



Occupy: A new new social movement

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Abstract

The recent mobilizations in the Middle East, Southern Europe, and United States were both inevitable given the implosion of global capital, and at the same time unexpected and unpredictable. How are we to understand these mobilizations? This article suggests that NSM, New Social Movement theory, with its concerns for identity, culture, and meaning, in which the transformation of identity becomes the basis of subsequent social transformation remains a useful starting point. But given the contradictions of global capital, as well as developments in social movement theory, there is a need to further consider the importance of the legitimation crises of the political economy migrating to the subjective realms of identity and emotion that impel mobilizations that are informed by morality and visions that may be utopian. The Occupy movements illustrate these relationships.

Keywords

Emotions, hope, identity, legitimation crises, morality, NSM, social movements, vision

Introduction

How can we understand Arab Spring, the *Indignados* or Occupy Wall Street? We could start with the structural crises of neoliberal globalization and governments were indifferent at best – duplicitous at worst – and immune to popular concerns or pressures. Small, core constituencies of young, college educated, typically underemployed/unemployed youth, with computer access and savvy, acted as catalysts igniting massive protests and mobilizations. These youth articulated wider grievances that attracted many other groups, classes, and cohorts who were also adversely impacted by neoliberalism and were now facing a precarious existence and uncertain future (Standing, 2012). How and why do

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mobilizations occur, who become recruited, who supports movements? The dynamics of emergence, trajectories and outcomes of such mobilizations are not simple. Do we look at the structural strains and contradictions, do we consider how and why certain groups embrace certain ideologies – how are structural factors mediated, how are they framed?

I would like to argue that these new social movements are best understood through New Social Movement theory (NSM) that while rooted in neo-Marxist critical theory, these movements are not classical worker struggles over redistribution, e.g., socialist workers whose parties/unions lead their struggles. Rather, NSM theory looks at the salience of culture, meanings, collective identity and social networks to consider why movements come into being, what motivates actors envisioning alternative forms of selfhood/subjectivity and identity as the means to transform society through cultural changes rather than specific kinds of legislation (see Polletta and Jasper, 2001). As will be argued, *these movements of the marginalized, the excluded and the indignant as contestations over cultural meanings, and the creation and recognition of new forms of collective identities impelled by visions of alternative possibilities of subjectivity within a transformed society that is egalitarian, caring, participatory, and democratic are the means of socio-cultural transformations.* I would however argue that *we must bring political economy back in* to realize post-materialist values and that these movements can then be best understood by considering (1) *the legitimation crises of global capital*, (2) *identity*, (3) *morality*, (4) *emotions*, and (5) *vision* – all of which are located within spatial, interactional, and informational matrices. As will be seen, this will be clear by looking at Occupy Wall Street (OWS) mobilizations.

Legitimation crises

As the economy shifted from providing goods and services to investing in the more profitable ‘casino capitalism’ (Strange, 1986), with the embrace of neoliberalism in the 1980s, most incomes stagnated while the incomes and wealth of the elites, especially the financial elite, not only skyrocketed, but with this wealth the elites changed the rules and regulations of banking, investment, economic activity, and the tax codes to further increase their wealth (Harvey, 2005). ‘Exotic’ investment instruments, insured by hedge funds, proliferated. There was a rapid rise in the value of housing, which, ironically enough increased the demand for housing as more and more people bought homes for investment purposes, and/or refinanced homes to pay off credit card debt. There was an explosion of ‘subprime’ mortgages in which vetting applicants was negligent at best, criminal at worst. Eventually, the bubble burst, the rapidly expanding housing market crashed, the entire financial industry imploded and took the entire economy down. There followed a wave of bankruptcies, layoffs of workers, and subsequent economic stagnation, if not devastation for many in vulnerable positions, who have been dubbed the precariat. But while surely there was malfeasance, if not criminal behavior, this must be understood as a structural crisis in which the ‘steering mechanisms’ failed.

A vast government bailout pumped trillions of dollars into the insolvent banks and ‘saved’ the banking/financial system. The government rescue halted the plummet, saved the financial system and its elite prospered, yet ordinary people lost jobs, houses were foreclosed, people evicted, and many remain unemployed and/or underemployed. It was

soon evident that thanks to 'crony capitalism,' the casino players won, the banking/finance industries had 'recovered,' indeed amassed more wealth than ever before. Its elites were well rewarded – thanks to the taxpayers.

