

Hi everyone!

Thank you so much for reading my paper!

I wrote this piece for a course about Transnational Social Movements I took last spring. I want to use the following arguments for writing part of my dissertation (which is about the Occupy Wall Street movement) and I would love to publish this text in an American journal. So, I would really appreciate any comments or suggestions you might have—about lines of argument, structure of the text, bibliographical references etc.

Besides that, I'm looking forward to learning a lot with you.

Thanks again for the opportunity to share my work with you.

See you next week,

Nara Roberta

WORK IN PROGRESSE. PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE OR CITE.

The oldness of the new and the newness of the old: comparing the Occupy Wall Street movement and the alterglobalization movement and illustrating their connections

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Abstract: In this paper, I compare the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement and the alterglobalization movement (AGM). The AGM is an extensive transnational network of diversified social movements, unions, political parties, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, intergovernmental institutions, non-governmental donor agencies, and (in some places) enterprises that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The OWS is the American manifestation of the 2011 global wave of protests. Analysis is based on review of literature, especially on transnational social movements and networks studies, and in-depth interviews conducted with activists. Links between the two movements are found initially in the Adbusters' explanation of the OWS as a late development of the AGM and the expectation of the former as a potential "shift in revolutionary tactics." I affirm that the OWS has nonetheless gone through similar dilemmas and difficulties faced by the AGM. I explain why such a repetition occurred by taking into account specificities of the AGM in the United States and of American politics. The AGM's organizing dynamics lasted in the United States because the American AGM turned its attention to domestic issues and pushed forward a movement building perspective. Therefore, I assume that the national political landscape is important to an analysis and maintain that connection between the two movements is understood through their similar tactics and organizational structure. Finally, the two movements here discussed are not exactly the same and I defend that the

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OWS's dependence upon some individuals seems to have been even more intense than it has been the case in the AGM.

Keywords: Occupy Wall Street; alterglobalization movement; transnational social movements; networks; tactics.

On September 17th, 2011, a group of around 200 people settled in Zuccotti Park, a privately owned public space in Lower Manhattan. The group was part of a bigger crowd that had gathered during the day around the New York City Financial District and had engaged in different activities, which did not follow a regular or formal schedule. After heading over to the park and congregating into a general assembly, the crowd agreed on moving forward with the main objective of the day: setting up an occupation to expose the influence of Wall Street over politics and the consequences of such an economic system.

While the initial concept of the gathering was simply to occupy Wall Street, it nonetheless became one of the most important recent movements in the United States. The occupation at Zuccotti Park, also known as Liberty Plaza, lasted for almost two months. It is strongly suggested that the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement is responsible for reigniting the discussion about class and social-economic inequality. This is significant in an "exceptional" country such as the United States, which has not only been the core of the capitalist system, but has also lacked strong left-wing parties and unions since the 1930s, when American Left and its radical organizations experienced a great momentum.

One of the strongest appeals of the OWS was its alleged novelty. That can be taken in two ways. Firstly, the OWS presented itself as an alternative to the so-called traditional Left. For many, "It was kind of nice to be at a protest and, instead of marching and shouting, to be talking about ideas. It felt like the script had changed." (Taylor et al. 2011:3) Secondly, the movement was a claim against the representative politics, highlighting the influence of money over the democratic system and presenting the idea of direct democracy instead:

Most of us believe that what is most important is to open space for conversations – for democracy – real, direct, and participatory democracy. Our only demand then would be to be left alone in our plazas, parks, schools, workplaces, and

neighborhoods so as to meet one another, reflect together, and in assembly forms decide what our alternatives are. (Taylor et al. 2011: 8)

Having said that, in this paper I will expose and analyze similarities and differences between the OWS and the alterglobalization movement (AGM). The AGM emerged during the mid-1990s through early 2000s. It was an extensive transnational network of diversified social movements (women's movements, people of color's movement, LGBT movements, peasants' movements, peace movements, antiwar movements, indigenous people's movement, environmental movements), unions, political parties, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, intergovernmental institutions, non-governmental donor agencies, and even some enterprises. Comparison between the two movements finds its inspiration in the idea of novelty abovementioned. At first glance, the OWS's discourse, underscoring itself and its conception of tactics and politics as something new and even original, is very similar to the AGM's discourse, which faced the reorganization of the Left after the Soviet Union collapsed.

