology and epistemology, which are usually permeated by ethics, social and political philosophy concerns⁸⁶. The contemporary debates on metatheory within the field of International Relations oppose two basic paradigms: the mainstream approach, which is based on the “philosophy of science” and advocates the adoption of elements of scientific theory in the field of international and social studies; and the reflectivist/interpretive approach, which rejects any parallel with the natural sciences and focuses mainly on practices related to meaning-making and knowledge claims⁸⁷. The latter metatheoretical strand is sometimes termed “critical international relations theory” and comprehends an entire array of schools of thought ranging from constructivism and post-structuralism to critical theory, which encompasses the neo-Gramscian approach. Thus, according to Stephen Gill⁸⁸, as “the central task of social science is to explain social action, social structure and social change” and as “there is no symmetry between the social and natural sciences with regard to concept formation and the logic of inquiry and explanation”⁸⁹, “the Gramscian approach is an epistemological and ontological critique of the empiricism and positivism that underpin the prevailing theorizations” in the field of international studies.

In this sense, the ontological critique advanced by the Gramscian perspective towards the orthodox-scientific mainstream approach to international studies (whose most well-known exponents are the realist school of thought and the liberal theories) develops along two basic principles: (i) the social radicalization of ontology and (ii) its ethical dimension. The former refers to the ontology of praxis or the engagement

⁸⁵ Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xi.

⁸⁶ Chernoff 2007, 5-6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 79-81.

⁸⁸ Gill 1993a, 21-2.

⁸⁹ Gunnell 1969, 168, as cited in Gill, 1993a, 21.

“in a practice of critique which aimed at uncovering and making explicit a social ontology - a process of social self-creation - which underlies and makes possible the capitalist mode of production, but which is systematically distorted and hidden from view by the characteristic institutional forms and social practices of capitalism. In the process of constructing this critique of capitalist social reality, ontology itself is radicalized; no longer viewed a priori, i.e., as prior to and constitutive of the reality which we can know, it becomes instead an ongoing social product, historically concrete and contestable.”⁹⁰

Thus, this historically-specific and socially-produced feature (the primary principle of Gramsci’s ontology) lays the groundwork for understanding the social reality in terms of the process of producing a world of objects, social relations and identities through the self-conscious activities of human social beings. It is, therefore, integral to the project of uncovering and actualizing latent revolutionary possibilities⁹¹. This premise is inherently linked to the ethical dimension - the second principle upon which the ontology is founded within Gramsci’s work - which is claimed to fundamentally direct the study of social relations within the field of International Relations⁹². Accordingly, the ethical aspect of Gramsci’s ontological conception must guide the ultimate political task of critical social and international theory, and most specifically, the neo-Gramscian approach to the field of international studies:

“the normative goal of the Gramscian approach is to move towards the solution of the fundamental problem of political philosophy: the nature of the good society and thus, politically, the construction of an ‘ethical’ state and a society in which personal development, rational reflection, open debate, democratic empowerment and economic and social liberation can become more widely attainable.”⁹³

According to the Aristotelian view towards one of the fundamental philosophical problems - politics as the search to set the conditions for the ‘good society’ - the Gramscian ontology aims, in turn, to conceive and to encourage the development of an alternative form to the fascist and capitalist state-society complexes, built upon the moral leadership of the

⁹⁰ Rupert 1993, 67-8.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 82-3.

⁹² Gill 2008, 11.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 19

working-class⁹⁴ and redefined away from these totalizing projects⁹⁵. Thus in order to inspire the debate within the critical, social, and international theory's agenda towards a transformative resistance through the conceptualization and identification of potentials for emancipation and liberation, sustainable social and human development, and conditions for human security, the Gramscian ontology "insists upon an ethical dimension to analysis, so that the questions of justice, legitimacy and moral credibility are integrated sociologically into the whole and into many of its key concepts"⁹⁶.

Hence, it inevitably establishes the linkage between the ontological and the epistemological dimensions of the Gramscian metatheoretical position, and thereby directs its application to the discipline of International Relations. Considering the Gramscian approach - and the critical social theory overall - as diametrically opposed to the objectivist/positivist metatheoretical paradigm (which, in accordance with natural sciences, is based on a priori knowledge and reality, and claims for value-free and neutral inquiry in ways that allow for verification or falsification⁹⁷), social scientific explanation must, therefore, "refer to (structural) elements in the constitution of society that cannot be observed through the senses, structures that are nevertheless real and subject to change"⁹⁸. Thus, concepts that are primordial for the Gramscian critique of the capitalist mode of production and the social reality it entails (and hence the structures, institutions and processes of neoliberal hegemonic order) - and for this work as well - such as ideology, hegemony, and the power of capital play a critical and decisive role in the character of knowledge for critical social theory and in the social scientific explanation of the phenomena at issue⁹⁹. As a matter of fact, this work explores a wide range of concepts that cannot be observed through the senses or via experiments, and argues that central to the understanding of the mainstream media's coverage of the OWS movement are the ideological operation and the manipulation and submission of cultural institutions to the power of capital (the ruling class) aimed at reproducing the neoliberal hegemony and at building the ideological consent over the ruled classes.

The metatheoretical debate about the nature and foundations of International Relations theory (the character of knowledge - the epistemological dimension - and the

⁹⁴ Cox 1993a, 49.

⁹⁵ Gill 1993b, 1-2.

⁹⁶ Gill 2008, 18-9.

⁹⁷ Chernoff 2007, 79-85.

⁹⁸ Gill 2008, 12.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 11-4.

nature of social reality - the ontological dimension), which confronts the conventional objectivist/positivist and the reflectivist/interpretive approaches, consequently establishes distinct research methodologies. Fred Chernoff outlines an interesting and quite clarifying distinction between these paradigms, the “inside” interpretive and the “outside” naturalist approaches:

“According to the outside approach, we can study IR by searching for general, lawlike regular patterns of behavior and causal relationships that parallel those that natural scientists seek in studying the natural world. But according to the inside approach, because causal connections are not a major feature of the social world, we should focus on the study of meanings and meaning systems. For example, we must try to discern what meanings actors attach to the actions of others by trying to “get inside” the actors’ thought processes.”¹⁰⁰

As previously discussed, Gramsci’s thought and its application to the study of International Relations fit into the “inside” perspective (as part of the “critical international relations” metatheoretical strand) and, therefore, in contrast to the mainstream scientific/naturalist approach (which emphasizes causal reasoning and identifying regularities in the behavior of social actors), are concerned with explanation/understanding, rather than causality. Hence this primary focus on explanation accounts for the proper use of the reflectivist/interpretive terminology because this methodological approach transcends orthodox theorizations, which are built upon hypothesizing of causal relationships, entailing the rejection of all forms of methodological individualism and methodological reductionism. Eventually, it culminates in a theoretical/methodological move towards a reflexive and dynamic form of explanation of the constitution of world orders (and the social relations and social structures that form their foundations) and the determination of the nature, limits, and potentials for political action in any given era¹⁰¹. Therefore the explanatory power of Gramscian epistemology lies in understanding the primordial constitution of knowledge as the process of decoding meanings of concepts which, albeit loose and elastic, attain precision “when brought into contact with a particular situation which it helps to explain - a contact which also develops the meaning of the concept”¹⁰². Accordingly, it justifies the focus of the

¹⁰⁰ Chernoff 2007, 181-2.

¹⁰¹ Gill 2008, xviii; 14.

¹⁰² Cox 1993a, 50.

interpretive approach on the social context and thereby its ultimate emphasis on the non-uniformity of social reality and the necessity of appreciating the rationality of the other¹⁰³. In other words, it means that there is no systematic, universalistic and non-historical knowledge: “for interpretive researchers, concepts are embedded within a literature, becoming part of the historical background that forms the context for scholarly thinking; the attempt to specify them once and for all, as universal constructs, violates interpretive presuppositions about the historical locatedness of scholars and actors”¹⁰⁴.

Apart from the epistemological contribution of Gramsci’s thought regarding the character of knowledge, it also has played a decisive part in unfolding the process of social struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives and principles that underpin the very foundations of knowledge. Therefore, the Gramscian criticism of positivist/scientific metatheory must be politically translated into a critique of the hegemonic perspectives within International Relations theory for not probing deeply enough into the complex role of ideas and consciousness, and the interaction of knowledge systems with the rest of the historical process¹⁰⁵, and for exercising influence on people’s ideas and perceptions in a way that reaffirms the privileged position of the hegemonic forces in society¹⁰⁶. And it is precisely because Gramsci contends that reality is produced by human will and that this process of producing reality entails the historical transformation of society and its social structure that humans are potentially capable of self-consciously guiding this process and thereby can determine their own process of becoming¹⁰⁷. Human emancipation (and thus to bring about structural social changes), therefore, is the ultimate goal of counter-hegemonic metatheoretical approaches towards the study of International Relations. Thus, such an emancipatory ambition must conduct the appropriate interpretive research strategy for the study of the mainstream media’s coverage of the OWS movement.

¹⁰³ Wallerstein 1999, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xvii.

¹⁰⁵ Gill 1993a, 44-8.

¹⁰⁶ Chernoff 2008, 173-4.

¹⁰⁷ Rupert 1993, 77-8.

1.3. The correspondence between Gramsci's metatheory and interpretive research

Bearing in mind that epistemological and ontological claims are mutually implicating, and thereby reflect on the methodological choices¹⁰⁸, and in accordance with Gramscian metatheoretical approach discussed above, the search for social scientific explanation of phenomena representing the social relations and social structures that permeate the issues studied within the field of International Relations requires a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the evidence upon which the researcher shall draw their conclusions. Moreover, the back-and-forth relationship between the collected data and the theoretical approach that provides the conceptual framework for the investigation of a specific phenomenon also demands deep interpretation of sufficiently documented discursive/meaning-making patterns. Therefore, the primordial character of practical (context-dependent) knowledge¹⁰⁹ alongside the focus on interrogation of within-case evidence¹¹⁰ - aimed at explaining phenomena underpinned by central concepts for the study of International Relations (all of which have particular and specific meanings under social conditions that are shaped by the structures, institutions, and processes of neoliberal capitalism) - drive the methodological choices implemented in this work: a research agenda built upon a case study.

The literature on qualitative research methodology towards the study of political sciences and International Relations has provided a wide range of definitions for the term "case study" stressing out its relation with the general line of research, its internal validation methods, and the number of cases investigated in the research (single-case or small-N cases)¹¹¹. Although all the meanings attributed to the term "case study" are, to some extent, valid and useful to outline the practices of social inquiry, this work will resort to Robert Yin's recommendation for the employment of a case study design and the associated succinct definition of the term provided by John Gerring, though a fundamental caveat concerning his definition shall be issued below. In accordance with Yin's exposition:

¹⁰⁸ Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xviii.

¹⁰⁹ Flyvbjerg 2006, 221-4.

¹¹⁰ Gerring 2006a, 1.

¹¹¹ Gerring 2004, 341-2.

“a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.”¹¹²

That being so, most of the circumstances that lead to the choice for carrying out a case study listed by Yin are met in this work. First of all, as previously detailed in this chapter, the general quest of this analysis is to critically investigate the mainstream media’s coverage of the OWS movement and thereby to explain how and why it played a decisive part in neutralizing the true dimension of the occupations and, ultimately, OWS’s emancipatory promises. Secondly, the explanation to be provided for these questions will not develop upon experimental methodological operations, i.e., through controlling variables, due two main reasons: (i) it is not possible - or even reasonable - to manipulate (isolating/neutralizing) the behavior of the agents, for they are imbued with concepts that are not empirically observable, and (ii) the epistemological orientation of this work towards understanding the processes, and explaining the dynamics and the conditions of possibilities that emerged from the phenomenon under study, rather than to discern the causal relationship between variables. Therefore, the research design in a reflectivist/interpretive approach will not operate through concepts of dependent and independent variables. Lastly, there is a great interest in the contextual conditions that underpinned the controversial relationship between the mainstream media and OWS. It is assumed that the revolutionary and the emancipatory premises of the movement and thereby the existential threat it had posed to the establishment - the long-lasting socio, political, economic, and cultural structures that sustain the neoliberal capitalist hegemonic order - triggered the deliberately condescending and dismissive frames and tone employed by mainstream media throughout the coverage the occupations. Accordingly, it is fundamental to grasp the power relations that pervaded each and every facet of this relation. In order to do so, it is necessary to explore the context within which the phenomenon under study took place and to position it within the broader debate concerning the achievement and reproduction of neoliberal hegemony.

Following the correspondence between Yin’s recommendations and the set of conditions guiding the research agenda carried out in this work, the next step to adequately

¹¹² Yin 2003, as cited in Baxter and Jack 2008, 545.

lay the groundwork for the outline of the chosen research design is to present a definition for the very term “case study”. In his seminal book on case study research design and the practices and principles that guide its use in the field of International Relations and political science, John Gerring defines a case study “as the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)”¹¹³. Furthermore, he emphasizes that it also presupposes a relatively bounded phenomenon, hence both spatially and timely delimited¹¹⁴.

Nevertheless, a necessary caveat must be issued concerning the purpose of case studies as stressed by Gerring. Although he does not specifically mean ‘generalization’, or the attempt to generalize beyond the data¹¹⁵ (and thereby drawing broad inferences from observations and findings of one particular study towards unexamined subjects and contexts), one may presume from the second sentence of his definition that the researcher’s goal is to understand a larger class of similar units. The attention Gerring draws to the objective of a case study - to discover something about a broader population of cases - is such that he even coins a specific definition for the subset of case studies exclusively aimed at elucidating features specific to a particular case. Accordingly, a ‘single-outcome study’ refers to a case study that aims “to investigate a bounded unit in an attempt to elucidate a single outcome occurring within that unit”¹¹⁶. Furthermore, Gerring draws a distinction in line with the purpose of the case studies - based on the attempt to or not to generalize beyond the immediate data - ranging within a nomothetic/idiographic scale of research goals (in which, at one extreme, ‘nomothetic’ implies the study of a population of cases through intensive study of one phenomenon and, at the other extreme, ‘idiographic’ implies a case study that is narrowly scoped to one particular - relatively bounded - unit¹¹⁷).

However, generalizations within the study of International Relations are quite ambiguous and debatable due to the lack of homogeneity of the universe that the researcher is attempting to understand. As discussed in the previous section, social phenomena are underpinned by concepts that attain precision only when brought into contact with a specific situation, claiming a context-dependent, historical, and interpretive knowledge. On the other hand, the investigation of a particular outcome of special importance may reflect some quite

¹¹³ Gerring 2006b, 20.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 17-9.

¹¹⁵ Levy 2008, 5.

¹¹⁶ Gerring 2006c, 707.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 709-710.

comprehensive and widely-applicable properties of other cases of the population in which the case study is comprised - accordingly, some additional cases may be brought into the analysis in the peripheral way as they carry an important burden in the study, but are not formally accounted for in the research design¹¹⁸ (such as the Arab Spring, discussed in the Introduction, and the social movements that erupted worldwide throughout the decade, which shall be assessed further on in this work). Therefore, the division that categorizes research agendas is actually a bit more tenuous than Gerring claims.

This idiographic/nomothetic distinction is also stressed by Jack Levy, although the typology he proposes is based on the theoretical purpose of case studies. Even though he focuses on the role of case studies in developing causal explanations - which deviates somewhat from the epistemological position assumed and consequently from the research objectives pursued in this work - it provides a quite useful contribution for shedding some light on the relation between theoretical and methodological frameworks. Thus, Levy's "basic typology consists of *idiographic* case studies, which aim to describe, explain, or interpret a particular "case" and which can be either inductive or theory-guided; *hypothesis generating case studies*; *hypothesis testing cases*" and "*plausibility probes*, which are an intermediary step between hypothesis generation and hypothesis testing and which include "illustrative" case studies"¹¹⁹. Unlike the first category of case studies ('ideographic') that may be merely descriptive/interpretive - lacking an explicit theoretical framework to guide the empirical analysis - or explicitly structured by a well-developed theoretical set of propositions, the three last classifications are, according to their ultimate purpose, nomothetic, for these case studies aim to generalize beyond the immediate data¹²⁰. Therefore, as Levy's typology is developed in correspondence to Gerring's ideographic/nomothetic distinction, though the former goes a step forward in referring to the theoretical purpose of the case study, the same caution must be taken when defining the research objectives.

¹¹⁸ Gerring 2006b, 22. Gerring argues that a case study may resort to additional cases and thereby "may combine the two elements – an intensive case study and a more superficial analysis conducted on a larger sample. These additional cases are often brought into the analysis in a peripheral way - typically, in an introductory or concluding section of the paper or the book. Often, these peripheral cases are surveyed through a quick reading of the secondary literature or through a statistical analysis. Sometimes, the status of these informal cases is left implicit (they are not theorized as part of the formal research design). This may be warranted in circumstances where the relevant comparison or contrast between the formal case(s) under intensive study and the peripheral cases is obvious."

¹¹⁹ Levy 2008, 3.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 4-7.

Bearing in mind that this analysis is carried out in harmony with Gramscian metatheory and thereby advances a social/ethical ontology towards the study of International Relations, its ultimate purpose is to hopefully contribute to the broader process of social self-creation, which finally uncovers and actualizes latent revolutionary possibilities leading to the emancipation and liberation of society from the disintegrating and oppressive forces of neoliberal capitalist hegemony. Therefore, it transcends the aim of elucidating a single outcome occurring within the specific phenomenon under analysis in this case study. Nonetheless, the primary research objective that guides this social inquiry is to provide a theoretically and methodologically self-conscious explanation of the mainstream media's response to the OWS movement, even though it may intrinsically reflect some widely shared properties of the class of phenomena within which the subject under study is comprised: the power dynamics between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic social forces. Consequently, taking into consideration the research objectives that drive this work (to explain the role played by the mainstream media during the OWS wave of protests and to play a part in the academic debate of critical social and international theory aimed to conceptualize and to identify potentials for emancipation and liberation¹²¹), this research project should be situated somewhere on the borderline between the ideographic and nomothetic agendas, leaning sometimes to one extreme, sometimes to the other. Furthermore, as it is explicitly structured by a well-developed theoretical framework (resorting to Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory and the neo-Gramscian approach applied to the study of International Relations - whose tenets will be detailed and discussed in the next chapter) and considering the reflexive, the back-and-forth relationship between theory and evidence advanced in this work, it should be, therefore, envisaged as a hypothesis testing case.

Lastly, for the purpose of carrying out this interpretive analysis of the mainstream media's coverage of the OWS movement in accordance with the research agenda outlined above, to a great extent this work resorts to the content produced by the major Western media outlets regarding OWS as this is the very issue under study here. Inasmuch as they provide a factual account of the occupations and its further developments, referring to the chronology of events through historical information and first-hand evidence, they serve a descriptive purpose and thereby shall be classified as primary sources. On the other hand, insofar as this evidence is sometimes (most of the time, actually) interpreted and/or has opinion interjected

¹²¹ Gill 2008, xviii.

and thereby reveals concerted efforts to sway public opinion (albeit implicitly), it can also be considered as secondary sources¹²². Besides that, this work also relies largely on a wide array of journal articles and academic books that are essential to fully grasp the historical, situational, and communication contexts within which the phenomenon under study took place, as they evaluate, interpret, and synthesize primary sources. These secondary sources are of the utmost importance to substantiate the in-depth analysis of the possible interpretations of the mainstream media's behavior toward the OWS movement, inasmuch as they comprehensively encompass the works of the most prominent and distinguished scholars writing on the field of international studies and political science. Finally, it is especially worth noting in this summary of the source material that this distinction between primary and secondary sources (as raw and interpreted data, respectively) is quite problematic, for the data is inevitably constituted by the human researcher's observation and thereby are always interpreted and subject to participatory interactions, so the interpretive moment cannot be escaped. Thus, so-called primary sources should be regarded as the least interpreted sources in contrast to succeeding stages in the research process - the secondary sources¹²³. Accordingly, all evidence-gathering methods are interpretive to a greater or lesser extent¹²⁴.