Economic crises, implosions, and structural contradictions that threaten survival or the maintenance of living standards, or render social status, dignity and self-esteem problematic, lead to questions and challenges to the legitimacy of the economic system, political leadership, and legitimating ideologies. For Habermas (1975), legitimization crises occur when there are failures in the objective 'steering mechanisms' of the systems of advanced capitalist industrial societies that provide adaptation and integration, *namely the economy and the state*. System integration depends on mechanisms of domination, the state, and the mass media. Social integration depends on normative structures. But each form of integration possesses distinct logics and in turn, a different kind of rationality. But at the same time, macro conditions impact the 'life world,' the micro level of feelings, identities, and values.

Social integration comes through socialization and the creation of 'life worlds' of meaning, namely a culture/ideology that legitimates the system and provides personal meaning. In contemporary societies, states and markets have 'migrated' into the subjective that is to say 'colonized the life world' – crises at the level of political economy impact the subjective namely identity, motivation, and values (Habermas, 1975, 1985). Thus crises of political economy have *subjective consequences in the life world where motivated identities are experienced and performed*. At times of crises, people withdraw commitments to the existing social order – creating spaces for alternative views, values, and understandings. But, these conditions do not lead to social movements *per se*. Crises need to arouse collective emotions; they must be interpreted within existing frames or new frames that resonate with an actor's character, identities and their morality to impel joining/creating networks of actors where alternative understandings and visions can be negotiated and collective struggles work toward change. Thus, as Habermas suggests, the new social movements can be seen as attempts to retain or recreate meaningful gratifying identities and lifestyles at the levels of social integration rather than redistribution. These movements emerge 'at the seam between system and life-world' (Habermas, 1985: 394).

Identity

Identity is a reflexive image of one's self – a narrative, a story of a social actor's continuity across time and space. It defines a person/group as distinct from others in norms, values, lifestyles, social practices, and aesthetic tastes. Identity locates the actor within the 'cohort flow' of history, where biography and collective history/memory intersect, in the current moment and in an imagined future.¹ Moreover, identity mediates between the larger society and specific thoughts and actions of the social actor. It acts as a filter that provides selective attention to external events; some people may pay attention to soccer, others to politics, and still others to popular culture. But identity is not simply a set of cognitive processes, it is acquired through social interactions and ties to groups, it is anchored by powerful emotions. Thus, salient events mediated through one's identity can engender indifference or intense emotional reactions. But the key factor here is that when

the cultural system and values, qua frameworks of meaning and identity that typically support and reproduce the system, are undermined or challenged by crises in the system and become dysfunctional, there are often intense emotional reactions that are mediated by, interpreted through, and reacted to on the bases of one's identity.

Identities, individually and collectively, mediate between structural conditions, e.g., legitimation crises at the level of system, such as political economy and culture, and the interpersonal/individual interpretations and reactions that may lead to crises of identity, culture, and legitimating meanings as people withdraw commitment to the social (dis) order – creating spaces for alternative views and understandings. At moments of crisis, traditional identities prove inadequate or insufficient to deal with the current crisis and act as brakes upon emerging, or at least hoped for, alternative social arrangements. Much as Marx noted that when social relations and/or ideologies hindered the expansion of capital, they needed to be discarded, similarly, at certain times of economic transformation so too must certain identities be cast off, discarded, and new ones negotiated. Some people may withdraw and become depoliticized. Some may become politically mobilized and seek social change or transformations that may either be reactionary or progressive. Moreover, when explanations for crises and alternatives are framed in ways that resonate with the identities of certain publics, social mobilizations arise to alleviate the distress, envision alternatives, and attempt transformation.

Emotions

While the progressive movements of today are in response to the economic conditions, these conditions do not lead to social movements per se. Crises need to arouse collective emotions such as 'moral shock' (Jasper, 1997); *events must be interpreted, alternative identities, understandings, and visions must be negotiated, mobilizing networks must emerge – and strategies must be chosen*. Emotions, socialized affects, may be experienced as intense feelings or may be suppressed – either way emotions influence perceptions, judgments, and in turn actions. Emotions motivate certain behaviors and inhibit others. We would seek to avoid or alleviate unpleasant emotions (fear, anxiety anger, disgust, shame, or guilt) and generally seek more pleasant emotional states (love, joy, recognition [self-esteem], agency, or surprise). Gaining an identity, individually or collectively, is an interpersonal process that involves emotions. In Freudian theory, identification was first based on overcoming the basic separation anxiety of infancy, and somewhat later it enabled a defense against harm through identification with the aggressor. In both cases, one's character was shaped in order to alleviate anxiety. Collective identities are also the result of similar processes of seeking attachments, recognition, etc., and the security provided by group membership. Moreover, collective identities mediate social events that evoke emotions. The work of Jasper (1997; Polletta and Jasper, 2001) finds salient roles for emotions, identity and cultural meanings in understanding the current wave of mobilizations.