I nonetheless question the discourse of novelty, which can be considered either as an incorrect and naïve evaluation or a strategic and useful statement, and I do so by shedding light on the organizational structure and coordination within both movements. Similarities between the OWS and the AGM can be grasped, but some differences emerge as well. Because I frame my discussion through these two themes, i.e., organizational structure and coordination, I utilize literature about the constitution of transnational social movements and networks as my analytical framework. In other words, I consider the process of social movements spreading across borders. Such a process results in a specific kind of political organizing, rather than only a diffusion of solidarity or feeling of collectiveness at the international level (Anderson 2002). The extension and overlapping of a movement's boundaries do not always follow the same path nor always have the same consequences. With respect to the two movements to be further analyzed, it is important to consider both the development of global economy and the critique of national-state and national political landscape. The global neoliberal economy provided the main frames for both movements, whereas the local political landscape that they were placed in has influenced their tactics and ways of taking action. In the end, both the AGM and the OWS unveil particular

difficulties and challenges of loose and changeable degrees of organizational density and cohesion, very typical of the network structure.

This article is divided into five further sections, and it is based on review of literature and interviews conducted with activists². In the following part, I briefly present some relevant features of the OWS and discuss why the two movements can be connected—the OWS is likely a late development of the AGM. Then, I explore the AGM's path, its dilemmas and pitfalls. I also argue that, in terms of organizational structure, the OWS has gone through similar dilemmas and pitfalls experienced by the AGM. Subsequently, I attempt to explain why such a repetition might have occurred. At this point, I take into account specificities of the AGM in the United States and of American politics, as the analysis of a transnational social movement must not lack the very grounds of its (national) political field (von Bülow 2014). I therefore conclude that the AGM's organizing dynamics thrived in the United States, especially because the American AGM turned its attention to domestic issues. Having disclosed the similarities between the two movements, I go on to showcase their differences: the dependence of the OWS's network upon some individuals seems to have been more intense than it was for the AGM. Through a summary of the discussion, some yet unanswered questions arise, leaving my final words as a call for further research.

The Occupy Wall Street movement as a new chapter of an unsolved challenge

The first thing to point out about the OWS is the surprisingly long life of the Zuccotti Park occupation, which was the movement's core. According to numerous reports and memories, it was not predicted people would or could not only camp out the first night, but also maintain the occupation for more than a couple of days. (Taylor et al. 2011; Milkman et al. 2013)

In spite of the uncertainty on September 17th, 2011, it is important to be aware that the OWS was not a spontaneous event. All the main features that characterized that big day, and later on the movement itself, were carefully defined prior to its launch. (Milkman et al. 2013) In this sense, from the beginning, the OWS pushed forward a horizontal and leaderless structure, within

² Further information about data is available upon request.

which debates and decisions would be taken through to consensus. The movement's central space was the General Assembly (GA), but it was not exactly a headquarters. The OWS was composed by decentralized working groups that continually begat other working groups according to participants' needs and/or values. The GA could be the common and communal space for all working groups and occupiers, but, in practical terms, groups and individuals were largely autonomous.

Discussion and deliberation over which working groups would be important for the plan of settling in an urban area and the definition of the main guidelines and principles for such a collective action took place between the voicing of the idea of occupying and day one of occupation. Over a two-month period, occupiers discussed a call from *Adbusters*, a Canadian magazine that promotes culture jamming tactics. Even though they were hardly involved with the process on the ground, *Adbusters* provided Occupy Wall Street with its name, assignment, due date, and some of its most impactful images. The initial *Adbusters*' invitation to bring tents to Wall Street on September 17th pointed out the importance of a tangible goal, asking clearly "What's your one demand?"³ The demand's framework was criticized by many occupiers and formally refused by the movement—but not without being the subject of contentious discussion within and beyond its flexible borders.

The same *Adbusters*' call presents a more detailed explanation of the reasons for having a demand⁴. That was justified by what had happened in Egypt some months before, when massive mobilization, staged mainly at the Tahrir Square, targeted and ousted the Egyptian president. Reclaiming public spaces has thus gained a prominent role, confirmed by the events in Spain following it. In Madrid, people settled in *acampadas* to express their grievances, exposing the excessive power of financial capital, the painful consequences of the harsh economic crisis affecting a great portion of the population, and the subsequent austerity policies carried out by the government. According to *Adbusters*, North-American activists and the then-imagined OWS

³ I here make reference to the banner that shows a ballerina over the famous Charging Bull with a riot in the background. Such banner can be seen on <<http://designobserver.com/feature/the-poster-that-launched-a-movement-or-not/32588/>> (retrieved May 13, 2015), for instance.