1.4. So, why OWS?

The selection of a case for in-depth interpretive analysis may follow different strategies in order to serve for many purposes¹²⁵. However, most of the case selection techniques applied to the field of international studies and political science rely heavily on positivist presuppositions and assumptions, stressing differences both in procedure and in rationales¹²⁶ and thereby deviating themselves from the metatheoretical position and the research objectives pursued in this work. Therefore, in contrast to the case selection techniques aimed at building and testing general causal theories¹²⁷, where data for key variables are available across a large sample¹²⁸, and that thereby explore cross-case

¹²² Thies 2002, 356-7.

¹²³ Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xviii-xix.

¹²⁴ Gerring 2006d, 69-70.

¹²⁵ Seawright, 2006; Seawright and Gerring 2008; Flyvbjerg 2006, 229-233; Van Evera 1997, 77-88.

¹²⁶ Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xv.

¹²⁷ Levy 2008, 7-8.

¹²⁸ Van Evera 1997, 79.

characteristics¹²⁹, the justification of the case selection to evidence this interpretive empirical research shall be provided in terms of its relevance to the field of knowledge within which the research is conducted and its potential for producing valuable insights to the broad academic debate dealing with issues that the case unfolds.

In this sense, the relevance of OWS as an anti-hegemonic grassroots movement and as an expression of people's power¹³⁰ itself shall become clearer in light of the literature review presented in the third chapter. The interchange of interpretations on the movement - its stories and constructs - with prominent advocates of the neo-Marxist approach towards the field of International Relations and critical social studies shall provide the academic background that is of utmost importance to lay the groundwork for addressing the prior expectations - which are, in turn, grounded both in the research literature and in some prior knowledge of the study setting. Despite the claims that may arise regarding selection bias, the OWS case was indeed selected according to the very expectations that it may explain the controversial and relentless strategies employed by the mainstream media when covering anti-hegemonic movements, entailing a "philosophical rigor" at the expense of the positivist "procedural rigor"¹³¹. On the theoretical level, this social inquiry drawn upon the interpretive empirical research of the selected OWS case is expected to endorse Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory, which emphasizes the central role of a system of rule premised more upon consensual aspects of power rather than direct coercion to explain the maintenance of hegemony. Thus, this case shall illustrate the instrumentalization of the media to ultimately serve the interests of the neoliberal hegemony and thereby how the "cultural apparatus serves to consolidate and create (directly and indirectly) the cultural 'limits of the possible' for social thought and political action"¹³². Needless to say, the insights this case study may produce will hopefully promote the ethical dimension in the study of social relations and eventually play a part the academic debate on the conditions of possibility for emancipation from the current social structures that underpin the neoliberal capitalist world order in unquestionable accordance with the social ontology advanced in Gramsci's metatheory.

¹²⁹ Seawright, 2006, 89-90.

¹³⁰ Kellner 2013, 255.

¹³¹ Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xvi.

¹³² Gill 2008, 14.

2. GRAMSCI'S HISTORICAL MATERIALISM, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND HEGEMONY

2.1. Gramsci and International Relations

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is one of the most distinguished intellectuals of the twentieth century, probably the most well-known and influential Italian thinker of his time¹³³, and perhaps the most original Marxist thinker of his generation¹³⁴. However, although he has influenced countless scholars and students from several academic disciplines, the dissemination of Gramsci's work and thought basically relied upon the massive contribution of other scholars in methodologically organizing and analyzing his writings¹³⁵ - which were eventually made tangible and accessible for various currents of Gramscian scholarship worldwide - for they would only come to light a few decades after his death. The ten-year odyssey throughout Italian fascist prisons was extremely deleterious for his health, as Gramsci was plagued by illnesses and lifelong physical pain due to a spine malformation that stunted his growth, and thereby could have no other final outcome than the death¹³⁶ of the man who devoted his best days to the constitution, and later to the renewal and organization of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) - and it was precisely for being the party leader that Gramsci was sentenced to prison by the fascist-dominated Italian legislature¹³⁷.

Yet the years of imprisonment in Italian fascist jails were rich with intellectual achievements and culminated in Gramsci's most important writings: the notebooks he kept while imprisoned (apart from the letters he wrote to friends and family). Thus, the Prison Notebooks¹³⁸ are the greatest legacy of Gramsci for various disciplines and, ultimately, to contemporary knowledge overall, as the large range of his intellectual interests encompasses reflections on philosophy, political theory, linguistics, Italian history and culture, and on the works of other intellectuals. Amongst his many contributions to these fields of study is his theory of hegemony, employed to unveil the mechanisms and modulations of power in

¹³³ Hobsbawn 2010, 7-8

¹³⁴ Buttgieg 2002, 67.

¹³⁵ For more on the life and work of Antonio Gramsci, see Santucci (2010) and Alastair (2016).

¹³⁶ Rosengarten n.d.

¹³⁷ Santucci 2010, 164-6.

¹³⁸ Gramsci 1971.

capitalist societies that purport to be democratic¹³⁹ and, consequently, the terminology he used and that eventually became key words for the critical analysis of the social relations and the social structures currently reproduced within the capitalist order and of the mainstream approach towards knowledge and reality. The theoretical and practical meanings Gramsci attached to terms such as ‘hegemony’, ‘civil society’, ‘historic bloc’, and ‘organic intellectuals’ (which shall be explored in the next sections of this chapter) are fundamental for the twin task Gramsci dedicated himself throughout his imprisonment, “of understanding the reasons underlying both the successes and the failures of socialism on a global scale, and of elaborating a feasible program for the realization of a socialist vision within the really existing conditions that prevailed in the world”¹⁴⁰.

Although Gramsci’s work has acquired, rightfully, the status of ‘classic’ writings, it distinguishes from other classic texts because it invites “the reader, even today, to become involved in an active - one could even say participatory - encounter with ideas and lines of thinking which, in the case of the Prison Notebooks, remain always in a fluid process of elaboration, reformulation, revision, amplification, etc.”¹⁴¹ Needless to say, Gramsci influenced a wide array of fields of study, ranging from political science and critical theory to cultural studies and politics, inasmuch as his writings “have been read and commented upon by historians and philosophers, literary figures and theater historians, scientists, party leaders and militants, students and teachers, who come from the most diverse ideological and political persuasions”¹⁴². More precisely - and aligned to the interests of this work - Gramsci has heavily influenced a whole theoretical strand within the studies of International Relations and International Political Economy.

Even though the international studies were not his primary concern and thereby most of the Gramscian scholarship predominately focused on the analysis of national social formations in particular historical periods (as he argued that this was the initial level at which the state and civil society should be analyzed, and where the foundations of social hegemonies were built)¹⁴³, Gramsci’s work must not be strictly confined to the national level, for he holds that “it is also necessary to take into account the fact that international relations intertwine with these internal relations of nation-states, creating new, unique and

¹³⁹ Buttigieg 1995, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Rosengarten n.d.

¹⁴¹ Buttigieg 2010, 12.

¹⁴² Santucci 2010, 29.

¹⁴³ Gill 2008, 3.

historically concrete combinations”¹⁴⁴. Hence, following his emancipatory project, both the notions of civil society and of hegemony must not be circumscribed by the national boundaries, because the comprehensive transformation of social reality through the creation of an alternative worldview and a new form of political organization based on participatory and consensual practices - a transformative praxis - occurs not only within a nation and between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and worldwide field, enabling the active participation of counter-hegemonic forces in the construction of a global political community ¹⁴⁵. Accordingly, as the global system needs to be conceived as a totality, the social forces that operate within the social relations and structures of that system cannot be territorially determined¹⁴⁶. Indeed, Gramsci’s theoretical assumptions are increasingly suitable for the study of contemporary International Relations insofar as the power and logic of capital become more and more entrenched in everyday life¹⁴⁷ and as power dramatically shifts from labor to capital in the current process of global restructuring the capitalist mode of production¹⁴⁸.

Since the conventional separation of politics, economics, and society becomes insufficient to grasp the main changes of social structures both at the national and the international level, the academic debate in International Relations is naturally compelled to understand the configuration of social forces, its economic basis, ideological expressions, and form of political authority as an interactive whole ¹⁴⁹. Correspondingly, the neo-Gramscian perspective proceeds

“from the premise that international relations are an aspect of global social development, in which states function to articulate the conditions of social production and power between rulers and ruled, and between states as such. As each political unit combines within itself a historically concrete array of social forces, reflecting the unequal development of different fragments of an immanent world society, state formation and international relations reflect the friction on the road to global integration in a most acute way, as war linked to social revolution.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ Gramsci 1971, 182.

¹⁴⁵ Rupert 1993, 79;87.

¹⁴⁶ Gill 1993a, 41-2.

¹⁴⁷ Gill 2008, 11-4.

¹⁴⁸ Cox 1993b, 259-262.

¹⁴⁹ Cox 1993b, 259.

¹⁵⁰ van der Pijl 1993, 237.

Thus the core concepts of Gramsci's thought are appropriately applied to the study of International Relations through the elaboration of historically integrated, dialectical forms of explanation appropriating the conditions of the current developments within the international level and thereby transcending the distinctions between political theory and empirical theory¹⁵¹. Its main contribution to the theoretical debate within the discipline of International Relations is to overcome the gap between structure and agency through the combination of both the normative and material, structural and existential (behavioral, relational) dimensions of social relations¹⁵². Thus, since the 1980s and 1990s, the 'Gramscian School'¹⁵³ has theoretically and methodologically addressed issues on the nature of culture, ideology, state, civil society, and hegemony in the current neoliberal capitalist world order in accordance with the metatheoretical dimensions of Gramsci's thought (as discussed in the previous chapter) - which are also assumed in this work - and thereby entailing a critique of hegemonic theorization in the fields of political economy and International Relations, for it essentially presupposes a historical materialist perspective towards international studies.

The historical materialism advanced in the Gramscian approach bears the primordial emphasis on the historical specificity of the social relations that are embedded in their proper socio-historical context and hence are socially produced and historically mutable. On that account, the social processes and concepts underpinning reality are continually reproduced and adjusted to historical circumstances - and thus historically specific since their importance and meaning develop and change over time - and thereby cannot be determined a priori or understood as immediately natural and universal¹⁵⁴. As such, the study of social reality aimed at achieving political and social change (Gramsci's concerns with the unification of theory and practice reflect this ontological commitment as discussed in the previous chapter) cannot take place in a vacuum of abstraction, but only under specific historical circumstances¹⁵⁵. More specifically, Gramsci's historicism is therefore non-

¹⁵¹ Gill 1993b, 1-2.

¹⁵² Gill and Law 1993, 93-4.

¹⁵³ Gill 1993b, 2-5. Gill acknowledges that there is not consensual interpretation of Gramsci thoughts concerning social theory (and thereby that there is no Gramscian or 'Italian' School, so to speak). He uses the term to refer to "clusters of scholars working in ways that address some of the questions raised and posed in Gramscian terms, across different disciplines, in a large number of countries. These scholars have begun to communicate, and to participate in joint conferences, and have thus begun to form the embryo of a global research community. Some research is of practical consequence insofar as it is linked in different ways to supporting the activity of socialist and progressive political parties and social movements".

¹⁵⁴ Rupert 1993, 69.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 77-8

structuralist insofar as it conceives history and social change as cumulative, endless, yet non-repetitive processes, with different time patterns, and historical change as the consequence of collective and self-conscious action of humans¹⁵⁶, which are, in turn, transformed (both their social lives and nature) through the very process of producing reality. Consequently, the historical necessity that Gramsci holds throughout his critical analysis of the historically concrete struggles in the advanced capitalist societies

“implies that social interaction and political change takes place within what can be called the 'limits of the possible', limits which, however, are not fixed and immutable but exist within the dialectics of a given social structure (comprising the inter-subjective aspect of ideas, ideologies and theories, social institutions, and a prevailing socio-economic system and set of power relations). The dialectical aspect of this is historical: although social action is constrained by, and constituted within, prevailing social structures, those structures are transformed by agency.”¹⁵⁷

That being so, the application of the Gramscian approach towards international studies stands as an epistemological and ontological critique of the empiricism and positivism that underpin the International Relations mainstream traditions (as highlighted in the first chapter of this work). Inasmuch as the neo-Gramscian historical materialist perspective “looks at the system from the bottom upwards, as well as the top downwards, in a dialectical appraisal of a given historical situation”¹⁵⁸, it contrasts with the dominant discourse in International Relations and International Political Economy studies, such as the neo-realist theory with its ahistorical nature (and thus portraying a set of social relations as natural and universal), its narrow and incomplete foundational theoretical abstractions and its search for parsimonious explanations relative to extremely complex objects of analysis¹⁵⁹. Nevertheless, the neo-Gramscian approach to international studies not only diametrically opposes the International Relations mainstream theories, but it also detaches from the crudely materialist, positivistic, and mechanically economic interpretations of Marxism, in that it focuses on a dual perspective on social politics, encompassing both state and society domains, coercive and consensual forms of power, military and cultural aspects of

¹⁵⁶ Gill 1993a, 22-3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 23.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁵⁹ Rupert 1993, 82-3; Gill 1993a, 46.

struggle¹⁶⁰. Thus, Gramsci's work is centered upon the state, upon the relationship of civil society and the state, and upon the relationship of politics, ethics and, most importantly, ideology to the capitalist mode of production¹⁶¹. Gramsci's originality, therefore, lies in emphasizing the consensual aspect of power and thus the ideological dimensions of the apparatus and mechanisms of the dominance of the ruling class. What's more, the neo-Gramscian theory applies this dialectical approach to the study of International Relations in order to explain the constitution and issues of world orders and the determination of the nature, limits and potentials for political action by exploring the relationship between ideas, institutions, and material forces (comprising therefore both the ideological and the material aspects of power).

As previously indicated, central to Gramsci's political theory - and, consequently, to the neo-Gramscian approach towards international studies - is the ensemble of social relations configured by social structures and thereby how they relate to the concepts of 'hegemony', 'historic bloc', and 'organic intellectuals'. Therefore, each of these concepts shall be explored in detail - the meaning Gramsci attached to them and their implications to social science explanation - in the next sections of this chapter in order to lay the theoretical groundwork for explaining the role played by the mainstream media during the OWS wave of protests and for positioning it within the broader project of achievement and reproduction of the neoliberal capitalist hegemony.

2.2. Hegemony and the enlarged state

Gramsci's thoughts were consistently geared towards the practical purpose of political action (which should be understood in terms of the 'ontology of praxis'¹⁶², or 'philosophy of praxis'¹⁶³, as discussed in the previous chapter), i.e., to the possibilities of bringing about a comprehensive transformation of social reality through the creation of an alternative form of state and society based on working-class leadership. Insofar as Gramsci was concerned with the increasing entrenchment of capitalism within Western societies, his understanding of the concept of hegemony becomes particularly valuable for fully grasping the relation between the capitalist mode of production and the reproduction of the dominance

¹⁶⁰ Rupert 1993, 76-7.

¹⁶¹ Cox 1993a, 49-51.

¹⁶² Rupert 1993, 82-3.

¹⁶³ Cox 1993a, 49-50.

of the ruling class. Inasmuch as he emphasized the ideological aspects of power, the traditional conception of hegemony relying entirely upon material capacities and coercive instruments becomes inadequate for understanding the ruled class' conformity of behavior. Gramsci's approach exhorts to examine not only the productive and military capabilities of the state - which he sees as the organ of the dominant group, destined to create favorable conditions for its maximum expansion¹⁶⁴ - but also to investigate how ideology is employed in order to both construct and legitimate a hegemonic order¹⁶⁵. It is, therefore, fundamental to comprise the consensual aspects of power as well. Consequently, civil society and, most specifically, the underpinnings of the political structure within civil society - the systems of thought and social institutions - play quite a decisive role in the acquiescence to ruling class leadership, and thereby are of utmost relevance for Gramsci, who was chiefly concerned with "the political and ideological struggle in the advanced capitalist societies of the West - where civil society is highly developed and capitalist class power has permeated and shaped the cultural institutions of society"¹⁶⁶. In a nutshell, according to Gramsci, the site of hegemony is civil society, as this is the arena wherein the ruling class extends and reinforces its power by consensual means¹⁶⁷.

As a matter of fact, the ideological component underpinning Gramsci's notion of hegemony entailed a positive understanding of civil society as a potentially revolutionary terrain in which ideological struggles take place. Accordingly, Gramsci goes beyond Marx's narrowed and negative vision of 'ideology' and 'civil society' (understood as self-limiting forms of consciousness which characterize capitalist social relations) inasmuch as he refers to civil society in a somewhat broader way than did Marx, designating, therefore, an area of cultural and ideological linkage between social relations in the economic and the political aspect of the state¹⁶⁸. Thus, civil society is a key concept for Gramsci's work and is conceived as

"the various forms of voluntary association and it constitutes the moment of transition from economic structure to political society, the social realm in which mere corporate interests (defined by a group's position in the mode of production) can be transformed into broader, more universal, political aspirations. For Gramsci,

¹⁶⁴ Gramsci 1971, 182

¹⁶⁵ Gills 1993, 186.

¹⁶⁶ Rupert 1993, 78.

¹⁶⁷ Buttgieg 1995, 26

¹⁶⁸ Rupert 1993, 78-9.

civil society is the primary political realm, the realm in which all of the dynamics of identity formation, ideological struggle, the activities of intellectuals, and the construction of hegemony (whether 'ethical' or based on fraud) takes place. Civil society is the context in which one becomes conscious and first engages in political action. Civil society is where the aggregation of interests takes place, where narrow interests are transformed into more universal views as ideologies are adopted or amended and alliances formed.”¹⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Gramsci acknowledged that in advanced capitalist societies, the ruling class had established its social power as hegemony over civil society specifically through the dominance and control of the cultural institutions that pervade it, such as political parties, unions, church, the educational system, the press, art and literature, i.e., all the institutions that help to shape the behavior and expectations of society suitably for the hegemonic social order¹⁷⁰. Therefore, the system of rule through which the ruling class exercises its dominance is premised mainly upon consensual aspects of power (coercion, albeit latent, is only applied in marginal cases), which are, in turn, built through these institutions, and upon a cultural apparatus. Thus, the production of consent involves the creation and distribution of cultural products (which must be understood in terms of discursive patterns, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs), and these ultimately constrain the cultural ‘limits of the possible’ for social thought and political action¹⁷¹. The adherence to ideologically universalized principles that are promoted by these cultural institutions of civil society and eventually are accepted or acquiesced to by the subordinate social forces is therefore crucial for achieving and sustaining the hegemony of the ruling class¹⁷².

Among these cultural institutions, the media has consistently been instrumentalized so as to enable the achievement and reproduction of the neoliberal hegemony as it has fostered the ideological association of the political and economic domains of the state - which are certainly subject to the rule of the dominant class - and civil society, transforming the neoliberal agenda into a universal and natural set of interests and aspirations. Thus whether manufacturing a consistent discursive narrative in accordance with the dominant neoliberal ideology - and thereby reproducing the capitalist mode of production and the

¹⁶⁹ Augelli and Murphy 1993, 129.