Structural conditions/legitimation crises elicit emotions which dispose people to joining social movements that promise emotional gratifications in a future, transformed society. The loss of work, underemployment and blocked mobility, the crash of a market, a fallen government, and an attack by an enemy can evoke primal fears for one's very

survival and quite often anger at those believed responsible – and often to scapegoat targets to blame. When governments, whether elected democracies or unelected dictatorships, fail to provide the conditions for economic growth and/or they security for its populations, and/or they retrench their social programs from supporting education, health care, or retirement pensions, while the growing wealth and political power of elites is especially visible, people experience a ‘moral shock’. For Jasper (1997) a moral shock takes place when various beliefs and values that people hold about themselves and their societies are challenged and undermined by breaches in the boundaries of what has been considered moral and decent when certain events undermine the typical routines of everyday life, shared understandings and notions of decency.

When people find themselves facing sudden economic reversals (job loss, foreclosure, bankruptcy), when they feel marginalized as either workers without work or underemployed and/or politically powerless, they experience ‘moral shock’ and are likely to be angry, frustrated, indignant, anxious about the future, and impelled to seek amelioration. In most cases, in late modern societies, people are likely to feel indignant, humiliated over the lack of recognition and in many cases, this is experienced as blow to one’s self-esteem.

Many young people entering the labor force face unemployment and/or underemployment, massive debt, and the costs of living unaffordable. Many older people’s jobs have disappeared and will not come back. This has evoked frustration, anger, and resentment at those elites deemed responsible. Moreover, the extent to which the economic elites control the political systems has been rendered transparent given the government’s bailouts that saved the bankers. The meltdown exposed the domination of society by the capitalist class, it has stripped away masks hiding the fact that relationships between people are based on the cash nexus, especially in democracies where ‘elected representatives’ supposedly represent the ‘people.’ But today these ‘people’ are the economic elites who fund elections, hire lobbyists, and otherwise select and elect those who do its bidding. The domination of the entire state, its legislative, judiciary, and executive branches of governance, is now beholden to the captains of commerce. We now live in a state of ‘inverted fascism’ where democracy provides entertainment and carnivals that assuage the people and fragment the society to forestall resistance (Wolin, 2008).

Morality

A central point of the new social movements is that the economic conditions are viewed through a moral prism in which the economic elites are viewed as directly to blame for the long-term stagnation and short-term crisis. These movements are less guided by particular interests than by moral judgments that regard the concentration of wealth and power, amid growing inequality, poverty, and degradation as fundamentally unjust. We live in a world where the 400 richest families have as much wealth as the bottom half of the world.

Over and above these collective emotions of shock and rage is also a ‘moral vision,’ which goes beyond consistent pressure to oust leaders and end regimes, and to propagate a social order that embodies a new social contract. It embodies a different utopian politics that delivers a nation

from degradation, serves as a barometer of future progress and calls for democratic politics, citizen participation, demands an end to corruption, and seeks a new beginning. ... Wherever citizens have been gripped by the fervor of peaceful people power, it was always the pursuit of an imaginable social utopia that drove protestors, who harbored no fear and were convinced that a new universe of social relations can be created based on a common belief. ... It is a moral vision best described as the relationship between the citizen and the ideal progressive state as the embodiment of the highest aspirations of a nation's political life. Protest is a statement writ large of the desires of millions of individuals to supplant the arbitrariness, brutality and partiality of prior arrangements based on the private power of disposition.²

At this point we should note that in a complex society, there are fundamental differences in moral values that lie at the basis of a group's claims that are not simply reducible to class or education, but reflect character, identity, and social locations. The early studies on authoritarianism showed that people varied on the tendencies to submit to authority, conform to groups, and show intolerance toward outgroups vs. being autonomous, creative, tolerant, open to experience and self-realization. In contemporary social psychological research, Lakoff (2011) has suggested a basic polarity of the 'strict father' vs. 'nurturant parent' is associated with particular moralities. The former stresses self-discipline, strength, and independence which arise from 'strict' parenting. Fairness is seen in equality of opportunity where all can compete to become one of the 'winners.' A society should not reward its 'losers' with any benefits which will then create a class of immoral parasites living off the labors of others. But for many other people, one's basic moral posture is based on empathy, compassion, and caring for others, even strangers one may never meet, sharing what one has with less fortunate who need support. Fairness is about seeing that in a world of plenty, all should benefit. For our purposes, we will note that the Occupy movements see the current arrangements as not simply unfair, but that unfairness is an important moral breach and that there is far too little compassion in contemporary American society.