⁴ Here is the blog post that teases out *Adbusters*' idea, inspiring the OWS: <<https://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/occupywallstreet.html>> (retrieved May 13, 2015).

should be attentive to the opportunities offered by this new moment. In that new international context, having a demand would mean “A shift in revolutionary tactics.”

But what would a shift in tactics mean in this case? The following statement is part of the Adbusters’ analysis:

“The antiglobalization movement⁵ was the first step on the road. Back then our model was to attack the system like a pack of wolves. There was an alpha male, a wolf who led the pack, and those who followed behind. Now the model has evolved. Today we are a big swarm of people.”

From this quote, it is possible to grasp that *occupying Wall Street* is conceived as a potential outcome or a development of something that has been seen before, despite that—or, maybe, *at the same time* as—it claimed to express innovation itself. The OWS is compared to the AGM, which had its golden age in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Connections between the two movements are established in a very specific way, as the main issue is how to attack the system—i.e., how the “old model” did that, how the AGM did that and how the OWS should do that. Consequently, a discussion about tactics, organizational structure, and movement coordination seems the most adequate to compare the OWS and the AGM.

Since relevant features of the OWS were just presented, I go on to introduce the AGM.

Understanding a movement of movements

Previously, I mentioned that the AGM also shared the discourse of newness and novelty when referring to itself. In the mid-1990s, a substantial change was witnessed in activism and within progressive and leftist groups, since a movement that is “a little bit of everything” became prominent.

In other words, not only could one see different social movements, political parties, unions, civil society organizations etc. acting in favor of their respective agendas. One could also distinguish, as part of the political debate and within the political arena, a large transnational

⁵ In the next section, I clarify that the AGM is also known by other labels, such as antiglobalization movement.

network that assembled social movements of all kinds (women's movement, people of color's movement, LGBT movement, indigenous people's movement, peace movement, anti-war movement, environmental movement, peasants' movement), unions, political parties, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-governmental donor agencies, intergovernmental institutions (that were built up in the post-war period), and, in some places, even enterprises.

All these groups and movements got together and built alliances inspired by their doubts, disagreements, and criticisms around the neoliberalization process and the negotiations over international trade agreements, which "have become increasingly prominent stages for the battle of ideas over the future of globalization and global governance, going much beyond traditional discussions about quotas and tariffs." (von Bülow. 2014:10)

Some efforts and some achievements for the consolidation of an international and transnational arena took place before the 1990s. In fact, the internationalization of political action and political activity was hardly excluded from many movements' perspective during the making of the so-called new social movements. (Azzi 2007) Such an effort towards international and transnational cooperation was also leveraged by intensifying NGO incursions during the same period. In addition, summits and forums for discussion and deliberation over trade policies have been a reality from the mid-1980s onwards and, since then, have faced contentious criticisms from informal or formal organized political actors and/or groups. It was only in the mid-1990s, however, that mobilization in response to trade agreements got much stronger and groups' engagement more consistent.

Challengers of trade agreements created new coalitions, launched campaigns, lobbied negotiators and legislators, held multitudinous protests, and built common critiques and demands across countries. Never before had so many different CSOs [civil society organizations] from the region come together to debate and mobilize transnationally around a hemispheric agenda. (von Bülow. 2014:11; addition here made)

To sum up, accumulation of previous experiences and intensification of activities and bonds with individuals, groups, and collectives finally unveiled something that could be taken as a movement.

I believe there are two main reasons for this momentum in the 1990s, which are intimately connected. Firstly, there was a consolidation of neoliberal policies that occurred in the period after the Washington Consensus. Once history reached its “end” all over the world, trade agreement negotiations definitively became a central battlefield and were even more in the spotlight—as practically and symbolically relevant. Secondly, there was the crisis of the Marxist and socialist/communist (or maybe traditional) Left. At the time, this had been an ongoing process that hit a very critical point. The final collapse of the Soviet Union not only confirmed the problems of the so-called actually existing socialism, but also expressed difficulties for a great part of the Left in carrying out a (auto) critique⁶. (Azzi 2007)

I have been using mid-1990s and early 2000s as the temporal reference to talk about the AGM. Although it is possible to grasp a shift from the first contentious demonstrations against trade agreements, it is very difficult to define a precise moment in which the AGM began. Some major events could be taken as milestones: the emergence of the Zapatistas’ movement in 1994, and the International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism they hosted in 1996; the foundation of the transnational network called People’s Global Action in 1998, Geneva; and, the very famous Battle of Seattle, when activists and demonstrators shut down the World Trade Organization summit in 1999 (Graeber 2002). Much as it is difficult to determine a unique milestone, there is no common denomination for the same wide transnational network I have been discussing. Focusing on their criticisms of neoliberalism, some name it the *antiglobalization movement*—sometimes in a depreciative way. *Global justice movement*, *movement of movements* or simply *the movement* are labels that are also used. In the case of the AGM, both the milestone and name to be adopted depend heavily on perspective, as it is a diversified movement.