¹⁷⁰ Cox 1993a, 51.

¹⁷¹ Gill 2008, 14.

¹⁷² Cox 1993b, 264-5.

supremacy of capital over social relations - or shifting the target of counter-hegemonic expressions so as to dilute their mobilization potential and then to neutralize the revolutionary threat they pose to the establishment, the mainstream media has appropriately served the interests of the ruling class at the expense of society as a whole. Chomsky acknowledges the progressive prominence of media in mediating the neoliberal hegemonic project since Gramsci drew attention to the consensual aspects of hegemony in the advanced capitalist societies in Western Europe, as he states that when “the dominant class recognized they had to shift their tactics to control attitudes and beliefs instead of just the cudgel” - even though “they didn’t throw away the cudgel” - is, in fact, “when the public relations industry began (...) in the United States and England, the free countries where you had to have a major industry to control beliefs and attitudes; to induce consumerism, passivity, apathy, distraction, and that’s the way it’s been going on”¹⁷³.

The prominence Gramsci gives to the consensual aspects of power, which are advanced through the ideological expressions of the institutions that underpin the civil society, is probably his greatest intellectual achievement and therein lies the main contribution of his thought to the study of social politics in the advanced capitalist societies of the twentieth-century (and, further, in accordance to the neo-Gramscian approach, to the international studies). This perception of hegemony - appropriately overcoming the conventional dichotomy between state and civil society, bridging both domains that, in fact, cannot be understood as separable entities in reality - necessarily led Gramsci to enlarge his definition of the state¹⁷⁴. Thus, Gramsci integrates “both major superstructural ‘levels’”, “the one that can be called ‘civil society’, that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called private, and that of ‘political society’”¹⁷⁵ into an extended, integral conception of State, which he holds “is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules”¹⁷⁶. Accordingly, Gramsci regarded civil society as an integral part of the state, as its most resilient constitutive element, and believed that this organic relationship (between civil society and political society - the latter corresponding to the traditional conception of state) not only enables the ruling class to gain dominance within

¹⁷³ Chomski 2012a, 43.

¹⁷⁴ Cox 1993a, 50-1.

¹⁷⁵ Gramsci 1971, 12.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 244.

the state but also to reproduce it, perpetuating the subordination of other classes¹⁷⁷. Thus, as the hegemony of the ruling class effectively constrains the administrative, executive and coercive apparatus of government within a particular social formation, it becomes inadequate to limit the definition of the state to those elements of government. Consequently, to be meaningful, the notion of the state also has to include the underpinnings of the political structure in civil society¹⁷⁸ - the cultural institutions through which the ideological struggle is carried out in the advanced capitalist societies of the West. This organic fusion¹⁷⁹ between the state and civil society into an enlarged state is a fundamental condition for the achievement of hegemony, for it corresponds to the necessary combination of consent and coercion. Thus, all through his writings, Gramsci aims “to expose how domination of political society and leadership of civil society actually reinforce each other, how the power of coercion and the power to produce consent are intertwined”¹⁸⁰. As a consequence, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony necessarily emphasizes both the coercive and the consensual aspects of power:

“These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of ‘hegemony’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of ‘direct domination’ or command exercised through the State and ‘juridical’ government. (...) These comprise: 1. The ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. 2. The apparatus of state coercive power which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.”¹⁸¹

Apart from building the ideological foundations for the development of a hegemonic order, another major aspect consequently fostered within the enlarged state is the alienation

¹⁷⁷ Buttgieg 1995, 4.

¹⁷⁸ Cox 1993a, 51.

¹⁷⁹ Gill and Law 1993, 93.

¹⁸⁰ Buttgieg 1995, 27-8.

¹⁸¹ Gramsci 1971, 12.

of human beings. Inasmuch as this concept of integral state “is historically embedded in, and internally related to, the relations of alienation which underlie capitalism, the state may be said to embody alienation, to be its specifically political form”¹⁸². Thus, to the same extent the enlarged state fosters the development of specific social forces - the ruling class and the institutions through which it ideologically controls civil society - it also individualizes human beings, estranging them from their own social powers and precluding the self-conscious social control of those powers, becoming the instrument of certain particular interests (those of the dominant group) and an externally imposed obstacle to others (the emancipatory counter-hegemonic claims), and thereby increasingly reproducing and entrenching the capitalist alienation. The extended state, conceived in Gramscian terms, is premised upon, is integral to, and contains within itself relations of alienation¹⁸³. Therefore, inasmuch as it segments, segregates, the working-class, culminating in the fundamental isolation of individuals under capitalism, the labor force lacks the natural cohesion of the largely concentrated workforces of the old mass-production industries which is essential for developing counter-hegemonic forces to challenge the prevailing institutional and political arrangements. Thus, the ideological aspect of the ruling class dominance within the enlarged state turns the working-class into a passive, divided, and incoherent workforce, undermining any collective action aimed at a thorough revolutionary transformation of social relations and the construction of a proletarian counter-hegemony.¹⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Gramsci envisioned this comprehensive transformation of social reality through the development of a counter-hegemony built upon the working-class through an alternative strategy of ‘war of position’¹⁸⁵ which slowly builds up the strength of the social foundations of a new form of state, bearing little resemblance to the self-limiting state integral to the capitalist hegemonic order. And the arena where this ideological struggle

¹⁸² Rupert 1993, 75.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 71-6.

¹⁸⁴ Cox 1993b, 261-8.

¹⁸⁵ Gramsci 1971, 229-239, proposes a strategic distinction between war of movement (maneuver) and war of position to indicate two different phases in the class struggle and to explain the different circumstances and strategies for the task of revolution. He conceives the former as the phase of open conflict between classes (as a direct confrontation), while the latter should be understood as the indirect, everyday, diffuse intellectual and cultural struggle wherein the counter-hegemonic forces build and develop an alternative working-class culture. Accordingly, he argues that the war of maneuver can only succeed where society is relatively independent from the state, and civil society is basic and unstructured, as was the case in Russia. In Western Europe, by contrast, civil society was fully developed and therefore, due to its resilience, a war movement (the direct confrontation with the hegemonic state) is insufficient, doomed to failure. In the advanced capitalist societies, only through a war of position could a counter-hegemony develop inasmuch as the working-class would finally have the necessary political power and popular support to begin the revolution.

should take place is primarily the civil society. Consequently, in order to build up the foundations of these alternative states and societies upon the leadership of the working-class, it is fundamental to create alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources within the existing order, so as to build bridges between workers and other subordinate classes¹⁸⁶. It means, therefore, that counter-hegemony must be built from within an established hegemony. In order to do so, an alternative, counter-hegemonic, historic bloc must necessarily emerge.

2.3. Historic bloc

To the extent that Gramsci's idea of hegemony comprises both the coercive and consensual aspects of power and his concept of enlarged state encompasses the political society (the political and economic realms of the state) and civil society (the ideological commands disseminated through the institutions of civil society), the complexity of state-civil society relations, and the dynamic synthesis between the key forces in the economy and society, operating ideologically throughout each and every domain of social relations, correspond to what Gramsci called a historic bloc¹⁸⁷. Accordingly, the concept of historic bloc that Gramsci employed throughout his writings is, therefore, a dialectical one, inasmuch as he holds that "structures and superstructures form an 'historical bloc'"¹⁸⁸, "i.e. unity between nature and spirit (structure and superstructure), unity of opposites and of distincts"¹⁸⁹. Hence, it refers to the organic link between political and civil society, a fusion of material, institutional, inter-subjective, theoretical and ideological capacities¹⁹⁰. Thus, hegemony - in accordance to Gramscian approach - can only be exercised within a wider social and political constellation of forces, i.e., the historic bloc, insofar as it forms the basis of consent to a certain social formation, which, in turn, produces and reproduces the hegemony of the ruling class through the ensemble of institutions, social relations, and ideas:

"For Gramsci, an historic bloc is more than a simple alliance of classes or class fractions. It encompasses political, cultural, and economic aspects of a particular social formation, uniting these in historically specific ways to form a complex,

¹⁸⁶ Cox 1993a, 52-3.

¹⁸⁷ Gill 1993a, 39-40.

¹⁸⁸ Gramsci 1971, 366.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 137.

¹⁹⁰ Gill and Law 1993, 93.

politically contestable and dynamic ensemble of social relations. An historic bloc articulates a world view, grounded in historically specific socio-political conditions and production relations, which lends substance and ideological coherence to its social power. It follows, then, that hegemonies and historic blocs have specific qualities relating to particular social constellations, their underlying class forces and productive relations.”¹⁹¹

As a matter of fact, it is precisely the juxtaposition and reciprocal relationships of the political, ethical, and ideological spheres of activity with the economic sphere within a historic bloc that reflect the fundamental and organic association of the superstructures of ideology and material circumstances (including both the social relations and the physical means of production). Furthermore, Gramsci would go on to argue that “material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces”¹⁹². On that account, ideas and material conditions are always bound together, mutually influencing one another, and, therefore, are not reducible, one to the other, inasmuch as the former has to be understood in relation to the latter¹⁹³. Thus, it is the ideology, as Gramsci appropriately emphasized, that grants coherence and homogeneity to this structure - the historic bloc.

The development of a historic bloc necessarily depends upon the existence of a hegemonic social class that maintains cohesion and identity within the bloc through the propagation of a common culture. Thus, the cultural institutions of civil society fundamentally endorse and legitimate the ideological leadership of the ruling class insofar as they are instrumentalized, or manipulated, to reproduce the interests of the dominant group as a universal and natural agenda and thereby to build consent among the subordinate classes. On that account, Buttigieg acknowledges the attention Gramsci drew to the material structure of ideology (the cultural production of the institutions of civil society) as he holds that the press - and, more precisely, the entire publishing industry of his time - is the most dynamic part of the ideological structure, as it constitutes the formidable complex of trenches

¹⁹¹ Rupert 1993, 81.

¹⁹² Gramsci 1971, 377.

¹⁹³ Cox 1993a, 56.

and fortifications of the ruling class¹⁹⁴. For that reason, the media ultimately performs an essential mediating function in the struggle of class forces such that it enhances the historical congruence within the historic bloc through the strategic dissemination of historically universalized principles (which encompass attitudes and beliefs) so as to control the behavior and the expectations of society consistently with the hegemonic social order. Hence, the historical developments in the media and mass communication, as well as in education, may prove to be of major long-term importance, for these sectors of activity embody both ideological and material structures operating increasingly throughout all strata of world society (as a consequence of new technological developments that increased the range of media outlets), and have historically been under the control (or at least under the heavy influence) of the dominant forces, which have suitably reshaped news and advertising output according to the hegemonic interests¹⁹⁵. The correspondence between the construction of the current transnational neoliberal historic bloc - and, consequently, of the hegemonic neoliberal capitalist order - and the recent developments of media and mass communications in the advanced Western capitalist societies shall be discussed further on in this work.

Therefore, as transformative social forces can cohere into a more integral counter-hegemonic bloc and thereby to engage in intellectual and political struggle at a variety of levels in the emerging world order¹⁹⁶, structural changes in the social structures which sustain the current hegemonic world order must reflect in fundamental changes in a range of apparently disparate social practices (cultural, political, economic), as far as hegemonic orders are grounded in social relations¹⁹⁷. This moral-political project - the achievement of counter-hegemony - necessarily involves the creation of a new historic bloc in which the dichotomy of the ruling class and the subordinate groups under capitalism is dissolute insofar as the working-class hegemony ultimately advances the active participation of all these subordinate groups within a unified revolutionary program. Thus, the participatory community - encompassing a constellation of social groups - in which social powers of self-production are commonly and consensually regulated is the foundational stone of the counter-hegemonic historic bloc, for it succeeds in enabling the masses to become masters of their own collective destiny and as such it eventually entails the reconstruction of the complexity of state-civil society relations through organically related processes of political,

¹⁹⁴ Buttgieg 1995, 26-7.

¹⁹⁵ Gill and Law 1993, 112-3.

¹⁹⁶ Gill 2008, 15-6.

¹⁹⁷ Cox 1993a, 64.

economic and cultural change within this emerging working-class hegemony¹⁹⁸. In this context, it is crucial for the development of a new historic bloc, whether dominant or emergent, what Gramsci called ‘organic intellectuals’.

2.4. Organic Intellectuals

To the extent that a successful historic bloc is politically organized around a set of hegemonic ideas which gives some strategic direction and coherence to the constituent elements¹⁹⁹ and as far as hegemony implies intellectual and moral leadership²⁰⁰ (whether genuinely ethical or based on fraud), Gramsci consistently holds, all through his writings, that the building of a historic bloc within a particular social formation necessarily relies upon the role played by the intellectuals. Thus, their work becomes essential, for they are the thinking and organizing element of a certain fundamental social constellation and thereby their intellectual activities are “precisely organizational and connective”²⁰¹. On that account, Gramsci states: “the role of intellectuals is to represent the ideas that constitute the terrain where hegemony is exercised”²⁰² and argues that their social function towards the development of a historic bloc and, consequently, the achievement of hegemony is intrinsically twofold: the intellectuals both raise class consciousness within the social group they are organically bound to (as discussed below) and develop the ideological foundations which legitimize the dominance of their class over the subordinate groups. Thus, on the one hand, the intellectuals disseminate the hegemonic ideology - whether producing the ideological underlying principles of a coherent worldview or converting the interests of the dominant class into the aspirations of the subordinate classes in universal terms - throughout each and every domain of a specific social formation (political, economic, and cultural levels) within which the historic bloc develops and advances towards hegemony. On the other hand, they also “perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organizations which bind together the members of a class and of an historic bloc into a common identity”²⁰³, and thereby ultimately direct the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.

¹⁹⁸ Rupert 1993, 80-3.

¹⁹⁹ Gill and Law 1993, 93.

²⁰⁰ Cox 1993b, 264.

²⁰¹ Gramsci 1971, 12.

²⁰² Gramsci 1975, II, 1.084, as cited in Augelli and Murphy, 1993, 131.

²⁰³ Cox 1993a, 57.

Consequently, Gramsci conceives the term ‘organic intellectuals’ to refer not to a distinct and relatively classless social stratum but rather to stress their organic ties with a specific social class:

“Are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own particular specialized category of intellectuals? (...) Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.”²⁰⁴

Thus, the intellectuals organically tied to the hegemonic class must demonstrate in every field of knowledge that the aspirations of the social group they serve coincide with the interests of society as a whole²⁰⁵. Furthermore, insofar as the organic intellectuals provide the intellectual and moral support for the exercise of hegemony, they must be able to theorize upon the existential conditions of the hegemonic order as a whole, so as to suggest policies and justifications for such a system, and effectively synthesize both a strategic vision with the technical and political ability to realize it in practice²⁰⁶, reflecting the unification of theory and practice central for the Gramscian approach. However, Gramsci holds that “the relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups but is, in varying degrees, “mediated” by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the ‘functionaries’”²⁰⁷.

Accordingly, this interaction with the world of production, and, in general, the achievement of hegemony, develops through the ideological apparatus of the dominant social class - the cultural institutions - such as education and the media. Thus, as stated before, the current developments in mass communication (either in telecommunication, press, radio, television, and - most recently - on the internet) are crucial steps towards the building of the neoliberal historic bloc, for they have led the cultural production to operate on an increasingly global scale and thus exponentially expanded the range of the media²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁴ Gramsci 1971, 5.

²⁰⁵ Augelli and Murphy, 1993, 131.

²⁰⁶ Gill and Law 1993, 110.

²⁰⁷ Gramsci 1971, 12.

²⁰⁸ Gill and Law 1993, 112-3.

Consequently, the role of the media as a fundamental instrument for spreading the ideological foundations of hegemony has been enhanced, as it provides an omnipresent structural platform for the organic intellectuals - who are, in turn, central actors in the ideological struggle - to address society as a whole, capturing the attention of the general public and then inculcating the dominant ideology and its cultural products throughout the subordinate classes. The proliferation of the hegemonic ideology through the mainstream media in the form of perspective-oriented political opinions and comments from the intellectuals created by capitalism²⁰⁹ successfully legitimizes and reinforces the interests of the dominant group as well as preserving them from counter-hegemonic expressions²¹⁰.

Despite the consolidation of the capitalist hegemonic bloc and the entrenchment of the neoliberal ideology throughout the cultural institutions of civil society - and the current submission of mainstream media to the dominant interests - Gramsci actually envisioned the possibilities for the emergence of a counter-hegemony movement built upon the working-class (as discussed in the previous section), inasmuch as it is capable of developing from within its ranks its own organic intellectuals. So as the counter-hegemonic forces may successfully come to challenge the prevailing institutional and political arrangements, the revolutionary activity of the working-class consists in a painstaking process of disseminating and instilling alternative values and an alternative ideology by means of cultural production on a mass scale, critical and theoretical elaboration, and thoroughgoing organization. In this sense, the organic intellectuals of the subordinate classes have a decisive role to play in this emancipatory project of counter-hegemonic challenge: to provide the alternative intellectual resources to foster the development of an independent socio, cultural, and political consciousness among the subordinate classes²¹¹, which will ultimately build the ideological foundations of alternative cultural institutions within the superstructure of civil society.

Therefore, bearing in mind both the metatheoretical positions and the methodological choices presented in the previous chapter, and the basic tenets of Gramscian historical materialism (and especially the three key concepts for Gramsci's thought: 'hegemony', 'historic bloc', and 'organic intellectuals') discussed herein, as the theoretical and

²⁰⁹ Gramsci 1971, 5-6, argues that "the capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organisers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc.", "he must have a certain technical capacity, not only in the limited sphere of his activity and initiative but in other spheres as well, at least in those which are closest to economic production. He must be an organiser of masses of men". They "must have the capacity to be an organiser of services, right up to the state organism, because of the need to create the conditions most favourable to the expansion of their own class".

²¹⁰ Suhay *et al* 2014, 646.

²¹¹ Buttgieg 1995, 14-9.

methodological groundwork has been laid, this work will now analyze the relationship between the OWS movement and the emergence of a counter-hegemonic bloc, and the response of the current neoliberal capitalist hegemonic order. In order to do so, the academic contributions of some of the most distinguished scholars upon both the movement itself and its relationship with the media are to be explored under these lenses in the next chapter.

3. REFLECTIONS ON OWS: A REVIEW OF THE MAIN WRITINGS ABOUT THE MOVEMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH MEDIA

3.1. A matter of great interest

Although the OWS movement has not produced any structural change in the political and economic realms of the existing neoliberal hegemonic order, nor in the inner composition of the hegemonic apparatus of the modern capitalist states, for it did not succeed in occupying the power centers of society²¹², its greatest achievement lies in its consequences upon the subjective aspects of contemporary social structures underpinning the hegemonic world order. On that account, OWS was decisive for the change in the dominant world discourse, creating an important conversation that encompasses economic inequalities, upward mobility, corporate greed, the corruption of Wall Street and financial institutions, and the failure of representative democracy, thereby raising class consciousness worldwide²¹³. Therefore, one cannot dismiss the essentially counter-hegemonic practices produced within OWS and the fact that the movement actually provided - throughout its existence, at least - the primordial counter-hegemonic functions (discursive and symbolic) of the alternative social and cultural dimensions to serve as the foundations for the building of a new hegemonic formation. Despite the relentless reaction of the hegemonic forces (the coercive apparatus of the state, the old-fashioned political parties, the financial institutions, right-wing groups, even the church, and, most importantly, the mainstream media - which shall be discussed in-depth in the next chapter)²¹⁴, OWS undeniably produced a legacy that comprises both the learning process built upon different accounts on the movement and its relation with the hegemonic order, with power dynamics, and its social and cultural developments²¹⁵, and self-reflections on the limits that blocked the proper emergence of a counter-hegemonic bloc and on the movement's contribution for the next generation of social protests²¹⁶.