Visions located within spatial and interactional matrices

Movements depend on the shared interpretations of events and conditions, goals to be attained, and strategies to attain them. 'Framing' is an essential aspect of claims making and mobilization that in turn shapes the goals of social movements. In order to affirm the bonds of solidarity between members and attract new members, to engender the hope that animates such movements, it is necessary to frame reality in ways that appeal to the emotional needs of members and potential members – *as well their moral outlooks*. But that said, we would then argue that the fundamental question raised by the contemporary social movements is the nature of vision – indeed hope and 'the good life.'

Bellah (1991) and his collaborators have long been concerned with the vision of the 'good life' and the downsides of an unbridled, Lockean individualism that has given us great affluence – especially for the few – while many face unemployment, underemployment, homelessness, untreated illness, and we all suffer a fragmented social, decaying infrastructure and environmental degradation. The logic of the market orientation has pervaded the entire society and undermined shared purpose, public virtue, collective spirit, or concerns for the unfortunate. Indeed the poor, minorities, immigrants, and

students are often seen as evil parasites. For many North Americans, the 'good life' has been seen in terms of freedom to pursue personal satisfactions and achievements apart from others, and 'retreat to one's own circle of friends and family.' Indeed, for many politicians and even clergy, this 'freedom' from social concerns and indifference to the less fortunate is itself a virtue to be celebrated. But this indifference and/or withdrawal from public concerns is exactly what enabled the massive corporate takeover of America and in turn its subsequent decline.

We might note the importance of hope and vision in the work of Ernst Bloch.³ For Bloch, Freud's notion of the daydream as wish fulfillment became the essential motive for hope which permeates myths, dreams, religions, and utopian visions often dismissed as ideology by some Marxists.

In his *magnus opus*, Bloch carries through both a thorough examination of the ways that hope and visions of a better world exist in everything from daydreams to the great religions, and cultural studies which trace throughout history anticipatory visions of what would later be systematized, packaged, and distributed as socialism by Karl Marx and his followers. Consequently, Bloch provides a critical hermeneutic of the ways that cultural history and socio-economic developments point to socialism as the realization of humanities [*sic*] deepest dreams and hopes, and that encourages us to look for the progressive and emancipatory content of cultural artifacts. ... For Bloch, the cultural surplus preserves unsatisfied desires and human wishes for a better world and because these wishes are usually not fulfilled they contain contents which remain relevant to a future society which may be able to satisfy these wishes and needs. In other words, ideology contains hints as to what human beings desire and need which can be used to criticize failures to satisfy these needs and to realize these desires in the current society. (Kellner, n.d.: 3, 5)

Utopian thought, as embodied in the NSM frames, is not easily understood within the dominant perspectives of social movement theory. Without understanding emotions in general, and people's needs for attachments, a dignified identity, creative agency, and meaning that engender hope, without considerations of morality, social movement theory is as empty and vacuous as the 'one dimensional society' that has given rise to 'the great refusals' (Marcuse, 1964). Similarly, pundits and politicians fail to see that the messages and demands, and utopian visions are expressed in the very existence of contemporary social movements – not formal petitions or attempts to engage in partisan politics.

Utopian thought has a long tradition in the western world, from More's classic work, to the French socialists, various religious communities and communes such as the Shakers, political experiments such as kibbutzim and of course the Marxist revolutions of 1917 and 1949. But most utopian communities faded and waned while communist Russia and China became brutal dictatorships. But that said, the Occupy movements ask us to rethink the role of vision in social movements, and indeed, bring utopia back in.⁴ While utopian thought has little impacted social research, we must recall, following Touraine that NSMs were not attempts to change elected representatives or support or oppose particular political strategies or overturn laws in the near term. Rather, such movements seek to change the very nature of the society in the long term by challenging meanings and values and changing identity in the future. In 1999, following upon the 'end of ideology' debates, Russell Jacoby (1999: xi–xii) pronounced the demise of

utopian thought – ‘that the future could fundamentally surpass the present.’ Politics had become boring. But the events to follow, especially the global justice movements and in turn the various movements of the Arab Spring, M15, Israeli Summer, and American Fall/Occupy movements, have rekindled utopian thought and require that we rethink the importance of utopian visions.