⁶ It is not by accident that many defenders of the “end of history” and second wave “end of ideology” are old enthusiasts of the Soviet regime. It is not by accident either that part of the Marxist and progressive sectors have made a pragmatic choice for the market and bourgeois democracy. (Eagleton 2007)

Diversity has been much celebrated within AGM's circles. Since it was an expression of a large progressive political spectrum,

Self-awareness of the movement against economic liberalization ('antiglobalization') proclaimed it as the reunification of the social movement that had split in the 1970s. In that decade, people of color's, women's, and students' struggle broke away from the labor movement's previous uniting force. (Ortellado. 2013: 230)⁷

At that time, it was believed that broad and extensive effects of neoliberalism could nonetheless bring all movements back together.

In spite of the presence of different political traditions and generations, an anarchist and autonomist hegemony is apparent within the AGM⁸. This statement is not the result of any survey or profile analysis of the organizations, groups and movements that compound *the movement*. The anarchist-autonomist hegemony is derived from a certain repertoire, a few tactics, and some organizational principles shared within the AGM that are in fact grounded in anarchist and autonomist values. The AGM is a horizontal movement, with no central head or decision maker (i.e., leaderless); it is committed to direct democracy and legitimizes direct action and original interventions, such as dramatic and theatrical intervention; it avoids voting when addressing issues or for reaching decisions, seeking consensus instead. Consequently, I defend that it does not matter that much if organizations, groups, movements and individuals identifying themselves as part of the AGM are anarchist and/or autonomists, or if they clearly advocate for anarchism and/or autonomism. Participation within the AGM and connection to its network relies upon acceptance of specific repertoire, tactics, and organizational principles, regardless of what is defended or pursued by a particular organization when it is outside of the movement and the network. This is a *movement culture* that organizes both the important debates and the potential alliances taking place within the AGM.

⁷ References and quotes in other language than English have been translated by me.

⁸ Some authors point out some particular features of anarchism and autonomism that emerge in the late 20th century and 21st century. In this sense, they talk about a *neoanarchism*, which would be slightly different from the "classic" 19th century anarchism. (Taylor 2013) It is out of the scope of this paper to explore such features and discuss to what extent anarchism and neoanarchism are really different. Readers and those who are interested in the debate, however, should be aware of (new) terminology and its implications.

According to what has been formerly exposed, the OWS also works through horizontalism and consensus, aiming at direct democracy and broad, non-hierarchical participation. There was great diversity within the OWS as well, since it stressed the problems of an economic and political system that runs for the wealthiest, smallest segment of society, namely the 1%, and the importance of the 99% majority opposition. The OWS is also structured through the same anarchist-autonomist hegemony capable of embracing a large diversity.

The following statements illustrate the similarities between the two movements I aim at unveiling. Firstly, some words about the AGM:

this is a movement about reinventing democracy. It is not opposed to organization. It is about creating new forms of organization. It is not lacking in ideology. These new forms of organization *are* its ideology. It is about creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy. Ultimately, it aspires to be much more than that, because ultimately it aspires to reinvent daily life as a whole. (Graeber. 2002: 70)

Now, the same author talks about the OWS, a decade later:

the embrace of prefigurative politics. As a result, Zuccotti Park, and all subsequent encampments, became spaces of experiment with creating the institutions of a new society—not only democratic General Assemblies but kitchens, libraries, clinics, media centers, and a host of other institutions, all operating on anarchist principles of mutual aid and self-organization: a genuine attempt to create the institutions of a new society in the shell of the old. (Graeber. 2012: 145)

Further observations must be noted with respect to how anarchist and autonomist principles were translated into political struggle by the AGM—or how this movement presented its criticisms and fought against neoliberal agenda. The AGM followed a three-way path simultaneously, even though its members dedicated different attention or energy to each way. The first of the three ways was institutional lobbying, pressuring governments or intergovernmental institutions either in favor or against any policy or decision connected to the AGM's agenda. The second was performing demonstrations, marches, rallies, campaigns, and

any sort of public event—that usually had a sharp dramatic, theatrical feature for maximum impact. Finally, the last of the three ways was settling venues for exchange of ideas and experiences, to meet and to plan. The most famous of such venues is the World Social Forum (WSF). The WSF was hosted for the first time in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001, and it is considered an important outcome of the AGM. Indeed, the WSF was born as an expression and a celebration of the AGM’s way of politics.