Accordingly, OWS has been the subject of a wide array of academic studies and hence various books and articles have been published in the aftermath of the occupations,

²¹² Rehmann 2013, 6;12.

²¹³ Chomsky 2012a, 9; Kellner 2013, 265; Wallerstein 2012a.

²¹⁴ Wallerstein 2011; Žižek 2012a, 1;78; 83-4.

²¹⁵ Rehmann 2013, 12.

²¹⁶ White 2016.

thus providing a quite robust analytical background on several aspects of the movement and its developments. The writings of distinguished academics from different scholarships on that account are, therefore, fundamental contributions for fully grasping the emergence, dynamics, and the outcomes of the movement itself, as well as for shedding some light on the broader set of conflicting relationship between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces taking place worldwide nowadays. Both endeavors are not dissociated; quite the opposite, since the thorough understanding of the OWS in its nature - and its antagonism to the social and cultural dimensions of the contemporary social relations within the neoliberal capitalist global order - is of utmost importance for envisioning the emergence of an alternative historic bloc that may eventually come to challenge the current neoliberal hegemonic formation.

That being so, in the next section, this work will draw on the contributions of some of the most well-known scholars from the Marxist tradition (irrespective of whether their focuses lie mainly on international studies or on other levels of analysis) in order to investigate OWS itself, its developments within the neoliberal hegemonic order, and its organic association with the emergence of counter-hegemonic alternatives, in accordance with the Gramscian approach. The examination of these accounts shall illustrate the relevance of OWS as a counter-hegemonic movement to the field of International Relations inasmuch as it articulates the findings and arguments advanced in these resources - observing both the methodological design and the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapters - towards the social inquiry carried out in this work. In the following section, the relation of OWS (and of social movements overall) with the mainstream media, and the virtual dimension of protests - the new terrain for ideological struggles created by the recent developments on new media and social networking²¹⁷ - shall be explored from the perspective of key scholarly resources on this field. Consequently, the studies on media (both the traditional and the new media channels) and its relation with social movements shall be explored under the lenses of Gramsci's hegemony theory, to the degree that it can serve both controlling and emancipation purposes²¹⁸, for it can disseminate the hegemonic ideology and mediate the subordination relations within the hegemonic bloc, or it can also foster counter-hegemonic protest dynamics. The thorough reflection on these accounts (addressing OWS and the relationship between social protests and media) shall lay the groundwork for the

²¹⁷ Kellner 2013, 264.

²¹⁸ Dencik and Leistert 2015, 1-2.

following analysis of the role of the mainstream media in developing of the neoliberal hegemonic bloc and in opposing the OWS's revolutionary potential.

3.2. On the OWS movement

As stated in the introduction of this work, the uprisings of the year of 2011 bear some capital resemblances with the counter-hegemonic movements of 1968 and the anti-globalization protests of the late 1990s, either for their appeal among the overall public, for their far-reaching and fundamental demands, or for the challenge they posed to the existing hegemonic order - which, in turn, triggered the response of the forces of the establishment²¹⁹. On that account, Immanuel Wallerstein, the distinguished historian and political scientist best known for his criticism of capitalist globalization and his world-system analysis²²⁰, argues that the social protests that broke out worldwide in 2011 are the latent expression of the structural crisis of the current capitalist world-economy, for they expose the world class struggle that has become increasingly acute since the 1970s, and most dramatically since the financial crisis of 2007-2008²²¹. Most specifically, he holds that OWS “is the most important political happening in the United States since the uprisings in 1968, whose direct descendant or continuation it is” and acknowledges that the movement has succeeded in leaving a lasting legacy, just as the uprisings of 1968 did: the prospects for the social foundations of a new and better world-system²²². Correspondingly, with respect to the emergence of anti-systemic movements and anti-capitalist demonstrations, Noam Chomsky (another prominent social scientist whose works on linguistics, cognitive science, mass media²²³, international affairs, and political activism, have consistently been marked by an anti-capitalist stance) also agrees on OWS being the first real, major popular response to more than forty years of a class war whose origins are intimately related to the apparently irreversible decline of the “precariat”²²⁴.

²¹⁹ Baber 2015, 138-9; Kellner 2013, 251-3;264-6.

²²⁰ Wallerstein 2004.

²²¹ Wallerstein 2012b.

²²² Wallerstein 2011.

²²³ Chomsky and Herman's “Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media”, (2008) 3rd edition, London: Bodley Head, provides a very elucidating analysis on how the modern mass media promotes the interests of the dominant groups of society.

²²⁴ Chomsky 2012a, 32-4. Chomsky uses the term “precariat” to refer to the people who live a precarious existence at the periphery of society, which is becoming a very substantial part of society both in the United States and elsewhere.

Another key aspect unveiled by the OWS movement that Chomsky emphasizes is the inescapable connection between the global economic crisis since 2008 and the crisis of representative democracy. The social, economic, and political arrangements undertaken since the 1970s in accordance to the neoliberal ideology, which have provided the foundations of the current hegemonic world order, culminated in an acutely increasing economic pain for the working-class (as many of the current economic indicators related to the conditions of working people - concentration of wealth, median real income, and labor share of output - have shrunk to the historically lowest levels of the past century²²⁵), encouraged the corruption and greed of Wall Street and the financial institutions, and - even more alarmingly - have ultimately shredded democracy²²⁶. Accordingly, Chomsky argues that concentration of wealth yields concentration of political power and the latter gives rise to legislation that increases and accelerates this cycle²²⁷. As a matter of fact, the increasing economic inequality has consistently undermined representative multi-party democracy, which thus became incapable of dealing with capitalist excesses, as the extreme concentration of wealth “leads almost reflexively to concentration of political power, which in turn translates into legislation, naturally in the interests of those implementing it; and that accelerates what has been a vicious cycle leading to (...) bitterness, anger, frustration and a very atomized society”²²⁸. The OWS movement, therefore, drew attention to the pervasive influence of global capitalism (in the form of global corporations, banks and financial institutions, and large-scale economic processes) on governments, for economic globalization has gradually but inexorably undermined the legitimacy of democracies²²⁹ - more specifically, the protesters rose against politicians’ open abandonment of the public interest, accountability, and commitment to real democracy²³⁰. Nevertheless, the intrinsic association of growing economic inequality and the general disbelief, hopelessness, in the mediating power of governments and democracy is by no means an exceptional or exclusive aspect of the current world order, for Gramsci himself argued that “complete and perfect political equality cannot exist without economic equality”²³¹.

²²⁵ Chomsky 2016, 143-4.

²²⁶ Chomsky 2012a, 53-4.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, 28-9.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 55.

²²⁹ Žižek 2012a, 87.

²³⁰ Ruggiero 2012, 15.

²³¹ Gramsci 1971, 258

The inescapable, organic relationship of economic and political crises is also condemned by Robert Cox, whose historical approach towards the International Relations field was fundamental for the development of the critical theory strand within this discipline²³² and whose studies on hegemony and world order have proved themselves to be of inestimable use in grasping the existing conflict of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces²³³, from a Gramscian perspective/approach (as his thoughts on this issue were extensively used to support the theoretical discussion carried out in the previous chapter). Cox refers to the OWS movement as “a bubble that comes up from below, or a series of bubbles that come up and burst and they are evidence that all is not well” and, most importantly, criticizes the alienation of society from the democratic institutions and mechanisms provided within the modern state as the inescapable consequence of growing wealth concentration, for “alienation and inequality feed on each other”, he argues²³⁴.

And to the extent that the protesters lifted the veil on the deleterious ascendancy of capital over the representational political system, and thereby on the current organic democratic crisis as the consequence of the unrestrained expansion of neoliberal capitalism, OWS, a utopian and practical movement, also laid the groundwork for the essential alternative social structures and assemblages of a new world, in the shell of the old, based on an ethical ideology, class consciousness, resilience, and creativeness²³⁵. On that account, Hardt and Negri, whose influential book ‘Empire’²³⁶ provides an invaluable contribution to the debate over supranational sovereignty and revolution on a global scale within today’s world order as a new stage of historical development, corroborate the critique on the subservience of the political system to economic and financial interests, which has rendered the current form of representative democracy obsolete. Besides, they go further on to envision OWS as “a genuine, democratic constituent process”, based on new, alternative democratic practices: the movement has developed according to a “multitude form” and engaged in horizontal organization, participatory and consensual decision-making, egalitarian solidarity, and open-ended free assemblies²³⁷. The alternative form of democracy the protesters embraced within the occupations, which strengthens class solidarity and

²³² Cox 1981; Moolakkattu 2009.

²³³ Cox 1993a.

²³⁴ Cox 2013, 220-1

²³⁵ Willians 2012, 20.

²³⁶ Hardt and Negri 2000.

²³⁷ Hardt and Negri 2011.

develops communities of mutual support²³⁸, ultimately embodies what Slavoj Žižek calls the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’²³⁹.

The Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst, whose idiosyncratic and provocative style employed in his controversially critical studies on psychoanalysis, politics, and popular culture, has made him one of the most prominent intellectuals of his age and a popular figure of the academic left, was a central figure for OWS due to his intellectual engagement with the movement and the articulateness of the thoughts he addressed to the occupiers and to the general public overall. Since the very beginning of the occupations, Žižek has genuinely engaged with the movement and the protesters, as he gave an unexpected and remarkable speech to the crowd occupying Zuccotti Park²⁴⁰ (which caused his name to be intoned respectfully as evidence of OWS’s legitimacy, and widely repeated by people who had never heard of him before he addressed the occupiers²⁴¹). Besides his public address to those who joined the occupation in New York, Žižek largely placed his intellectual production at the service of OWS, as he produced a wide array of academic contributions²⁴² regarding the movement, expressing support for the protesters, resonating their arguments and critiques, addressing further issues that surround the movement, and, especially, offering practical advice to the occupiers.

Following Hardt and Negri’s account on the inadequacy of the current representative democratic political system denounced throughout the protests, Žižek goes even further in arguing that modern democracy is not only obsolete, but rather it constitutes an essential obstacle to any truly emancipatory project, for the general discontent with the global capitalist system cannot be properly expressed through the existing democratic institutions and mechanisms²⁴³. And that is precisely what he saw throughout the occupations - the real, physical expressions of the OWS movement: a general refusal to engage with the multi-party representative democratic system that had led the protesters to develop and advance their own assemblages and forms of association outside the existing political system. This is the key for any transformation of the current social relations within the neoliberal capitalist order: to create alternative social structures and institutions, overcoming the common belief in the existing democratic procedures as the sole framework for any possible change, as they

²³⁸ Chomsky 2012b.

²³⁹ Žižek 2012a, 88.

²⁴⁰ Gell 2011.

²⁴¹ Asher 2011.

²⁴² Žižek 2011d; 2012a; 2012b.

²⁴³ Žižek 2011a.

are part of the apparatus of the modern integral state that guarantees the undisturbed functioning of capitalist reproduction²⁴⁴ and thereby restrain the ‘limits of the possible’²⁴⁵, the very prospects of resistance and revolution. Accordingly, Žižek argues “that we should start thinking about how to expand democracy beyond its state-multiparty form, which has clearly failed to address the destructive consequences of global economic life”, for “the key to actual freedom rather resides in the network of social relations, from the market to the family, where the kind of change needed if we want genuine improvement is not political reform, but a change in the “apolitical” social relations of production”²⁴⁶.

Therefore, the emergence of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, as Žižek holds, stands as the unique reasonable and effective structural alternative to the current representative democracy - which has been built upon economic and political arrangements that are underpinned by the hegemonic social and cultural formations, and thereby reproduce the dominant neoliberal ideology - and ultimately embodies the development of a counter-hegemonic bloc based on the working-class, as Gramsci envisioned. For this emancipatory moral-political project of challenging the hegemonic order to genuinely succeed - and thus a new historic bloc may eventually emerge - this alternative arrangement of social forces and its means of producing coherence and legitimacy must develop upon two elemental axes. First, the prospects of a broad alliance of progressive forces must evolve into the complete synergy of the various classes and groups once subordinated under capitalism, thus ensuing the achievement of the working-class hegemony and its ideological leadership, in which all these subordinate groups actively and directly participate in the reconstruction of the social world through a participatory community in which social power of self-production is commonly and consensually regulated²⁴⁷. Second, the building of a counter-hegemonic bloc must inevitably entail the reconstruction of state-society relations through organically related processes of political, economic, and cultural change to be conceived upon alternative social and cultural dimensions, so as the civil society and its institutions may reproduce and encourage an ethical, egalitarian, and social ideology, thereby fostering cooperation and solidarity within society²⁴⁸. In a nutshell, Robert Cox cleverly sets the two foundations of this emancipatory project: “to build up the basis of an alternative state and society upon the

²⁴⁴ Žižek 2012a, 87;

²⁴⁵ Gill 2008, 17-8.

²⁴⁶ Žižek 2012a, 86-7;

²⁴⁷ Rupert 1993, 80-1.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 81.

leadership of the working class means creating alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources within existing society and building bridges between workers and other subordinate classes”²⁴⁹.

And OWS, throughout its occupations, had precisely produced the vital functions and capabilities to develop these two elementary foundations of a counter-hegemonic bloc. With regard to the new political arrangements and the alternative social and cultural formations, Jan Rehmann, who was one of the few scholars to apply Gramsci’s thoughts to evaluate the political trajectory of the movement, argues that the occupations

“could thus be understood as the spatial “dispositif” (arrangement) of an alternative hegemonic apparatus, which combines different counter-hegemonic practices and functions. It provided a political domain for debate and decision-making, requiring careful work with both mainstream and movement media (the latter powered by its own generators) and practices of intense education, both by famous “public intellectuals” and in small working groups. OWS established its own public library, which was then destroyed by the police and dumped as trash. It developed a large body of Occupy imagery as part of a vibrant “social movement culture.” The activists who actually lived there claimed to practice a new way of living in cooperation and solidarity (a claim which however was threatened by inner tensions and some isolated cases of harassment). Overall, the effective combination and condensation of counter-hegemonic functions and capabilities created an emotional density and made the occupation at once significant for the movement and dangerous for the powers that be. Otherwise the police would not have used so much force and intimidation to prevent new camps from emerging. When Zuccotti Park and the other occupied squares were cleared, the movement lost the spatial centers of its hegemonic apparatus.”²⁵⁰

Accordingly, the alternative social and cultural dimensions advanced by the movement, which produced new political arrangements and assemblies within the occupations, also supported the construction of bonds and associations among those who somehow joined the protests. Apart from the horizontal and anti-hierarchical organization and the consensus-based participatory decision-making practices employed by OWS,

²⁴⁹ Cox 1993a, 53.

²⁵⁰ Rehmann 2013, 5.

various further arrangements and assemblies created and strengthened the connections between the protesters throughout the occupations worldwide. The construction of these associations and bonds (the rhizomatic network, in Rehmann's words²⁵¹) through the creation of cooperative communities is the most exciting aspect of the OWS movement, as Chomsky holds²⁵². The multi-thousand-volume public library, the collaborative kitchen, general assemblies, people's university and workshops, spaces for meditation and worship, are some examples of real functioning communities of mutual support, democratic interchange, and egalitarian ethics. And these community structures are the genuine expression of the people, the self-defense of society against the disintegrating and atomizing motor forces of capitalism²⁵³, which advance the alienation of human beings from society, individualizing them, and estranging them from their own social powers²⁵⁴. Thus, OWS articulated relevant dimensions of societal reality in a way that frees up counter-hegemonic potentials and capacities²⁵⁵, and thereby produced the foundations for the emergence of the alternative working-class hegemonic bloc that Gramsci had envisioned.

And regarding the other fundamental requirement for the building of a counter-hegemonic bloc and the achievement of the working-class hegemony - the coalescence of groups and social forces once subordinated under capitalism - OWS had also entailed the convergence of several social groups towards its sometimes vague and indefinite, nevertheless all-encompassing agenda and demands. Even though the key demographic driving the OWS's initial ascent was a disappointed highly-educated youth, the movement rapidly attracted adherents from a far more diverse population²⁵⁶, thus establishing a racially and ethnically diverse (albeit coherent and self-conscious) constellation of social forces gathered around two main feelings: the contemporary popular rejection of capitalism as a system and the failure of representative multi-party democracy in dealing with capitalist excesses²⁵⁷. Inasmuch as the bonds and associations were being created through community structures at the core of the occupations and as the movement celebrated the occupiers themselves, demonstrations under the banner of OWS resonated with so many people all over the world, and hence key labor unions and other progressive organizations, anti-poverty

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 4-6.

²⁵² Chomsky 2012a, 24; 45; 53; 56-7.

²⁵³ Gill 2008, 15.

²⁵⁴ Rupert 1993, 71; 75-6.

²⁵⁵ Rehmann 2013, 8.

²⁵⁶ Milkman 2012, 13-4.

²⁵⁷ Žižek 2012a, 87.

initiatives, immigrant rights organizations, church communities, students and professors, celebrities, unemployed elders, and ordinary citizens joined the protests in support to the rage and hope the OWS embodied²⁵⁸. Therefore, the movement had opened up the possibilities for real synergy within the occupations, even though they embrace a panoply of causes, and contain tensions and fissures the protesters themselves acknowledged and even welcomed, for an authentic feeling of actively taking part of a real transformative social experience was shared by the occupiers (irrespective of their ages, education, economic background, ethnicity, religion and beliefs). Therefore, OWS had become a vessel into which people poured their own fears and aspirations²⁵⁹, which, in turn, were channeled into an “authentic emancipatory revolt”²⁶⁰, whose vital objective is but the building of a new positive social formation as a true alternative to the existing neoliberal capitalist order.

As much as the two foundations of an alternative counter-hegemonic bloc were, at least initially, laid by OWS, new forms of civil society rose against the capitalist ‘market civilization’ (a consumerist and individualist form of corporate-dominated development). Stephen Gill, who is probably one of the most distinguished neo-Gramscian scholar of his time and whose seminal work on the application of Gramsci’s historical materialism towards the studies of International Relations²⁶¹ has proved of inestimable value for laying the theoretical foundations upon which this work is developed, had enthusiastically welcomed the emergence of “a collective and democratic process involving broad social forces on a mass basis”. This process embodies the challenge to the dominant practices of global politics aimed at saving capitalism that have, nonetheless, served to maintain the prerogatives of the ruling class and of global plutocracy, and worsened a global organic crisis. Gill²⁶² sees OWS (and other examples popular, grassroots pressures and organizations) as

“a ‘post modern Prince’ - a set of progressive conceptions of the world, organized resistance and differentiated political potentials that are developing in the plural, albeit unevenly and, in a variety of contexts. These self actualising potentials are reflected in a variety of radically democratic practices, interpret dominant power as supremacy or as ‘dominance without hegemony’ and they challenge the mantra that there is no alternative to neo-liberal capitalism. We can identify the post-modern

²⁵⁸ Wallerstein 2011; Kellner 2013, 262; Rehmann 2013, 5-6.

²⁵⁹ Barber 2012, 15.

²⁶⁰ Žižek 2012a, 88.

²⁶¹ Gill 1993c.

²⁶² Gill 2011.

Prince as a set of potentials and forces in movement and in formation, with no fixed organizational structure as such. What it is important to emphasize is how this process is producing innovations in thought and action which are directly linked to the actual practices of local, regional and global politics.”