It should also be noted that contemporary NSMs depend on computer-based ‘virtual public spheres’ and computer-mediated social connections that link actors from distant locales through the electronic circuits and fast transportation corridors, while isolating and subduing the logic of experience embodied in the ‘space of flows’ (see Castells, 1998; Langman, 2005; Melucci, 1998). The power of the Internet, and indeed the flourishing of social media accessible via smartphones, has enhanced the power of the weak and enabled the masses to confront the power of the few.

Enter Occupy Wall Street

NSM theory and its concerns with identity and culture emerged along with the various social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, feminism, ecology, civil rights, and later, gay rights. While this perspective remains foundational, I have argued that to understand the social mobilizations of today we need to incorporate political economy/legitimation crises, emotions, morality, and vision. When American economy crashed, the result was a number of legitimation crises. In the aftermath, Obama was elected president. But the immediate reaction was the emergence of the Koch/Armey funded ‘astroturf’ Tea Party, which was primarily a reactionary, racist response to the election of an African American ‘socialist’ president with plans to provide health care to everyone and subsidize the ‘parasitic classes’ (Langman, 2012). Many were surprised that in face of a massive economic collapse where millions lost jobs, homes, and indeed their future, there was not a mobilization from the left.

Outside of alternative media, there was little critique of financial capital and/or the extent to which Wall Street controlled the US government – regardless of party or proclaimed ideology. The corporate-controlled mass media focused on the silly costumes and slogans of the Tea Party and ignored the basis of the collapse.⁵ The banks were saved, the people were screwed – or as OWS would later chant ‘the banks were bailed out the people were sold out.’ Between lobbyists and campaign contributions, the financial elites created a system of ‘inverted totalitarianism’ in which the very rich controlled the political system (Wolin, 2008). But nevertheless, many people were becoming increasingly frustrated and angry.

Recent college graduates with huge student loans often found themselves unemployed or underemployed. Such youth were likely to be part of the now growing ‘precariat’ that consists of:

... millions with insecure jobs, housing and social entitlements. They have no occupational identity, and do not belong to any occupational community with a long-established social memory giving an anchor of ethical norms. Being urged to be ‘flexible’ and ‘employable’, they act opportunistically. They are *denizens*, not citizens, in that they have fewer rights than citizens. ... There are three ‘varieties’ of precariat, all detached from old political democracy and unable

to relate to twentieth-century industrial democracy or economic democracy. The first variety consists of those drifting from working-class backgrounds into precariousness, the second consists of those emerging from a schooling system over-credentialized for the flexi-job life on offer, and the third are migrants and others, such as the criminalized, in a status denying them the full rights of citizens. Each has a distinctive view on life and society. (Standing, 2012)

The precariat, including segments of skilled workers, the highly (over) educated as well as the poor that were without occupational ties or ties to work organizations, experienced themselves as marginalized, excluded from the social order. This was especially the case for educated youth who ‘played by the rules,’ did what they needed to do, and found instead, rejection and disdain.

And then came the Arab Spring – itself a response to neoliberalism, crony capitalism, and the economic stagnation of Arab countries – that seemed a model and catalyst for other progressive mobilizations.⁶ How did these mass protests in Tunisia and Egypt have contagion effects in Europe, Israel, and the given the present concerns, the USA? As has been noted, the growing stagnation of wages, downsizing, and deskilling had been taking place for decades – but bereft of a labor party or widescale labor organizations, the fragmented nature of American society meant there were very few progressive organizations that could organize and implement effective protest.

In the summer of 2011, the irreverent Canadian magazine *Adbusters* called for an occupation of Wall Street, the Ur of American capitalism, on 17th September – and the rest is history. Zuccotti Park, a small private park near Wall Street, suddenly became a camp filled with masses of ‘Occupiers.’ A new and unexpected social movement burst forth.⁷ The Occupiers established a democratically organized, egalitarian community whose very existence was itself a threat to the established order by mobilizing general awareness, critique and resistance to the inequality and the stagnation, unemployment/underemployment, and most of all, the extent to which the fiscal elites benefitted and the people were screwed. From the encampment of Zuccotti Park over 1400 plus occupations blossomed nationally and internationally.