Furthermore, Gill also envisages this emerging new civil society as the ideal terrain for fostering a genuinely collective effort to develop new forms of knowledge, modes of communication and culture that visually and conceptually contest the hegemonic neoliberal ideology and common sense, and conceives it as an event of great philosophical and political significance. Lastly, he reflects upon the initial achievements of OWS and the global uprisings of 2011:

“So what are the achievements of Occupy and the movements of Red October? First, Occupy is breaking the shackles of a political common sense restricted by ‘horizons of necessity’: the minimalist notion that the future must necessarily be more or less like the past, that there is no alternative to rule of the 99% by the 1%. Second, Occupy reflects the formation of new ‘horizons of desire’, in the plural, its forces are collectively imagining desirable and possible futures; rendering necessary what had previously thought to be politically impossible.”

The last dimension of OWS that is worth giving some thought to is the re-appropriation of the commons, public spaces, that the movement entailed²⁶³, inasmuch as the occupations became the fertile ground for the emergence of an alternative civil society - as previously discussed - and, ultimately, the principal battleground over which the ideological struggle for hegemony was occurring. This is not a key feature of the OWS movement exclusively, but rather the existential driving force of a wide array of uprisings that broke out throughout 2011 and owe their momentum and success, to a greater or lesser extent, to the occupation of key urban spaces of capital (and, obviously, to the resilience and creativity of their occupiers). Just like Tahrir Square in Cairo, Syntagma Square in Athens, Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid, and Catalunya Square in Barcelona, many other public spaces were also spontaneously, collectively, and pacifically, occupied, and hence embodied popular anger and aspirations for revolt and change. Accordingly, David Harvey, the distinguished Marxist economic geographer, leading theorist in the field of urban studies,

²⁶³ Rehmann 2013, 3-4.

and best known for advocating the right to the city and for his critique on the developments of neoliberalism upon urban geography²⁶⁴, argues that “the collective power of bodies in public space is still the most effective instrument of opposition when all other means of access are blocked”²⁶⁵. Thus, as the common right to public spaces has been long denied to society by the collective will of the ruling class, and as money power has closed all other channels of public expression, OWS, through its occupations, called out all the alienated, the dissatisfied, and the discontented, to occupy the parks, squares, and streets until the common good eventually prevails over narrow venal interests, Harvey argues²⁶⁶. The efficient and resilient tactics of OWS, as he identifies, are “to take a central public space, a park or a square, close to where many of the levers of power are centered, and, by putting human bodies in that place, to convert public space into a political commons - a place for open discussion and debate over what that power is doing and how best to oppose its reach”²⁶⁷.

The belief on the occupation of public spaces as the genuine (and the most effective) expression of the collective will of the ‘precariat’²⁶⁸, of the ‘dispossessed’²⁶⁹, of those who are locked into the embrace of a system that is rotten to the core²⁷⁰, largely resonates in Mike Davis’ words. Davis, who is a Marxist-environmental historian and longtime political activist²⁷¹ (an old radical, in his own words), hailed OWS as the child with the “rainbow sign”, for it embodied “a broad, spontaneous compassion and solidarity based on a dangerously egalitarian ethic”. Thus, insofar as OWS reclaimed the commons, i.e., “democratize and productively occupy public space”, it inevitably praised the triumph of “the supposedly archaic principle of face-to-face, dialogic organizing” and implied that “activist self-organization - the crystallization of political will from free discussion” - still “thrives best in actual urban fora”. Thus, OWS, Davis argues, had “turned a privatized square into a magnetic public space and catalyst for protest” through the collective power of bodies, and hence effectively expressing the common will²⁷².

²⁶⁴ Harvey 2009.

²⁶⁵ Harvey 2012, 161-2.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 162-4.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 161.

²⁶⁸ See note 13.

²⁶⁹ See note 31 of Introduction.

²⁷⁰ Harvey 2012, 160.

²⁷¹ Vettese 2018.

²⁷² Davis 2011.

Despite the undeniable relevance of the collective power of bodies and the occupation of key urban spaces for the success (albeit transitory in some cases) of the social movements that swept the world in 2011, as Harvey and Davis hold, new media and social networking were also a decisive dimension for the protests. They provided concrete practices of connection and organizing that enable the functioning of both the “real” collaboration within the occupations and the “virtual” communication over the net, thereby creating new terrains of ideological struggle for hegemony and effectively intervening in the symbolic order²⁷³. This virtual dimension, inaugurated by the new media and social networks, produced particular interventions and attitudes that converged according to a synergy effect and thereby has proved itself an emerging terrain for resistance and social change, as shall be observed in the next section.

3.3. On social movements, mainstream media, and new media technologies

Anti-hegemonic social movements have historically had significant difficulties in their relationship with mainstream media²⁷⁴, and, consistently, the media had relentlessly worked to undermine and neutralize the true emancipatory dimension of the OWS movement, thus deliberately preserving the neoliberal capitalist hegemony and its economic, political, social, and cultural structures (and it is precisely that what this work aims to understand and explain). Consequently, due to this chronic conflicting and complicated relationship with mainstream media, which either ignored the occupations or employed condescending and dismissive frames in the coverage of the movement (as it shall be in-depth explored in the next chapter), OWS adopted an unorthodox strategy to advance their own narrative, both through the creation of alternative media channels and the development of the virtual dimension of protests through social networks. Notwithstanding the technocratic overestimation of the use of social media and other digital media²⁷⁵ - such as Facebook, YouTube, and especially Twitter - within the context of OWS and the other anti-hegemonic movements witnessed throughout 2011 (which were, perhaps, prematurely called the Twitter Revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya²⁷⁶), these new medias have indeed

²⁷³ Rehmann 2013, 2; Salem 2014, 171.

²⁷⁴ Ferrari 2016, 144.

²⁷⁵ Rehmann 2013, 4.

²⁷⁶ Beaumont 2011.

played a role in these uprisings. As a matter of fact, these digital communication channels enabled the intersection of virtual and physical forms of social protest, thereby creating a collective subjectivity of fundamental importance for counter-hegemonic struggles²⁷⁷.

Throughout the anti-hegemonic global insurrections of 2011, the use of new media and communication technologies inaugurated a virtual dimension for protesting. Thus, apart from simultaneously participating in and following the events taking place in several other locations (all over the world, actually) the protesters could, more importantly, broadcast vast amounts of information, links, and updates, and thereby could generate massive viral communication flows. That being so, people not only participated directly and actively in the creation of media spectacles - which Douglas Kellner defines as “media constructs that present events which disrupt ordinary and habitual flows of information and that become popular stories that capture the attention of the media and the public” - but also were ultimately documenting and articulating their own insurrection²⁷⁸. Kellner, a leading theorist and critic of media and cultural studies, who holds a strong critical position towards media spectacle and authoritarian populism and writes on counter-hegemonic movements and alternative cultural expressions studies²⁷⁹, argues that new media and social networking were fundamental for the apparent success of these popular uprisings, for the media spectacles of popular struggle and revolt proliferated in a global scale precisely through these alternative communication channels²⁸⁰. Therefore, through the virtual dimension for online activism recently inaugurated, “new media and social networking were creating new terrains for struggle”, as “the media spectacle took the forms of political resistance and insurrection”²⁸¹ - and thus the OWS movement eventually reached all the levels in which ideological struggle for hegemony takes place: local, regional, global, and virtual spheres.

Nonetheless, although many have hailed the use of social networks and alternative medias as the very driving force of these insurrections and as their determinant tools (in very techno-optimistic narratives, perhaps) and despite the clever and effective strategy of OWS of extensively exploring the virtual dimension of social protests, the use of digital media is, by no means, an unprecedented or exclusive feature of OWS and the other social movements of its age. In fact, new media technologies and developments had significantly influenced

²⁷⁷ Juris 2012, 268-9.

²⁷⁸ Kellner 2013, 252-3.

²⁷⁹ Kellner 2012.

²⁸⁰ Kellner 2013, 257.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 264;266.

the social protests for global justice of the late 1990s and 2000s. However, unlike this previous wave of global justice activism, in which the use of digital media (mainly listservs and websites) gave rise to practices of communication and coordination across diversity and difference on the part of collective actors, and hence generating and diffusing networking logics, in the OWS case, social media contributed to develop logics of aggregation²⁸². The anthropologist and activist Jeffrey Juris, who writes on social movements, transnational networks, and new media activism, defines this particular phenomenon - the logics of aggregation - as “an alternative cultural framework that is shaped by our interactions with social media and generates particular patterns of social and political interaction that involve the viral flow of information and subsequent aggregations of large numbers of individuals in concrete physical spaces”²⁸³. Inasmuch as the use of social media by the occupiers has led to the development of these logics of aggregation, which involve the coming together of actors qua individuals and encourage interaction and community building within physical spaces, it has, therefore, reinforced the organic linkage between physical and virtual dimensions of social protest. Thus, Juris argues that “compared to the global justice movements, #Occupy Everywhere seems to have penetrated the social fabric more deeply, reflecting the resonance of the issues addressed and the ability of social media to reach far beyond typical activist circles”²⁸⁴.

On that account, inasmuch as Rehmann argues that OWS successfully created a ‘spatial dispositif’ throughout the occupations (as stressed in the previous section) in which different counter-hegemonic practices and functions developed, he identifies the digital medias and social networks as the platform through which the virtual and the real dimensions of social protests could eventually communicate and connect, in accordance to Juris’ idea of intersection between these two domains. Consequently, he argues that from this articulation of both the virtual and the real dimensions of social protests the vital strength of OWS stemmed: the effective intervention into the symbolic order, or the discursive formation, the meaning-making aspect of social relations²⁸⁵. And it could only be achieved through social networking.

Nevertheless, even though the role of social media platforms within the context of the popular uprisings of 2011 - and especially in the OWS case - has indisputably been one

²⁸² Juris 2012, 260-1.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, 266.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 265.

²⁸⁵ Rehmann 2013, 7.

of preparing the ground for protests and occupations and of fostering the creation of communities of practices²⁸⁶, and of constructing new arenas of participation and decision-making²⁸⁷, this remarkable feature of the global cycle of social movements must also be understood within the broader context of the contradictions of capitalism and communication, and of commercial and alternative social media. Accordingly, Christian Fuchs, in his book “OccupyMedia!”, argues that the creation and structural development of alternative media channels by OWS is a crucial and indispensable innovative process to the extent that it embodies the existential driving force of the movement itself - the re-appropriation of the commodified commons - for this social popular struggle must inescapably extend to the “occupation” of communications, which are part of the commons of society²⁸⁸. Fuchs has consistently reflected on critical media and information studies in the age of digital capitalism²⁸⁹ and regards social media as predominantly a “corporate-state-power phenomenon, a force field in itself, in which powerful corporate and state interests are present and meet” and, therefore, should be understood as “spaces of complex manifestations of power, counter-power and power contradictions”²⁹⁰.

Consequently, he investigates the power relations underpinning the OWS movement’s use of social media, from the perspective of the contradictory dialectic of private corporate control (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and self-managed, commons-based activist media, in order to identify the movement’s communication forms and strategies, and, especially, its limits and potentials. Thus, Fuchs unveils the power relations between corporate media and non-commercial digital media and condemns the former category for advancing practices of censorship and surveillance towards social media activism. He goes further to argue that the development of an alternative social media that goes beyond corporate dominant social media was of utmost importance to enable OWS’s communication and protest capacities and thereby strengthening its emancipatory potential. On that account, he explores the use of new forms of communication by the OWS movement, such as live video streams, blog-based news, protest maps, a how-to-occupy guide, podcasts, newspapers (e.g. Occupied Times and Occupied Wall Street Journal), news services (e.g. Occupy News Network, occupy.com, Occupied Stories), Occupy classifieds, directory of

²⁸⁶ Della Porta and Mattoni 2014, 49.

²⁸⁷ Gerbaudo 2014, 74.

²⁸⁸ Fuchs 2014.

²⁸⁹ Fuchs 2011.

²⁹⁰ Trottier and Fuchs 2014, 34.

Occupy campaigns, chat and discussion forums, non-commercial non-profit social networking sites (e.g. TheGlobalSquare, Occupii, Riseup, Diaspora, N-1) and lastly, the InterOccupy platform²⁹¹. In the context of media activism in an antagonistic world, alternative, activist-oriented social media must, therefore, embody the logic of resistance to and escape from capitalism and thereby enable the re-appropriation of communications, whose ultimate goal must be to establish “truly social media” that “advances the public good and the common interests of all”²⁹².

On that account, among the social movement media cultures the OWS produced - “the set of tools, skills, social practices and norms that movement participants deploy to create, circulate, curate and amplify movement media across all available platforms”²⁹³ - InterOccupy, a communication platform owned and operated by the occupiers, stands as an effective strategy to prolong the OWS movement after the tactic of occupying public spaces was no longer feasible. The loss of the “spatial centers” of OWS’ counter-hegemonic apparatus due to the clearing of occupied squares²⁹⁴ had originated the need for taking infrastructure building as a political strategy to ensure the movement endured beyond the police raids on the encampments²⁹⁵. Consequently, in order to create an internal community that could sustain OWS beyond the period of widespread protest, a communication infrastructure was assembled to more effectively manage the abundant flow of information. Thus, the construction of InterOccupy, a virtual organization that synchronized action across multiple groups, locations, and issues, would therefore ensure the durability of the movement, as long as it could secure local spaces and maintain relationships across multiple online and offline domains, consequently building a long-lasting networked social movement²⁹⁶.

3.4. Towards a critical analysis of mainstream media’s coverage of OWS

Notwithstanding its revolutionary counter-hegemonic nature (as discussed in the second section of this chapter) and the interventions it had produced in the symbolic and

²⁹¹ Fuchs 2014, 45-7.

²⁹² *Ibid*, 161.

²⁹³ Constanza-Chock 2012, 375.

²⁹⁴ Rehmann 2013, 5.

²⁹⁵ Donovan 2018, 1.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 2-5.

discursive order as a consequence of the intensive exploration of the virtual dimension of social protests through the use of new media and social networks (as illustrated in the previous section), OWS stalled in its attempt to make a transition from a moment to a movement²⁹⁷ and, consequently, has not successfully led to a restructuring of hegemonic structures. Even though the movement has generated a new discursive formation focusing on economic inequalities, greed and corruption of Wall Street and financial institutions, and the failure of democracy as a representative political framework of society's will²⁹⁸ (thus inaugurating new forms of civil society as an emerging terrain of ideological struggle for hegemony ²⁹⁹), the counter-hegemonic functions and practices OWS had developed throughout its occupations could not sustain and hence could not reverse the current intensifying structural crisis of the neoliberal capitalist world order. Consequently, the building of an alternative counter-hegemonic historic bloc, based upon the ideological leadership of working-class (in accordance with Gramsci's predictions) was but a fragmentary and ephemeral project advanced only throughout OWS's existence.

Among the many reasons for the dissolution of the movement's radical revolutionary force and, consequently, for the absence of structural social change, there are several accounts in the literature produced about OWS so far. The inability of the 'inner movement' (the activist core) to expand and engage with the 'outer movement' (civil society organizations) and thus to become a "full-service movement"³⁰⁰, the absence of a structured and pragmatic agenda and the lack of an organizational structure³⁰¹, its intentionally vague and leaderless essence³⁰² (which opposes Gramsci's prediction on the need for a political party, or some organizational leadership)³⁰³, and the governmental authorities' repression and police raids that culminated in the dispersion of the encampments - and, consequently, in the loss of its spatial centers of counter-hegemonic apparatus³⁰⁴ - are some of the circumstances indicated in the numerous investigations on OWS as possible explanations for the neutralization of the movement's truly emancipatory potential. Furthermore, the deliberately condescending and dismissive mainstream media's coverage of OWS has also been considered in many studies addressing the OWS movement and related issues as an

²⁹⁷ Gitlin 2013, 3-4.

²⁹⁸ Kellner 2013, 265.

²⁹⁹ Gill 2011.

³⁰⁰ Gitlin 2013, 15-22.

³⁰¹ Calhoun 2013, 35-7.

³⁰² Sorkin 2012.

³⁰³ Rehmann 2013, 1.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 7;

antagonistic force serving the interests of the very systems of power the OWS targeted - the hegemonic neoliberal ideology³⁰⁵. However, although this aspect is by no means neglected in the many sources upon which this work draws, none of them comprehensively addressed the antagonistic relationship between the mainstream media and OWS, and the key role the former has played in the building and reproduction of the current neoliberal historic bloc. Such a thorough and exhaustive examination would likely provide some valuable insights for addressing the limits faced by OWS and for guiding future social movements. And it is precisely this critical analysis of the mainstream media's coverage of OWS that this work endeavors to carry out in the next chapter.

³⁰⁵ Chomsky 2012a, 69-72; Baber 2015, 135; Wallerstein 2011; Gitlin 2013, 5-11; Žižek 2012a, 84-6; Writers for the 99% 2011, 167-176.

4. A CRITICAL FRAME ON THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF THE OWS MOVEMENT

4.1. Neoliberal capitalist hegemonic bloc vs. OWS

The study of the set of conflicting relations between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces that takes place nowadays - and of which the mainstream media's coverage of OWS is but one of its recent and latent expressions - is inescapably linked to the study of the building of the existing hegemonic bloc and the reproduction of the dominant neoliberal ideology, which, in turn, must be understood within the broader neo-Gramscian debate about world orders grounded in social relations³⁰⁶. That being so, fully grasping the power dynamics that have consistently underpinned the social relations upon which the current neoliberal capitalist historic bloc emerged and has developed is of utmost importance for achieving the objective of the present work. Furthermore, inasmuch as the social structures of dominance and submission that pervade the economic, political, and cultural foundations of the current hegemonic world order are completely interwoven with a globally-conceived civil society³⁰⁷, in which the dominant neoliberal ideology has been continuously reproduced and advanced, a critical social inquiry of the case under study must necessarily focus on the ideological struggle for hegemony within this terrain - the civil society - and, thereby, on the cultural institutions that foster the dominance of the ruling class. Consequently, it is essential for a critical analysis of the mainstream media's coverage of the OWS movement to firstly investigate the role of the media in the building of the current neoliberal hegemonic bloc and - more broadly - in the reproduction of the dominant ideology within civil society. Thus, inasmuch as these hegemonic structures of civil society restrain the basic limits of its political action³⁰⁸, or the limits of the possible³⁰⁹, Gramsci's understanding of these concepts, as introduced in the second chapter, is the primordial instrument - the basic approach for carrying out this critical social inquiry. The next section of this chapter shall account for this historical investigation.

Once the agency of the media as one of the cultural institutions of civil society - and, therefore, as an active agent of the ruling class in the consolidation of the neoliberal cultural

³⁰⁶ Cox 1993a, 64.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 61

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 51.

³⁰⁹ Gill 2008, xxi.

hegemony - has been detailed and critically assessed, the very work of the major Western media outlets throughout the coverage of the OWS movement shall finally be extensively investigated in the following sections. These sections shall account for the attempt to thoroughly understand how the mainstream media contributed to undermine and delegitimize the movement and thereby to counterbalance its revolutionary potential. Thus, three different stages (which, albeit successive, may sometimes overlap) of the mainstream media's coverage of OWS and its occupations will be identified and analyzed in the next sections: first, from the deliberate lack of interest to the total indifference in an event of great philosophical and political significance³¹⁰ (or the suffocating silence of mainstream media towards OWS); second, the employment of condescending and dismissive frames while reporting developments in the occupations to the public (or the manufacturing of an ideologically hostile, cynical, and antagonistic narrative of the movement); third, the attempt to constrain, to channel the movement - and its revolutionary claims - within the existing hegemonic structures of the neoliberal world order (or the controversial advocacy of representative democracy as the ideal - and the sole - framework for claiming for changes that would hopefully be forgotten as soon as the movement disperses).

4.2. The building of the current neoliberal bloc and the role of mainstream media

Indisputably the primordial, dominant actors of International Relations are the states, and appropriately the mainstream theoretical strands within this discipline have consistently and extensively focused on these agents, their relations, and systems of states³¹¹ - either from the neorealist tradition³¹², which emphasizes the structural effect of the ordering principle of the international system upon states behavior, or from the neoliberal perspective³¹³, according to which norms, regimes, and institutions may play a decisive role in influencing the behavior of rational states towards cooperation, interdependence, or conflict. Nonetheless, to rely solely upon these unitary actors and the international system within which they interact when studying hegemony and world orders, is - to say the least - superficial, in spite of its evident relevance for the study of international politics. As a matter

³¹⁰ Gill 2011.

³¹¹ Chernoff 2008, 50-2; 62-3.

³¹² Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001; Walt 1987.

³¹³ Keohane 1984; Keohane and Nye 2001.

of fact, many of those scholars who employ a reflectivist/interpretivist and historical materialist approach to the international studies would say this understanding of the International Relations is obscure, self-limiting³¹⁴, narrow and reductionist³¹⁵, and thus does not account for explaining the social basis of power relations, for it underestimates the development of social forces that transcend national boundaries, including culture and ideology³¹⁶. Consequently, the predominance of such a state-centric approach towards the discipline has necessarily led to a consistent alienation of the mainstream theoretical traditions within the field of International Relations regarding a fundamental aspect for the studies of hegemony and world orders: the relations among social forces and social groups developed within the ensemble of state and civil society that emanate to and operate on the world scale and thereby determine the states behavior and their interactions within the international system³¹⁷. Therefore, the state must be ultimately conceptualized as composed of a coalition of classes and social forces³¹⁸.

Indeed, although Gramsci himself acknowledged the state - “the enlarged state which includes its own social basis” - “remains the primary focus of social struggle and the basic entity of international relations”³¹⁹, he also held that power dynamics necessarily must be inserted into the context of the relation among social forces, irrespective of which level they take place in (ranging from the objective relations within society to the relations between states in the international field). Accordingly, he argued:

“Do international relations precede or follow (logically) fundamental social relations? There can be no doubt that they follow. Any organic innovation in the social structure, through its technical-military expressions, modifies organically absolute and relative relations in the international field too.”³²⁰

Consequently, the inter-states relations necessarily reflect the social relations and social structures that are produced and reproduced within the complex relations between state and civil society, for the international order is but a particular configuration of states and social forces, corresponding to a particular epoch and having certain conditions of

³¹⁴ Rupert 1993, 82-3.

³¹⁵ Gill 1993a, 22.

³¹⁶ Gill 2008, 81.

³¹⁷ Cox 1993a, 61.

³¹⁸ Gills 1993, 186.

³¹⁹ Cox 1993a, 58.

³²⁰ Gramsci 1971, 176.

existence which are corporeal and transitory. This historical materialist approach opposes the mainstream theories within the discipline of International Relations, as discussed in the first chapter. Therefore, for the study of hegemony and world orders to appropriately follow Gramsci's predictions, the basic unit of analysis must be the ensemble of social relations configured by social structures, rather than individual agents or the international system itself³²¹. Thus, both the national and the international levels should be construed as two aspects of an internally related whole, and hence international relations are "*historically embedded* in, and *internally related* to, capitalist social relations"³²². That being so, inasmuch as the primary focus of critical social theory within the field of International Relations is the social relations and structures and the power dynamics that pervade these interactions throughout every and each level of study, and considering that world orders are grounded in these very same social relations³²³, the study of hegemony at the international level cannot be merely reduced to concentrating exclusively upon the order among states - and thereby upon the dominance relation among states and their military forces and material capabilities. In accordance to Gramsci's understanding of the concept (rooted in both dimensions of power, coercion and consent, and in which the latter primarily characterizes the relations between classes, and between state and civil society³²⁴ - implying moral and intellectual leadership³²⁵), one may refer to hegemony as

"an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production. It is also a complex of international social relationships which connect the social classes of the different countries. World hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must be all three. World hegemony, furthermore, is expressed in universal norms, institutions and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behaviour for states and for those forces of civil society that act across national boundaries - rules which support the dominant mode of production."³²⁶

³²¹ Gill 1993a, 24; 29.

³²² Rupert 1993, 84.

³²³ Cox 1993a, 64.

³²⁴ Gill and Law 1993, 93.

³²⁵ Arrighi 1993, 149.

³²⁶ Cox 1993a, 62.

Thus, even though the concept of hegemony is inescapably related to inter-state relations, it must be understood in such a way that not only encompasses, but also (and mainly) relies upon the social relations and social structures that characterize existing power dynamics among classes. Moreover, inasmuch as the relations among social forces stem from and are ruled by the ideological struggles that take place within the civil society, and as ideology is the organic element of consent that legitimizes a hegemonic formation, this work shall investigate the building of the current neoliberal historic bloc by tracing the development and consolidation of the neoliberal ideology as the “common sense” in Gramscian terms³²⁷. Therefore, insofar as the inter-state relations within the international system reflect and reproduce on a global scale - to a greater or lesser extent - the social relations and structures (and thereby the power dynamics among classes), the studies of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces relations and world orders shall fundamentally concentrate on the ideological struggle taking place within the global civil society through its cultural institutions. Notwithstanding the genuine belief that this approach towards the study of hegemonic formations and historic blocs suitably lays the groundwork for a coherent and consistent analysis of the role of social movements as counter-hegemonic forces and their conflicting interactions with the ruling class within the domain of the extended state, to carry out a thorough account of the building of the current neoliberal historic bloc from its emergence to the global consolidation of this hegemonic formation definitely falls beyond the scope of the present academic paper. For that reason, this work will resort to the studies of some of the most prominent neo-Gramscian scholars of the International Relations and International Political Economy fields (whose interpretations on Gramsci’s thinking were of utmost relevance for elucidating the theoretical concepts supporting this social investigation, as previously discussed).

Neo-Gramscian theorists - or historical materialist scholars - have approached issues related to hegemony and world orders from two perspectives which, although built upon different levels of analysis, are nevertheless complementary and have intermingled increasingly in the light of recent developments of global political economy. The achievement of hegemony in Gramscian terms (hence combining material and normative capacities and potentials³²⁸, and thereby accounting for both the coercive and consensual

³²⁷ Gramsci 1971, 323-343. The term “common sense” as Gramsci employs in his writings corresponds to the form of thought appropriate to a certain age which is uncritical and unconscious so as to perceiving and understanding the set of generally held assumptions and beliefs common to any given society.

³²⁸ Gill 2008, 75.

dimensions of power) might, therefore, be associated with the world-system and inter-state relations - the rise and decline of world powers, or the power of a state to exercise governmental functions over a system of sovereign states³²⁹ - or it can also refer to the hegemony of capital over the global economy, i.e., an economic space transcending all national borders³³⁰, which is the very outcome of the supremacy of a transnational neoliberal historic bloc³³¹. Both of them are, therefore, fundamental for fully grasping the building of the neoliberal historic bloc and the achievement of neoliberal ideological hegemony.

On the one hand, from the perspective of inter-state systems and relations, the emergence and consolidation of the neoliberal ideology is the byproduct of the hegemonic leadership of the United Kingdom and of the United States respectively. Accordingly, Arrighi³³² associates (1) the birth of liberalism to the radical restructuring of the political geography of world market due to new synthesis of capitalism and territorialism stemmed particularly from British mercantilism and its consequent hegemony - or “Free Trade Imperialism” - in the eighteenth century and expanded throughout the nineteenth century, and (2) the consolidation of the neoliberal ideology to the emergence of the “Free Enterprise System” which resulted from the hegemonic leadership of United States from the aftermath of the World War II to the late 1970s, and whose institutions have restored the principles, norms, and rules of the Westphalia System, so as to further develop it appropriately into an integrated system of production, exchange, and accumulation, in which transnational corporations are ultimately superseding the inter-state system as the primary locus of world power. Therefore, both hegemonic orders embodied the continuous tendency of capitalist accumulators to mobilize their respective states so as to enhance their competitive position in the world-economy³³³, inasmuch as the hegemon was the leading capitalist state of its epoch:

“In these more liberal periods, there was a rise in the relative and structural power of internationally mobile capital. (...) However, the significance of hegemonic leadership for the power of capital depends crucially on the nature of the political economy of the dominant states, and their domestic coalitions which control

³²⁹ Arrighi 1993, 148.

³³⁰ Cox 1993b, 259-260

³³¹ Gill 2008, 71.

³³² Arrighi 1993, 167-173;177-183.

³³³ Wallerstein 1974, 402, as cited in Arrighi 1993, 153.

international economic policy. Both Britain and the USA were not only capitalist, but also in favour of liberal international economic policies.”³³⁴

However, during the 1980s and 1990s, there was a shift towards more flexible transnational forms of accumulation associated with large-scale and internationally mobile elements of capital³³⁵. Such a movement was explicitly and enthusiastically promoted by the Thatcher-Reagan model³³⁶ and hence culminated in the development of a new world order “which is characterized by the growing global integration of production and financial structures, complex communications grids, the rapid innovation and diffusion of technology”³³⁷. All of these aspects converged towards the reconstruction of a Gramscian form of hegemony favoring capital and fitting in with the notion of a hegemonic ideology that serves the class interests of capital at the expense of those of labor. Eventually, the current world hegemony of capital is built upon a transnational neoliberal historic bloc “anchored in the structures of production and social reproduction and in the transnational political and civil societies of the capitalist core (Western Europe and North America)”³³⁸. Thus, while some neo-Gramscian scholars turn their lenses towards this transnational hegemonic social formation, both the domestic and the international levels of analysis converged and integrated³³⁹ through the association of the capitalist world hegemony and the social forces within the core of global capitalism and in other parts of the world. Appropriately, this approach suits better for this work’s secondary purpose of investigating the interrelation between the development of the current transnational capitalist historic bloc and the attainment of neoliberal hegemony, and its primary constitutive element: the neoliberal ideology.

The major geopolitical and deeper structural changes that led to the consolidation of this transnational hegemonic social formation were neglected by many theorists in the 1970s and 1980s, who were mainly concerned with the substantial relative decline of American state power³⁴⁰. Indeed, to the extent these scholars were predominantly attached to the approach towards hegemony issues rooted in the world-system and the inter-state relations

³³⁴ Gill and Law 1993, 115.

³³⁵ Gill 2008, 76

³³⁶ Cox 1993b, 267

³³⁷ Gill 1993b, 7.

³³⁸ Gill 2008, 61.

³³⁹ Gill and Law 1993.

³⁴⁰ Gill 2008, 73.

perspective, they not only underestimated American power by predicting its decline and foreseeing the consequent collapse of the post-war liberal international economic order centered in the United States³⁴¹, but they also - and perhaps most importantly - ignored evidence of the existence of a global social structure and global processes of structural change enhanced by the two principal aspects of globalization: global organizations of production and global finance³⁴². These key elements of the new world order together constitute the propitious conditions for the exponential expansion of transnational corporations - both in scale and scope - and for the promotion of international capital mobility. Thus, capitalism entered into a transnational stage which ultimately produced a transnational capitalist class or class fraction, with its own particular form of strategic class consciousness. This transnational capitalist class is bound by the substantial congruence of ideas, institutions, and policies within the core of the capitalist system, and their intimate interaction helps to shape the agenda for those state policies which favor the operation of transnational capital³⁴³.

In a thorough and insightful essay³⁴⁴ accounting for the development of this transnational capitalist class, Stephen Gill associates the alleged decline of American dominance in the late 1970s and 1980s with the historical structures of the new world order produced since the early 1990s in a context of global social, economic, and political structural changes as the direct consequences of globalization, in order to delineate the expansion and consolidation of the power of transnational capital. In his work, Gill has called the coalition of social forces that constitute this transnational neoliberal historic bloc a “supremacist bloc” that has ultimately achieved supremacy over apparently fragmented and subordinate forces in the new context of globalization:

“In the period since the mid-1990s, the dominant forces can be described as a ‘supremacist bloc’: social forces exercising a transient dominance over global society until a coherent programme of resistance emerges to challenge it, and to offer an alternative. The supremacist bloc is transnational in form, associated with elements of the G-7, transnational capital and other privileged members of an

³⁴¹ *Ibid*, 82.

³⁴² Cox 1993b, 259-260.

³⁴³ Gill and Law 1993, 96;104; 106-7.

³⁴⁴ See Gill 2008, Chapter 5 “US Hegemony in the 1980s: Limits and Prospects”. This chapter is an abridged version of Gill, S. (1986) “American Hegemony: its Limits and Prospects in the Reagan Era”, *Millennium*, Vol.15, No.3, (1986) pp. 311–336.

unfolding market civilization, and it is linked to policies and governing frameworks that expand the role and protection for free enterprise and market forces on the one hand, and restrict democratic control and accountability on the other.”

(...)

“Global production, exchange and capital flows have widened the basis of this class formation beyond the Atlantic circuits of capital, as industrialization of many parts of the Third World has developed, and as Japan and East Asia have become much more powerful economically. At this ‘transnational’ stage in the development of capitalism, the developing transnational capitalist class or ‘international establishment’ can be said to comprise the segments of the national bourgeoisies and state bureaucracies of a range of countries who have material interests in the relatively free flow of capital, goods and services within the world economy. In sum, this class can be said to be at the core of an emerging transnational historical bloc, whose material interests and key ideas are bound up with the progressive transnationalization of the global political economy. Its key members include top owners and managers of transnational corporations; central and other international bankers; and many, though not all, leading politicians and civil servants in most advanced capitalist countries, and those in some Third World countries. The growth of this class has been facilitated by improved transport and communications, and increasingly by ‘private’ as well as ‘public’ institutions fostering dialogue and interaction between élites.”³⁴⁵

That being so, the expansion of structures of capitalist accumulation on a global scale - driven by the political and economic transformative processes that globalization has promoted - provided the material basis and the legitimation for the power of transnational capital. These structures of accumulation, legitimation, consumption, and work, largely configured by the power of transnational capital, converged together with a set of ideas, practices, and an institutional framework, towards the ideological formation of this transnational capitalist class and thereby constitute the conditions of existence of its material and cultural domination over other subordinated fractions of society. The normative capacities that constitute the cultural dimension of this hegemonic social formation are

³⁴⁵ Gill 2008, 77; 93.

organically associated with the neoliberal ideology, which in turn should be hence understood as the constitutive element of the consensual dimension of power of the current neoliberal capitalist historic bloc.

The neoliberal ideology has consistently articulated a historical congruence of a consciousness, ideas, and theories so as to produce a discursive formation whose ultimate goal is to promote the power of transnational capital (which Gill has called a ‘market civilization’, configured by disciplinary neoliberalism, new constitutionalism, and extensive and often coercive methods of discipline and surveillance³⁴⁶), hence securing the ideological legitimation required for the exercise of supremacy by this hegemonic social formation. Thus, the cultural settlements and normative system of representations of the new world order - defined and shaped in conformity with the neoliberal ideology - have cemented the social relations and structures which bind together each and every element of this hegemonic historic bloc, and thereby embodies the class consciousness or solidarity of this dominant transnational capitalist social class (as Gramsci distinguished the different levels of collective political consciousness in the movement towards the achievement of hegemony and the development of a historic bloc³⁴⁷). Insofar as Robert Cox has applied Gramsci’s ideas and concepts to the study of International Relations - and thereby has appropriately conceived hegemony and the formation of historic blocs on a world scale - he associates the consolidation of a class consciousness with the assimilation of the neoliberal ‘framework of thought’, whose ultimate goal is to promote ideas and policies conducive to the promotion of transnational capital power within both the state apparatus and the cultural institutions of the civil society³⁴⁸ - hence within the integral state in Gramscian terms. Likewise, Gill argues that the connected ideas and associated normative representations that constitute the neoliberal framework of thought (or the transnational capitalist class consciousness) firstly orientate the actions and policies of this hegemonic social formation; secondly, legitimate its supremacy within a globally-conceived civil society; and lastly - and perhaps most importantly - limits the possibilities of subordinate classes fractioned throughout the world to articulate and converge towards the building of an alternative counter-hegemonic historic bloc³⁴⁹.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 74; 124-5.

³⁴⁷ Gramsci 1971, 181-2.

³⁴⁸ Cox 1981, 147.

³⁴⁹ Gill 2008, 94.

Therefore, it is especially worth reflecting upon the role that the cultural institutions of civil society have played in the reproduction and dissemination of this framework of thought, particularly in the case of the emergence and widening of the existing transnational capitalist class. All the social elements of the current neoliberal capital historic bloc upon which this transnational ruling class has built its hegemony at the global level, and which legitimate its domination over subordinated classes, are bound together by this class consciousness fostered through the complementary agency of a wide range of institutions pervading all sorts of state-civil society complexes. As Gramsci identified in his writings, such institutions are by no means limited to political parties and governmental bureaucracies³⁵⁰ nor to international institutions, but rather they encompass all sorts of social structures³⁵¹. Furthermore, these civil society cultural institutions must be situated within the broad accumulation strategy of the transnational capital class whose conscious efforts of its organic intellectuals aim at steering the extended state complex so as to advance their class interests that are posed on a universal plane. Thus, a wide range of institutions have consciously and consistently forged economic, political, and cultural elements of state and civil society into a hegemonic discursive formation which combines coercion and consent³⁵²: political parties, unions, churches, the educational system (university and think tanks), art and literature, the press and, especially, the media³⁵³.

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned purposes that neoliberal ideology serves and which are organically advanced through the cultural institutions of civil society, a historic congruence between the shift Gill acknowledged towards transnational forms of capitalist accumulation during the 1980s and 1990s - which strengthened the power of internationally mobile (finance) capital and consequently the consolidation of this transnational historic bloc³⁵⁴ - and the development of public relations industry and mainstream media can clearly be identified. As Chomsky argues, the dominant class finally came to realize they could no longer control society's behavior through the employment of states' coercive apparatus (force and repression) solely. In order to obtain the legitimate acquiescence of subordinated groups in the ruling class leadership, it had to control the beliefs and attitudes of the overall population, which is when the major industry of public relations began to develop, and the

³⁵⁰ Gramsci 1971, 55-7; 187-8.

³⁵¹ Cox 1993a, 51; 62-3.

³⁵² Gill 2008, 125-6.

³⁵³ Rupert 1993, 79.

³⁵⁴ Gill 2008, 97-8.

mainstream media took an active part in mediating the neoliberal hegemonic project for society³⁵⁵. And it is no coincidence this took place precisely in Britain and the United States, the core of the capitalist system at that time, and where conservative political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan not just promoted neoliberal reform policies towards privatization, monetarism, and deregulation, but undertook a conscious and relentless effort to change ideas and expectations of the population towards favoring the supremacy of the power of transnational capital over labor and society³⁵⁶. Therefore, in this new hegemonic world order that began to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s and whose ideological structure embodied the decline of the left and the rising power of transnational capital championed by Thatcherism and Reaganism, the mainstream media and the major industry of public relations became fundamental channels for the consolidation and expansion of the bonding and constitutive ideological element of neoliberal capitalist hegemony.