Legitimation crises migrate into the life world, the site of subjectivity. A long tradition of sociological research has shown how joblessness evokes anger, anxiety, and resentment, which leads to despair, depression, and the loss of self-esteem, and finally, in some cases, aggression to self or others. Crises not only impact pocketbooks, but undermine the means by which people gain recognition through work. Joblessness humiliates people, robs them of their dignity, of their humanity. Occupiers not only feel that they have been excluded and marginalized, but their fundamental sense of self has been assaulted. Work involves not only the production of products but the production of oneself; and while one may be alienated on the job, without a job one is not only further alienated but marginalized and unable to fulfill one’s humanity. In North American society, for many people, work has been one of the key elements of one’s identity – especially among highly skilled industrial workers and the educated sectors. But following the implosion, millions of such workers were suddenly without jobs – or working at minimally skilled, minimum wage service McJobs in fast food, retail sales, security, etc. – and even these jobs were hard to find. This is especially difficult for people who

‘played by the rules,’ worked or studied hard and did what they needed to do, and found instead, rejection, and disdain.

On the basis of such emotions and feelings, a number of people were disposed to organize and protest. Occupy provided the kind of public sphere and group ties otherwise lacking. Moreover, for many, ‘movement identities’ provided a variety of alternative, if not seemingly more moral kinds of emotional gratifications from membership in a community, recognition apart from job-based wealth; and especially important for many, giving voice to their discontent provided feelings of agency and empowerment that come through collective struggles for change. Moreover, as was previously noted, such struggles were informed by a sense of ‘moral shock’ if not outrage over the growing inequality and indifference of the government to the exclusion and marginalization of growing numbers.

In deed and word, the Occupiers embraced and articulated a morality of sharing and caring – not as simply desirable, but the very survival of the world depends on changing lifestyles, identities, and values. It was not by accident that the initial target was Wall Street, the locus of the greed, power, and wealth of a small number of people that is grossly unfair.

Democracy starts with citizens caring about one another and acting responsibly on that sense of care, taking responsibility both for oneself and for one’s family, community, country, people in general and the planet. The role of government is to protect and empower all citizens equally via The Public: public infrastructure, laws and enforcement, health, education, scientific research, protection, public lands, transportation, resources, art and culture, trade policies, safety nets, and on and on. Nobody makes it on their own. If you got wealthy, you depended on The Public and you have a responsibility to contribute significantly to The Public so that others can benefit in the future. Moreover, the wealthy depend on those who work and who deserve a fair return for their contribution to our national life.

I think it is a good thing that the Occupation movement is not making specific policy demands. If it did, the movement would become about those demands. If the demands were not met, the movement would be seen as having failed. It seems to me that the OWS movement is moral in nature, that occupiers want the country to change its moral focus. It is easy to find useful policies; hundreds have been suggested. It is harder to find a moral focus and stick to it. If the movement is to frame itself, it should be on the basis of its moral focus, not a particular agenda or list of policy demands. If the moral focus of America changes, new people will be elected and the policies will follow. (Lakoff, 2011: 1)

It is evident that while this view is highly contested, even vehemently repudiated by some, it rests on basic emotional dispositions that define a morality of ‘fairness.’ The emphasis on the unfettered individual gain of the few – and let others be damned – has not only fostered the decline of the US economy and its infrastructure, but threatens and adversely impacts the environment in ways that portend more catastrophic weather, rising sea levels, violent resource wars and major ecological collapse like those that destroyed the civilizations of Easter Island or the Mayans.

Habermas pointed out, that the early NSMs addressed the problems of social integration and were less concerned with redistributive issues than with the ‘grammar of forms of life’ (Habermas, 1981: 33). But as we have seen, today, given the crises of capitalism,

the NSMs have been responses to economic retrenchments and growing inequality as much as concerns with identity, lifestyle, creativity, self-realization and post materialist values based on collective good and harmony with Nature. The Occupy movements were prompted by anger, indignation, and resentment to both the structural crises of capitalism as well as the alienation, marginalization, exclusion, and denial of recognition that come from a society where individual wealth and the power of the few trump collective good and thwart genuine democracy. Occupy became the means of channeling legitimate anger toward productive ends, the progressive transformation of society.

The contemporary movements are not simply the classical interest-driven movements seeking better wages, workers' rights, or the rights to vote, nor are these movements simply questions of a valorizing denigrated, subaltern identity. Their protests were not simply reactions to the crises of financial capital, but critiques of a society which encourages the growth of concentrated wealth/power rather than caring relationships between people within a society that promotes a better quality of life for everyone. What kind of society encourages the pursuit of private wealth over the common good, where alienated labor becomes necessary to support an alienated consumerism that destroys our planet and warps subjectivities that find few genuine satisfactions? *Rather, these movements articulate a hybridity of economic grievances with visions of alternative identities based on different kinds of economic arrangements informed by (utopian) visions of collective benefit.* For many of the Occupiers, 'movement identities' provide(d) a variety of alternative, and seemingly more moral kinds of emotional gratifications to attain 'good life.' Such movements are trying to change the very nature of collective identity by themselves negotiating and articulating alternative identities that provide *both* economic redress and transformations of culture and identity based on sharing, caring, participatory democracy and personal fulfillment, self-development and self-fulfillment rather than competition, hierarchy, and the acquisition of material things. These movement identities seemingly provide more moral kinds of emotional gratifications through community bonds, feelings of agency and empowerment that one is doing something, acting on the world instead of passive resignation, gaining recognition and dignity, and finally, finding realms of personal meaning – not provided by the larger society.

The conditions of our times, as the Occupiers show, do not simply require new policies, but hope, new visions, and a resurrection of utopian thinking. As Shostak (2001) put it:

It would seem far more utopian for a society to ... provide for the needs of its least-well-off citizens, and to bolster the hopes and ability of all persons to compete. ... Similarly, basic values that appear to promote utopian gains include the cultivation of artistry, caring, creativity, curiosity, empathy, faith, honor, humor, love, sensitivity, and other virtues celebrated by healthy, life-appreciating people everywhere. (Shostak, 2001)

While the NSMs struggle over identity in the contested cultural terrains of the public spheres, various movements such as the solidarity economy or Parecon, inspired in part by Mondragon, suggest alternative, democratic, participatory economic structures, and practices. It is only a matter of time until these two movements come together.

Conclusion

In order to understand the recent movements, it is necessary to rethink the legacies of NSM theory and the importance of identity and culture as the sites of social transformation that encourage hope and enable visions. In the social context of today, after several decades of neoliberal capitalism that culminated in a massive implosion, it becomes necessary for us to rethink that paradigm and pay more attention to various crises of legitimacy, their emotional impacts, and questions of morality and vision. Here, the Occupy movements have much to teach us.

Occupy is meant more as a way of life that spreads through contagion, creates as many questions as it answers, aims to force a reconsideration of the way the nation does business and offers hope to those of us who previously felt alone in our belief that the current economic system is broken. But unlike a traditional protest, which identifies the enemy and fights for a particular solution, Occupy Wall Street just sits there talking with itself, debating its own worth, recognizing its internal inconsistencies. ... The members of Occupy Wall Street may be as unwieldy, paradoxical, and inconsistent as those of us living in the real world. But that is precisely why their new approach to protest is more applicable, sustainable and actionable than what passes for politics today. They are suggesting that the fiscal operating system on which we are attempting to run our economy is no longer appropriate to the task. They mean to show that there is an inappropriate and correctable disconnect between the abundance America produces and the scarcity its markets manufacture. ... And in the process, they are pointing the way toward something entirely different than the zero-sum game of artificial scarcity favoring top-down investors and media makers alike. (Rushkoff, 2011)

From all that has been said, the movements of the 21st century can be seen as linking the traditional concerns of NSMs with identity and culture with the realities of neoliberal capitalism and its contradictions. These movements are not directed at a particular event or single adversity, they are not episodic gatherings, but enduring testaments to the oppressive, inequalitarian economic system that has privileged the few. We cannot analyze these movements using the tools and concepts of the 20th century – although as I argued, a number of traditions in critical theory, NSM theory, and sociology of emotions, especially when conjoined with issues of morality, can provide important starting points. This article has attempted to continue that discussion.

Epilogue

What difference has Occupy made? Has it gone gently into the night? But those who ask are indeed quite unaware of just how much has happened. After the initial encampments of Zuccotti Park, there were soon 1400 plus occupations nationally and internationally. Moreover, national discussions in the USA turned from austerity, debt reduction and the retrenchments of entitlements, to fairness and inequality. The mass media had very few discussions of inequality but after Occupy, there were thousands of articles, stories, and television news bites. Among the clear results of Occupy, Pew Research shows that two-thirds of Americans saw growing inequality as a problem and were willing to demand greater government support, economic investment, and that the rich pay higher taxes.