The developments of communication technologies and infrastructures of mass media that allowed its large-scale proliferation and thereby the widening of its reach for socio-political control worldwide in the 1980s and 1990s³⁵⁷ do not occasionally coincide with the shift of the ideological task of mainstream media within the ever-expanding strategy of neoliberal capitalist hegemony at that time - from the covert action and manipulation of the media and politics in the 1960s and 1970s to the normalization of market rationality, commodification, and limited democratization promoted at the end of the last century³⁵⁸. From an objective perspective, such developments introduced new forms of communications, like global cable television (the rise of cable news networks broadcasting news 24/7), satellite stations that broadcast to a number of countries simultaneously, economies of scale in the production of television programs³⁵⁹, not to mention the explosive rise of Internet news and the incorporation of blogs and opinions into their online presence³⁶⁰, which helped to capture the attention of the general public in a consistent and contentious way.

Additionally, the institutional and organizational domain of mainstream media and mass communications saw the appearance of a set of transformation processes and new

³⁵⁵ Chomsky 2012a, 42-3.

³⁵⁶ Gill and Law 1993, 101-2; 107.

³⁵⁷ Kellner 2013, 253.

³⁵⁸ Gill 2008, 71.

³⁵⁹ Gill and Law 1993, 112-3.

³⁶⁰ Suhay *et al* 2014, 645.

arrangements that have decisively shaped media performance in the new world order in harmony with the neoliberal agenda and principles advanced in by the transnational capitalist dominant class. The rise in the scale of media enterprise, the gradual centralization and concentration that led to the increased media monopoly, the growth of media conglomerates, and the displacement of family control by professional managers serving the market discipline all contributed to the decisive shift of global balance power towards commercial systems and the consequent monopoly of the global media and communication systems in the hands of the transnational capitalist class³⁶¹. Thus, “a wave of massive deals and rapid globalization have left the media industries further centralized” in a limited number of media conglomerates that “own all the world’s major film studios, TV networks, and music companies, and a sizable fraction of the most important cable channels, cable systems, magazines, major-market TV stations, and book publishers” and have “integrated the leading Internet portal into the traditional media system”³⁶².

That being so, the proliferation of the ubiquitous, omnipresent, and monopolized media and communication matrix ³⁶³ eventually led to the complex entanglement of mainstream media and civil society, inasmuch as the globalization processes of the neoliberal era fostered the spread of media throughout all levels of the social fabric and across borders as well. This process of all-embracing entanglement of mainstream media and civil society ultimately enabled the transnational media companies to reproduce and distribute the hegemonic cultural apparatus globally, restraining the cultural ‘limits of the possible’ for social thought and political action within civil society³⁶⁴. Needless to say, the neoliberal ideology has provided the intellectual rationale for the policies that enabled these changes to take place and, appropriately, the performance of mainstream media - and of communication systems as a whole - has consistently promoted a structure and language of social relations that have become more marketized, individualized, and linked to commodity logic³⁶⁵. Therefore, the mainstream media not only miserably failed to promote its idealistic goal of democratizing the public sphere but has - far from its ideal - served the interests of transnational capital, advancing the neoliberal agenda and principles, and through an “observable pattern of indignant campaigns and suppressions, of shading and emphasis, and

³⁶¹ Chomsky and Herman 2008, xiii-xv.

³⁶² *Ibid*, xiii.

³⁶³ Kellner 2013, 254.

³⁶⁴ Gill 2008, 14.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 124.

of selection of context, premises, and general agenda”, hence serving the very powerful societal interests that control and finance it: the transnational capitalist dominant class³⁶⁶. The mainstream media’s behavior is shaped and constrained by its essential corporate character and organic integration into the political economy of the dominant economic system, and various forces account for its real performance³⁶⁷. Even more interestingly, the highly politicized, marketized, individualized, and commoditized political discourse the global mainstream media advances does not emerge as a result of an active conspiracy on the part of media corporations, but rather naturally, as a result of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate, which are, in turn, oriented according to the market forces of neoliberalism³⁶⁸.

Therefore, in a context of highly politicized and monopolized communication system, the mainstream media (and its political monoculture, in accordance with the neoliberal ideology) has neglected and ignored all potential counter-hegemonic forces and their expressions (revolts and protests) that threaten the dominant transnational capitalist class³⁶⁹. Or, more sophisticatedly, it has kept them “within bounds and at the margins, so that while their presence shows that the system is not monolithic, they are not large enough to interfere unduly with the domination of the official agenda”³⁷⁰. As shall be observed in the next sections of this chapter, the coverage of the OWS movement has precisely followed the standard procedures historically - albeit continuously refined - carried out by the mainstream media throughout the process of the achievement of neoliberal ideological hegemony and the building of the current transnational capitalist historic bloc.

4.3. The suffocating silence of mainstream media towards OWS

As observed in the previous chapters of this work, in September 2011, OWS broke out in the wake of the Arab Spring as a grassroots social movement of global uprising with

³⁶⁶ Chomsky and Herman 2008, lxiii

³⁶⁷ The Propaganda Model that Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman present in their seminal book “Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media”, (2008) 3rd edition, London: Bodley Head, is an analytical framework that describes forces (“filters”) inherent to the modern communication system that shape the real media performance - namely - ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and anti-communism - ensuring that it serves elite interests.

³⁶⁸ Comeforo 2010, 221-2.

³⁶⁹ Gill 2008, 243-4.

³⁷⁰ Chomsky and Herman 2008, xii.

history-making weight³⁷¹ embodying the first major popular response to forty years of a devastating world class struggle³⁷², the latent and genuine expression of popular discontent with the neoliberal capitalist system and the failure of representative democracy³⁷³, the conversion of public space into a political commons by the collective power of bodies ³⁷⁴, hence challenging the existing hegemonic order on a global scale not seen since the uprisings of 1968³⁷⁵. Notwithstanding its extent, revolutionary potential, and violence (in the sense of its shattering, disruptive nature and the real threat it posed to the establishment, for the movement preached civil disobedience through nonviolent militancy), from the first call of *Adbusters* magazine for protesters to join in a demonstration and camp out in Zuccotti Park, New York, to the very beginning of the occupation that would become the epicenter of the movement for the following months and inspire people's encampments in public spaces all over the world ³⁷⁶, the mainstream media outlets all but ignored OWS and the unexpected occupation at the heart of Wall Street financial district³⁷⁷.

Unsurprisingly, the mainstream media's lack of interest in a revolutionary social movement that constituted such an "event of great philosophical and political significance"³⁷⁸ was expected and predictable, for it consciously followed the primary task of cultural institutions of hegemonic ideology: to neutralize the true dimensions of the emerging counter-hegemonic forces and movements, their expressions and possibilities³⁷⁹, hence avoiding the coherence of progressive forces into more integral alternative historic blocs and their engagement in intellectual and political struggle within the ideological terrain of civil society³⁸⁰. Thus, insofar as the OWS's "first action drew a blind eye from the mainstream media", a "near-total blackout"³⁸¹, it is easy to identify the uniformity and congruence between the attempt of the major media outlets to keep OWS at the margins of the media system - and hence away from the public - and the traditional approach of neoliberal doctrine and its associated institutions and social forces of neglecting and ignoring any emerging constitutive ideological element that may eventually come to bind together all

³⁷¹ White 2016, 23.

³⁷² Chomsky 2012a, 34; 54.

³⁷³ Žižek 2012a, 87.

³⁷⁴ Harvey 2012, 161-2.

³⁷⁵ Wallerstein 2011.

³⁷⁶ Castells 2015, 162-3.

³⁷⁷ Baber 2015, 135.

³⁷⁸ Gill 2011.

³⁷⁹ Žižek 2012a, 1.

³⁸⁰ Gill 1993b, 15-6.

³⁸¹ Writers for the 99% 2011, 167.

the social classes once subordinated in capitalism around a counter-hegemonic historic bloc. Therefore, the relentless effort to silence OWS - apart from being the instinctive reaction of the mainstream media, as a cultural institution through which the ruling class exerts its dominance over civil society - is but a deliberate and open attempt to limit the prospects of a broad alliance of the disadvantaged³⁸² against the neoliberal ideology underpinning the existing political, economic, and cultural arrangements of the current hegemonic order, or the modern common sense, as Gramsci would have it.

In this regard, Gramsci argues that the fundamental project of the working-class - to actualize its revolutionary possibilities for the creation of alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources³⁸³ - cannot proceed without raising a critical class self-consciousness. Accordingly, the development of an intellectual-moral set of practices that ultimately legitimates the emergence of an alternative, counter-hegemonic historic bloc “necessarily supposes an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality” that goes beyond common sense³⁸⁴. This intellectual unity that makes politically possible the progress of the working-class and the other subordinated groups³⁸⁵ towards the attainment of hegemony can only be achieved through the organic alliance between intellectuals (in the OWS case, the organizers and occupiers of the leaderless movement³⁸⁶) and the broad public (the masses), which eventually develops the consciousness of being part of a particular social formation, one that has no dichotomy between rulers and ruled, dominant classes and subaltern groups, state and society³⁸⁷, but is grounded on a common identity. Thus, it is no coincidence the mainstream media totally ignored the OWS movement in its initial stage, for it would supposedly limit and counteract the overall coherence of this intellectual unity, hence frustrating the rise of a disadvantaged class self-consciousness.

Nevertheless, the silence of mainstream media could no longer counter the public support for OWS, as the theme of the protest resonated widely and quickly caught on³⁸⁸. Thousands of people joined the movement in the following days, either gathering in the occupations and demonstrations worldwide, expressing their solidarity and support to the

³⁸² Cox 1993a, 65.

³⁸³ Rupert 1993, 68; 82.

³⁸⁴ Gramsci 1971, 333-4.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 332-3.

³⁸⁶ Rehmann 2013, 2.

³⁸⁷ Rupert 1993, 79.

³⁸⁸ Wallerstein 2011.

occupiers, or participating through the virtual dimension of the protest (as explored in the previous chapter) by sharing images and videos in order to organize, document violence against them, and circulate their message globally³⁸⁹. Therefore, insofar as OWS gathered momentum and due to police and government assaults on the occupations (establishment violence and police brutality against the protesters), the movement became too loud to be neglected. As the major media outlets could no longer ignore the movement entirely, they struggled to manufacture their own narrative about OWS.

4.4. The manufacturing of a dismissive and depoliticized narrative about OWS

As anti-hegemonic social movements have historically dealt with a notoriously difficult relationship with the traditional communication system, whenever the mainstream media eventually begins to generate some coverage of them, it either employs condescending and dismissive frames to portray the protesters' grievances, ideas, and demands, or reframes them to fit in with the ideological narrative of hegemonic discourse³⁹⁰. Appropriately, the mainstream media's coverage of OWS - when the movement finally caught its attention - falls precisely within these two lines of action, which shall be analyzed in this section and the next one, respectively.

To the extent that most of the public's understanding of the movement - and consequently its decision to support it or not - hails mainly from the mainstream media's coverage³⁹¹, the major outlets initially attempted to discredit OWS on the ground that there was no positive political program, or at least a clear, identifiable set of demands. The occupiers were labeled as 'disorganized', 'confused', 'leaderless', and 'romantics', and the movement as 'incomprehensible', and 'ineffectual'³⁹². The prevailing approach of media commentators, television pundits, and columnists was to repeatedly and cynically ask what an ignorant youth could know about politics and the economy, to accuse the absence of a positive political program to appropriately address their claims and discontent, and to recommend the occupiers to go home and let the politicians get on with their work³⁹³.

³⁸⁹ Kellner 2013, 264; Castells 2015, 165-6.

³⁹⁰ Ferrari 2016, 144.

³⁹¹ Catalano and Creswell 2013, 667.

³⁹² Baber 2015, 135.

³⁹³ Chomsky 2012a, 71; Wallerstein 2011.

It turns out the demands were always there; however loose and generic they might seem. In the *Adbusters* magazine's first initial call for people to "flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street", there was a concrete fundamental demand aimed at restoring democracy by making the political system independent from the power of money: "we demand that Barack Obama ordain a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington"³⁹⁴. Along with this unifying goal of separating money and politics through the appointment of a presidential commission to enact the independence of government regarding Wall Street financial institutions, a set of specific multiple proposals of various nature was voted on in the General Assemblies of each occupation, according to its local and regional specificity³⁹⁵. Indeed, as the sociologist Manuel Castells - whose work has consistently focused on the information society, technology and communication, and globalization - argues "the movement was popular and attractive to many precisely because it remained open to all kinds of proposals, and did not present specific policy positions that would have elicited support but also opposition within the movement", for it "is not a single entity, but multiple streams that converge into a diverse challenge to the existing order"³⁹⁶. Therefore, the weakness of OWS - at least as mainstream media emphatically underscored in order to undermine the movement - was actually a distinguishing, innovative, and defining feature of the movement, as it consciously sought to avoid going through the mediation of the political system, which would, otherwise, contradict the generalized distrust of the representativeness of political institutions³⁹⁷.

Much as some of the demands were indeed too generic or loose, and despite mainstream media's criticism (let alone the unceasing ridicule and dismissive media-orchestrated campaign against the movement), the political and social experiments of OWS actually produced concrete - and remarkable - actions and achievements, addressing daily life requirements within the occupations. The spatial arrangement of an alternative hegemonic apparatus³⁹⁸ created in the large occupations and built upon new democratic practices and horizontal participatory structures - a concrete experience of direct democracy and community - provided the occupiers with tents, toilets, collaborative kitchens, sanitation,

³⁹⁴ Castells 2015, 162-3.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 188. For a list of most frequently mentioned demands debated in various occupations see pages 188-9.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 189-90.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 190-1.

³⁹⁸ Rehman 2013, 5.

camp security, daycare centers, children's play spaces, gardens, multi-thousand volume libraries, lectures, classes and workshops, spaces for meditation and worship, first aid and medical assistance by volunteer medical personnel, their own media centers, communication structures and Wi-Fi networks³⁹⁹. Therefore, besides developing the structure, organization, and the cultural and ideological functions that bind together the members of a class and of a historic bloc into a common identity⁴⁰⁰, the occupations also embodied the foundations of Gramsci's revolutionary political practice. Accordingly, as Gramsci envisioned "a comprehensive transformation of social reality through the creation of an effective counter-culture, an alternative world view and a new form of political organization in whose participatory and consensual practices that world view is concretely realized"⁴⁰¹, it can be said that OWS's cooperative communities established the organizational and structural foundations for it. And as this revolutionary transformation - the building of a counter-hegemonic bloc - could only take place precisely within the existing hegemonic order⁴⁰², OWS might be said to have envisaged the creation of a new world in the shell of the old⁴⁰³.

Therefore, the labels of 'incomprehensible', 'dangerous', 'ineffectual', 'lunatics', 'nuts' or even 'a bunch of wusses', 'revolting' and 'fascists'⁴⁰⁴ that mainstream media suspiciously attributed to OWS would unlikely stick to a social movement that not just demanded but was fundamentally grounded on people's power, grassroots empowerment, self-government, participatory democracy, and common interest. Even if the occupiers' demands were not properly translated into a coherent, concrete and practicable political program, OWS was essentially a formal gesture of rejection⁴⁰⁵ to the existing political, economic, social arrangements and to the institutional democratic framework of the current neoliberal hegemonic order.

4.5 The myth of representative democracy

The eager attempt of mainstream media to undermine OWS by harping on the same string - the incapacity of occupiers to channel their outrage, grievances, and aspirations to

³⁹⁹ Castells 2015, 172-3; Chomsky 2012a, 45.

⁴⁰⁰ Cox 1993a, 57.

⁴⁰¹ Rupert 1993, 79.

⁴⁰² Cox 1993a, 53-4

⁴⁰³ Williams 2012, 20.

⁴⁰⁴ Gitlin 2013, 5; Writers for the 99% 2011, 174.

⁴⁰⁵ Žižek 2012a, 83.

produce attainable legislative proposals - aimed precisely to cover up the movement's gesture of rejection to engage with the existing institutional and political framework of neoliberal capitalist world order. This refusal is essential for the working-class' counter-hegemonic emancipatory project, "for only such a gesture can open up the space for new content"⁴⁰⁶. Inasmuch as the neoliberal hegemonic ideology and the dominance and submission relations it reproduces are embedded in the current political system, to situate the movement, its organization, and demands outside the modern representative democratic framework - that not only is incapable of restraining capitalist excess but is the very political legitimization of capitalism⁴⁰⁷ - is vital for the project of building alternative institutions and advancing alternative intellectual resources that will eventually form the foundations of a counter-hegemonic historic bloc upon the leadership of the working-class⁴⁰⁸. That being so, from the very beginning of the occupations, mainstream media strived to reduce the movement to a mere call for extending democratic control of capitalism in order to funnel its revolutionary energy back into the existing democratic institutional system that legitimizes and reproduces the dominance of transnational capitalist class, whereas the movement truly claimed for a thorough reinvention of democracy itself.

Appropriately, this gesture of rejection on the part of the occupiers and their overall distrust of the current structures of the political representational system as an effective - and in fact the only - means of addressing their claims and thereby changing the existing domination relations and structures of neoliberal capitalist world order⁴⁰⁹ (as the establishment forces and institutions emphatically claimed) are masterly put into words by Slavoj Žižek. On that account, he unravels the subservience of the institutionalized form of representative multi-party democracy to the power of capital and to the interests of the transnational capitalist ruling class, the bourgeois-state as he calls:

“Radical changes in this domain should be made outside the sphere of such democratic devices as legal rights etc. They have a positive role to play, of course, but it must be borne in mind that democratic mechanisms are part of a bourgeois-state apparatus that is designed to ensure the undisturbed functioning of capitalist reproduction. Badiou was right to say that the name of the ultimate enemy today is

⁴⁰⁶ Žižek 2011a.

⁴⁰⁷ Žižek 2013.

⁴⁰⁸ Cox 1993a, 53.

⁴⁰⁹ Hardt and Negri 2011.

not capitalism, empire, exploitation or anything of the kind, but democracy: it is the ‘democratic illusion’, the acceptance of democratic mechanisms as the only legitimate means of change, which prevents a genuine transformation in capitalist relations.”⁴¹⁰

Accordingly, Žižek’s critique on democracy as the institutional foundation and political legitimation of capitalism as system resonates in Alain Badiou’s argument that democracy - or at least its modern version - has a class character itself. That being so, to the extent that neoliberal capitalism has left its class imprint on democracy, Badiou accuses the latter of being a seemingly universalistic project which is, in fact, particularistic, conservative, and discriminatory, despite its fundamental principles of freedom, equality, and democratic representation. On that account, he argues that insofar as the current representative democracy legitimates capitalism, it restricts the liberties of citizens and oppresses minorities; it allows - and ultimately promotes - inadmissible social inequalities; and it does not embody nor express the will of the people but serves the private interests of the ruling class⁴¹¹. Consequently, Badiou goes further by arguing that politics, in a genuine democratic sense, must not be subordinated to the power of the integral state, but to the immanent constituent power of the people, and hence the authentic opposition to modern democracy nowadays is the desire to set collective existence free of the grip of its limiting political representative structures⁴¹². Otherwise, unless its organic underlying rationale - “the power of peoples over their own existence” - finally outweighs the pervasive ascendancy of the hegemonic neoliberal ideology and of the capitalist mode of production (or social structure of accumulation) over itself through the absolute decoupling from capitalism, democracy is doomed to be but “a word for a conservative oligarchy whose main (and often bellicose) business is to guard its own territory”⁴¹³.