While Occupy eschewed partisan politics as a presidential election was in process, a number of America voters responded to the messages of inequality and a much larger than expected number of young voters came to the polls and re-elected Obama. Whatever the many critiques of his policies, he stood in clear contrast to the lily white Romney, the embodiment of the 1% whose fortunes came from financial speculation.

Despite inclement weather, police brutality, and the violent dispersal of Occupation sites, the movements are not likely to disappear – as seen in the anniversary demonstrations of 17th September 2012. They are the product of capitalist contradictions that will not soon change. Moreover, quite under the radar they have been forging links and alliances with labor activists, anti-foreclosure groups, community activists, and minority communities that despite their many differences, are all impacted by the inequality and unfairness of domination by Wall Street. The next step involves the transformation of discontent from a myriad of critiques and protests to the mobilization of political power. This will require both leadership and contestations and confrontations with the very political and economic powers they eschew. But young movements mature and explore various strategies. The future of Occupy and the realization of a more egalitarian, democratic, and indeed post-materialistic society remain to be written.

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Notes

1. Identity links history and biography and locates the actor in particular 'generation units' that flow through time according to Mannheim (1952).
2. 'Why we protest'; at: www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/06/24/154623.html
3. See Kellner's (n.d) 'Ernst Bloch, utopia and ideology critique' for a short introduction to Bloch.
4. It is indeed fortuitous that Eric Olin Wright, past president of ASA, made utopian thought the central theme of the 2012 meetings.
5. They also ignored the extent to which the primary impetus for the Tea Party was racism, the controversy over Obama's birthplace meant that 'he was just not one of us' – us being white Americans.
6. See Moghadam, *Current Sociology* 61(4).
7. Many of the early occupiers were likely to have been college students exposed to sociology and philosophy, and many have been involved in previous social protests.

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Author biography

Lauren Langman is a Professor of Sociology at Loyola University of Chicago. He received his PhD at the University of Chicago from the Committee on Human Development and received psychoanalytic training at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. He has long worked in the tradition of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, especially relationships between culture, identity, and politics/political movements. He is the past president of Alienation Research and Theory, Research Committee 36, of the International Sociological Association as well as past president of the Marxist section of the American Sociological Association. Recent publications deal with globalization, alienation, global justice movements, the body, nationalism, and national character. His most recent books are *Trauma Promise and Millennium: The Evolution of Alienation*, with Devorah Kalekin and *Alienation and Carnivalization* with Jerome Braun.

Résumé

Les mobilisations récentes dans le Moyen-Orient, Europe du Sud et des États-Unis étaient à la fois inévitable compte tenu de l'implosion du capital global et dans le même temps inattendue et imprévisible. Comment doit-on comprendre ces mobilisations? Je dirais que NSM, New Theory mouvement social, avec ses préoccupations pour l'identité, la culture et le sens dans lequel la transformation de l'identité devient la base de la transformation sociale ultérieure reste un point de départ utile. Mais étant donné les contradictions du capital mondial, ainsi que les développements de la théorie des mouvements sociaux, nous avons besoin d'examiner plus avant l'importance de la crise de légitimation de l'économie politique qui migrent vers les royaumes subjectives de

l'identité et de l'émotion qui poussent la mobilisation, informé par la morale et visions qui peut être utopique. Les mouvements Occupy illustrer ces relations.

Mots-clés

Crises de légitimité, émotion, identité, moralité, mouvements sociaux, MSN, vision

Resumen

Las movilizaciones recientes en Oriente Próximo, Europa meridional y EEUU han sido inevitables dada la inesperada e imprevisible implosión del capital global. ¿Cómo podemos comprender estas movilizaciones? Sugeriría que NMS, la teoría de los Nuevos Movimientos Sociales, con sus preocupaciones por la identidad, la cultura y el significado, en la que la transformación de la identidad llega a ser la base de las transformaciones sociales posteriores es un buen punto de partida. Pero, dadas las contradicciones del capital global, así como los desarrollos en la teoría de los movimientos sociales, es necesario reconsiderar la importancia de las crisis de legitimación de la economía política para desplazarse al reino de la subjetividad, de la identidad y las emociones, que impulsan la movilización, alimentada por la moral y las visiones que pueden ser Utopía. Los movimientos de Ocupación pueden ilustrar estas relaciones.

Palabras clave

Crisis de legitimación, emoción, identidad, moralidad, movimientos sociales, nuevos movimientos sociales (NMS), visión