On that account, much thought had been put into OWS as the hopeful birth of a genuine and authentic democratic constituent process at its time⁴¹⁴, as explored in the previous chapter. Bearing that in mind, it is precisely because the movement, through its occupations, re-appropriated the commons throughout the world and thereby converted public spaces into spatial arrangements that frame counter-hegemonic practices and

⁴¹⁰ Žižek 2011a.

⁴¹¹ Znepolski 2013.

⁴¹² Badiou 2009, 14.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 7.

⁴¹⁴ Hardt and Negri, 2011.

functions⁴¹⁵ that it gave rise to a wide and relentless rejection by the establishment forces, from media commentators, political pundits, to conservative (in the sense of belonging to the domain of old-fashioned party politics) politicians. That being so, mainstream media spared no effort to frame the alternative democratic practices OWS embraced from its very beginning within the existing - and limiting - institutional framework of democratic political system, and hence eventually dilute the protest, “transforming it into a harmless moralistic gesture”⁴¹⁶. The major media outlets repeatedly echoed the unsurprising coordinated impulse of politicians, political analysts, and a huge range of captive expert commentators to the occupiers to resort to the existing mechanisms of institutionalized democracy. Thus, mainstream media questioned how a movement with no positive political program could “fit into the mainstream structures of how things are supposed to change”⁴¹⁷, and it complementarily insisted that there is no alternative to the democratic mechanisms - institutions, elections, political parties, rules, laws - as the only legitimate means for translating their energy into structural changes⁴¹⁸.

Obviously, it is no coincidence that mainstream media enthusiastically championed the very same political and institutional mechanisms that the neoliberal hegemonic order currently provides and through which society has been historically and consistently alienated and subjugated in favor of transnational capital. This strategy responds to Gramsci’s prediction about the reaction of hegemonic forces against any authentic emancipatory revolt, aimed at restoring the ruling class dominance as the institutions of civil society reasserted control⁴¹⁹. Accordingly, Gramsci unravels the struggle of the dominant class to assimilate, to coopt, and to ideologically conquer the counter-hegemonic forces, through the action of its organic intellectuals⁴²⁰. Thus, the intellectuals organically tied to the hegemonic class - those in charge of producing “a philosophy, political theory, and economics which together constitute a coherent world-view” - are fundamental actors in this ideological struggle, for they “must prevail over the intellectuals of other classes by developing more convincing and sophisticated theories, inculcating other intellectuals with the dominant world-view, and assimilating them to the hegemon’s cause”⁴²¹. Consequently, the intellectual activity of

⁴¹⁵ Rehman 2013, 5.

⁴¹⁶ Žižek 2011a.

⁴¹⁷ Chomsky 2012a, 72.

⁴¹⁸ Ali 2011.

⁴¹⁹ Cox 1993a, 53.

⁴²⁰ Gramsci 1971, 10.

⁴²¹ Augelli and Murphy 1993, 131.

organic intellectuals of the dominant class, besides strengthening homogeneity and awareness of their own social class and directing its ideas and aspirations, aims precisely to undermine the organization and political cohesion of the working-class and other subordinated groups by mediating the struggle of class forces through the ideological mystification of the dominant conception of the world⁴²² - in the OWS case, the myth of multi-party representative democracy as the allegedly appropriate political terrain for achieving substantial reform of the hegemonic world order.

⁴²² Cox 1993b, 268.

CONCLUSION: THE CONSTRUCTIVE FAILURE OF OWS AND THE GLOBAL CYCLE OF STRUGGLES

OWS within a global cycle of struggles

As much as the movement struggled with the hegemonic forces, and despite the popular support and the relative immediate success of the occupations worldwide, OWS did not succeed in consolidating its main temporary achievement - the creation of cooperative communities of mutual support and authentic democratic interchange⁴²³ - into structures for sustaining the development of an alternative historic bloc, thereby bridging the decisive gap between short-term triumphs and long-term, lasting accomplishments. Consequently, victory eventually eluded OWS and hence the movement was defeated, evaporated, though its dissolution provides valuable lessons for the next wave of social protests, as shall be seen when the OWS's constructive failure⁴²⁴ is explored further on in this chapter. Perhaps not as soon as the media commentators and those who promptly wrote the obituaries for OWS⁴²⁵ predicted and actually longed for, yet the movement could not overcome the fundamental contradiction between democracy and capitalism and thus disrupting the political, economic, social, and cultural structures of the neoliberal capitalist hegemonic order. That being so, it could be said that OWS was but a dream. Indeed, it was a collective dream that developed in its nucleus alternative social and cultural formations and embraced horizontal and anti-hierarchical organization and consensus-based participatory decision-making practices, and yet came close to become true. However, neither the combination of boldness, diversity-embracing, inventiveness, and nonviolent militancy, or the creation of new forms of democratic participation on the part of the occupiers, could counter the physical eradication of the occupations, nor the efforts by the state forces (in Gramsci's extended sense) to disrupt the movement through surveillance, entrapment, intimidation and infiltration. On that account, Micah White, a long-run political activist and one of the co-founders of OWS, identifies the many reasons that led to the movement's defeat:

“Asked to explain why our movement vaporized, Edward Snowden, the National Security Agency whistleblower, asserted that Occupy revealed the limits of our

⁴²³ Chomsky 2012a, 72-3.

⁴²⁴ White 2016, 2; 26-7; 34-5.

⁴²⁵ Hedges 2012.

conception of protest: ‘Occupy Wall Street had such limits because the local authorities were able to enforce, basically in our imaginations, an image of what proper civil disobedience is - one that is simply ineffective.’ Snowden is right to blame authorities for developing counter-tactics that constrain protesters to ineffective, performative and symbolic acts. These counter-tactics include requiring protest permits, encouraging organizers to work with authorities on orchestrating pre-planned voluntary arrests, establishing so-called free speech zones in areas where being heard is impossible, or forcing protesters to keep moving on sidewalks rather than block traffic. These counter-tactics were developed to neutralize the effectiveness of activism, and they work to prevent protests from achieving social change.”⁴²⁶

Therefore, the hegemonic forces that from the very beginning of the movement sought to undermine and suppress its revolutionary potential through the cultural institutions of civil society - and particularly through the mainstream media, as investigated throughout this work - eventually came to overthrow this mass social movement, hence blocking the construction of a political alternative and a sustainable counter-hegemony. Needless to say, the eviction of the occupations through the deployment of a massive police force, and thereby the loss of the spatial dispositive in which counter-hegemonic practices and functions were developed⁴²⁷, clearly and decisively contributed to the attainment of the hegemonic ruling class’ main goal regarding OWS: to preserve unquestioned the democratic mechanisms of the modern state that guarantee the undisturbed functioning of capitalism, and thereby to block any radical transformation of the foundational constituent of social relations and structures within the hegemonic order - the neoliberal ideology⁴²⁸.

Nevertheless, OWS indeed has left a lasting legacy⁴²⁹ inasmuch as it effectively and positively intervened in the symbolic order - the subjective domain that refers to the discursive formation, the meaning-making aspect of social relations⁴³⁰. Thus, it finally came to significantly alter the dominant narrative when a new discursive formation born of the movement: a new political discourse concerning economic inequalities, greed, the corruption of Wall Street and financial institutions, shredding of democratic process, and specifically

⁴²⁶ White 2016, 2-3.

⁴²⁷ Rehmann 2013, 10.

⁴²⁸ Žižek 2012a, 87.

⁴²⁹ Wallerstein 2011.

⁴³⁰ Rehmann 2013, 7.

the anti-capitalist rejection of neoliberal ideology and solutions⁴³¹. Consequently, OWS had generated the germ of class solidarity⁴³² by advancing the common identity among different groups once subordinated under the capitalist system - the slogan “We are the 99%” encompasses the poor, the middle-class, the working-class, the disadvantaged of capitalism, and hence articulated the relevant dimensions of societal reality - exactly how Gramsci once envisioned the rise of class consciousness as the key precondition for the development of an intellectual and moral unity on a universal plane, the first step towards the emergence of a solid counter-hegemonic historic bloc⁴³³. Although one may rightfully claim the success of OWS in raising this class consciousness worldwide, and even though the virtual dimension of the Occupy movement may have survived somewhere else and the movement has actually splintered and regrown into a variety of focused causes⁴³⁴, the hegemonic structures of neoliberal capitalist order went through this ideological struggle unscathed, barring a few scratches: OWS produced no tangible legislative achievement; income inequality has grown continuously - the gulf between the 99% and the 1% is still there, and actually widening; bankers continue to get fat bonuses while their banks are saved by public money; big money’s hold on politics is even tighter as corporate money still floods unrestricted into election campaigns⁴³⁵.

However, one cannot evict an idea whose time has come⁴³⁶, and hence the popular outrage and revolutionary energy that moved OWS and that found fertile ground in the hearts of overall society can no longer be kicked into the long grass.

The subsequent groundswells of popular uprisings may not have used the “Occupy” language, nor followed its tactics, or even developed according to its inner dynamics, but they definitely shared the same feeling of unease and discontent with the hegemonic structures of neoliberal capitalist world order and the hope for achieving social change through collective action that sustained the occupiers in their encampments around the world week after week. Thus, for fully grasping the relevance of OWS and other popular anti-hegemonic social protests that broke out in this decade, it is of utmost importance to situate them within the “‘new cycle of movements,’ kicked off by the ‘revolution of dignity’ in the

⁴³¹ Wallerstein 2012; Kellner 2013, 265; Reyes 2018, 244.

⁴³² Chomsky 2012b.

⁴³³ Gramsci 1971, 52-3; 181-2; 196-200.

⁴³⁴ Levitin 2015.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*; Žižek 2012a, 86.

⁴³⁶ Manski et al 2011.

Arab World”⁴³⁷ in early 2011. OWS must be, therefore, conceived along with: the Arab Spring uprisings that spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa; with the encampments in Greece, Portugal, the UK riots, and the *Indignados* in Spain; with the student revolt in Chile and the labor and trade union movement in Wisconsin; with the popular protests that erupted in 2013 in places that until then were perceived as success stories, as were Turkey (the popular defense of the Gezi Park against the government’s urban development plan), Brazil (the social protests triggered by a small rise in the cost of public transport)⁴³⁸; with the movement #YoSoy132 and the later massive protests against the assassination and kidnapping of students in Mexico, the anti-establishment Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, and with the Umbrella Revolution and lately the anti-extradition protests in Hong-Kong⁴³⁹; and, most recently, with the Yellow Vests in France⁴⁴⁰, the civil demonstrations in Chile and other South-American countries (that were promptly and prematurely called the Latin American Spring).

Accordingly, all these protests and revolts (and a long list of others) together form an emerging cycle of struggles whose contexts are very different, indeed, and by no means are they the simple iterations of what has happened elsewhere, but rather each of these movements has managed to translate common elements into their own situation⁴⁴¹. Consequently, the global uprisings that erupted throughout this decade must be studied as the ensemble of anti-hegemonic movements and grassroots organizations, for they all stand against complementary, combining, aspects of the economic, political, and social dimensions, which are, in turn, underpinned by the very same neoliberal ideology and the dominance relations it organically entails. That being so, together these popular struggles constitute a “set of progressive conceptions of the world, organized resistance and differentiated political potentials” whose “self-actualizing potentials are reflected in a variety of radically democratic practices” and hence “challenge the mantra that there is no alternative to neo-liberal capitalism”, and hence produce “innovations in thought and action which are directly linked to the actual practices of local, regional and global politics”⁴⁴². On that account, Žižek holds that they all target the hegemonic structures of neoliberal capitalist world order:

⁴³⁷ Rehmann 2013, 3

⁴³⁸ Žižek 2013.

⁴³⁹ Castells 2015, 220-1.

⁴⁴⁰ Della Porta and Diani 2020, 135.

⁴⁴¹ Hardt and Negri 2011.

⁴⁴² Gill 2011.

“Global capitalism is a complex process which affects different countries in different ways. What unites the protests, for all their multifariousness, is that they are all reactions against different facets of capitalist globalization. The general tendency of today’s global capitalism is towards further expansion of the market, creeping enclosure of public space, reduction of public services (healthcare, education, culture), and increasingly authoritarian political power. (...) None of these protests can be reduced to a single issue. They all deal with a specific combination of at least two issues, one economic (from corruption to inefficiency to capitalism itself), the other politico-ideological (from the demand for democracy to the demand that conventional multi-party democracy be overthrown).”⁴⁴³

Otherwise, the individual attribution of single issues to each of these social movements and the resulting reduction of them to a particular response to a specific situation inevitably leads to the maintenance and reproduction of the status quo: it leads one to believe “there is no threat against the global order as such, just a series of separate local problems”⁴⁴⁴. Appropriately, the strategy of hegemonic forces has been to particularize each of these uprisings and consequently to dissociate them from the global struggle against the limiting structures of neoliberal capitalist world order, in order to contain fundamental political contestation on the nature and purposes of rule on a global scale, hence allowing them to continue to promote the capitalist mode of accumulation⁴⁴⁵. Ultimately it ends up dispersing any authentic attempt to strike at the core of neoliberal hegemonic ideology and thereby blocking any radical global revolution and the consequent working-class emancipation through the building of a counter-hegemonic historic bloc.

Having that said, what lessons can be drawn from the full political trajectory of the OWS movement - its emergence, dynamics, and defeat - to expand the limits of possibilities for the next wave of social protests (make no mistake, for there will be one)?

OWS’s constructive failure

Although there is, obviously, no ready-made solution for the ultimate success of the counter-hegemonic emancipatory project and the search for innovative tactics or practices for social activism falls beyond the scope of this work, an effort is to be made in order to

⁴⁴³ Žižek 2013.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ Gill 2011.

address some crucial issues for the future social movements in their relation with mainstream media - and with the cultural institutions of civil society overall. After thoroughly addressing the subject of study of this work, two main approaches emerge as imperative preconditions for the foundation of a truly engaged global civil society that will hopefully bring about the universal solution for the current structural crisis of neoliberal capitalist hegemonic order: a working-class-led global revolution. These strategies lie upon two major struggles, which nonetheless shall not be pursued independently: first, the struggle for media reforms⁴⁴⁶, or the thorough reconstruction of media⁴⁴⁷, enabling the long-term and sustainable development of a community-based media system that truly represents society's will, and thus re-appropriating the digital and communicative commons to put them at the service of the public interest; second, the encouragement of the extensive participation of students and the active engagement of public intellectuals, and the fostering of practices of intense education, thus providing cadres for social transformation⁴⁴⁸ and ensuing the ultimate responsibility of dissident, value-oriented intellectuals⁴⁴⁹ in building the moral ideological leadership of the working-class hegemony - the new "organic intellectuals" in Gramscian terms, though in a non-hierarchical sense of building processes of consensus⁴⁵⁰. As long as these two strategies intermingle and positively develop within the core of the social protests, the future uprisings, or the upcoming challenges to the hegemonic order, they may eventually succeed in advancing towards the achievement of the working-class hegemony and the building of a new counter-hegemonic historic bloc.

As regards the first perspective - the complete reconstruction of media - the need for democratization of information sources and for a more democratic media remains and demands as a fundamental issue to be pointedly addressed in the relation of social movements and mainstream media. That being so, substantial changes in media structure and objectives are imperative and must be ceaselessly pursued through two main approaches: to strive for containing and reversing the growing corporate media monopolies (a process that started in the 1980s, as observed in the previous chapter), and the resulting creation and support of truly independent media ⁴⁵¹. Accordingly, nonprofit community-based broadcasting stations and networks must be developed along with the better use of public-

⁴⁴⁶ Fuchs 2018, 787.

⁴⁴⁷ Chomsky 2012a, 75.

⁴⁴⁸ Kellner 2013, 261.

⁴⁴⁹ Chomsky 2016, 6-10.

⁴⁵⁰ Rehmann 2013, 2.

⁴⁵¹ Chomsky and Herman 2008, xlix.

access channels, the Internet, and independent print media, and thereby society may eventually come to rely upon a live media system that is genuinely community-based, ethnic-based, and labor-based⁴⁵², which shall necessarily serve the public interest. Furthermore, not only the social movements but society as a whole must struggle for “reforms that advance slow media, non-commercial media, public interest media, a public service Internet, the digital and communicative commons, and platform co-operatives”⁴⁵³.

These developments are essential for the re-appropriation of communicative commons, which, in turn, provides the ideological terrain for the achievement of cohesion among the disadvantaged groups subordinated under capitalism and the consequent building of a solid social unity under the leadership of the working-class, for only then can the social movements gain active public support. Thus, social movements will finally be portrayed to the overall public not through the biased mediation of mainstream media’s coverage, but through the work of a truly independent, ethical, and community-based alternative media.

Secondly (and perhaps even more importantly), social movements must be firmly committed with the empowerment of public intellectuals, for - as observed previously in this work - the development of an intellectual and moral unity is the foundational step for raising a class consciousness that will eventually create coherence among all the social elements of an emerging counter-hegemonic historic bloc. As Gramsci consistently held throughout his writings, “the role of intellectuals is to represent the ideas that constitute the terrain where hegemony is exercised”⁴⁵⁴. Consequently, “intellectuals play a key role in the building of an historic bloc” insofar as “they perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organizations which bind together the members of a class and of an historic bloc into a common identity”⁴⁵⁵. That being so, as they are fundamental actors in the ideological struggle for the radical reconstruction of social relations taking place within the domain of civil society, the wide participation of students and public intellectuals must be enthusiastically encouraged at the core of the social movements. Moreover, the community bonds developed within these anti-hegemonic movements must invariably reach universities and schools and hence forge broad coalitions, as these are precisely the instruments through which intellectuals - the cadres for social transformation - of various

⁴⁵² Chomsky 2012a, 75.

⁴⁵³ Fuchs 2018, 787.

⁴⁵⁴ Gramsci 1975, II, 1084 *as cited in* Augelli and Murphy 1993, 131.

⁴⁵⁵ Cox 1993a, 57.

levels are elaborated⁴⁵⁶. Schools and universities are also a primordial domain in which ideology thrives to articulate a coherent set of ideas, values, and associated subjective representations that account for a historical congruence that frees up the emancipatory possibilities for these movements.

Finally, progressive education to be fostered within social movements should additionally focus on transmitting knowledge also horizontally among their protesters. Thus, the understanding of the structural crisis of neoliberal capitalism⁴⁵⁷ as the propitious moment for expanding the limits and potentials for political intervention and radical social change on a global scale through collective struggle and transformative resistance would spread and thereby reach as many protesters as possible. It will eventually drive them to cohere their general discontent with the hegemonic order into a positive program with alternatives to change the existing economic, political, social, and cultural structures that reproduce the capitalist mode of accumulation, the individual alienation, and the ultimate dominance of transnational capitalist class over other fragments of society.

Therefore, unless the next wave of anti-hegemonic protests and revolts fully takes into account these two complementary strategies - the thorough reform of media and the empowerment of public intellectuals - the achievement of the working-class counter-hegemony and the development of a sustainable alternative historic bloc will remain beyond the horizon. The dominant practices of neoliberal capitalism will continue to block the emergence of any genuinely independent form of civil society, which ultimately corresponds, for the ideological terrain, to the contestation of neoliberal hegemonic ideology. Nevertheless, OWS has revealed to society that the building of an authentic democratic community of resistance to these neoliberal hegemonic structures is entirely possible, even if for just a few months.

⁴⁵⁶ Gramsci 1971, 10.

⁴⁵⁷ Kellner 2013, 268.

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