There has been much criticism over the three way model throughout the years, targeting especially the WSF. As the WSF was at the core of the AGM, one can effortlessly see the objections to the latter through the way the former is criticized. For many, the Forum became deeply bureaucratic and affected by an excessive influence of its International Council, NGOs, and institutional political actors that pushed street demonstrations and activists on the ground to the sidelines. It had a predominantly white, middle class profile, and was a Latin American and European rather than a world Forum. Also, many WSF editions were settled in these continents, with fewer African and Asian delegations, which had less (financial) resources.

The criticisms over the WSF are small (yet important) parts of a broader question that has been systematically raised: what exactly is the WSF and what is, in fact, its political meaning? Should the Forum be a space or should it be a movement, a political actor? Even though the AGM has achieved a featured position within the Left as the main progressive reaction to neoliberalism, there have been many doubts around it and its main expression, the WSF. On the one hand, some think the Forum fulfills the purpose of strengthening bonds and exchanges between groups, and of raising discussions and encouraging a critical perspective on the neoliberalization process. On the other hand, some claim that this is not enough and that the Forum—and, consequently, the AGM—should be more focused on acting and pushing an agenda forward.

Having or not having a political program has always been a sensitive question to the AGM. In this sense, when the 2011 Adbusters questioned “What’s your one demand?”, this can be interpreted as an identification of the AGM’s previous dilemma and an attempt to solve it. Adbusters’ call imagined and projected the OWS as something meant to be different than its predecessors. However, some of the early 2000s criticisms just have re-emerged in 2011. Many

pointed out that the OWS's GA became an increasingly bureaucratic and time-consuming space. Many occupiers have said they quit or dropped out of the GA and/or have opted for other spaces, such as working and affinity groups, when something important had to be discussed or decided. Also, even though the "white, middle class movement" label has been used many times to depreciate the OWS, many occupiers acknowledge that that was not totally untrue. People of color's participation and initiatives did exist within the OWS, but that does not mean that race and racism were topics profoundly discussed there or that the movement was not fundamentally structured as more welcoming to traditionally white, middle class people.

With respect to the present discussion, the most important thing to remember is that the OWS did not present any demands, indicating that there was not an agenda or a political program to be followed or implemented. Consequently, it is possible to say that the OWS repeated the AGM's modification of what can be considered a classic political formula. (Taylor 2013)

A *classic* political formula can be expressed according to the following scheme: *goal* ☒ *strategy* ☒ *tactics*. According to that, individuals or collective actors in the political field or arena pose one or many specific goals. These goals are connected to a major plan or project that both shapes and is shaped by them, i.e., a strategy. In order to achieve goals, actors define the way they are going to act, and the ways through which their goals may be satisfactorily achieved. They consider either values, potential consequences, or the balance of forces, or sometimes a combination of all these factors, in choosing or forging specific tactics.

In contrast to the classic political formula, both the AGM and the OWS highlight their tactics above the two other steps, i.e., goal and strategy, to the point that tactics becomes the main reason for their major plan or project (i.e., strategy)—either intentionally or not. As a consequence, they do not—or cannot—precisely distinguish or state what is to be taken out of their struggle and their goal is either unstated, undefined, or unknown. Once there is a major stress on the process of political intervention, "old" classic political formula is turned into *tactics* ☒ *strategy* ☒ *goals*.

It is beyond my scope here to discuss eventual potentialities and limitations of such an inverted political formula. Because it dominated both movements, it must be the subject of deeper analysis. However, I choose to focus in the following section only on reasonable

explanations for the repetition of characteristics, problems, and dilemmas in a relatively short period of time.

The alterglobalization movement's heritage

The AGM and the OWS share common features and have taken similar paths. Reaching such a conclusion is not a complete surprise. It is an old lesson that “The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” (Marx. 2001: 7) In the case of political struggle and the making of political actors, that means that questions from the past might come back in the present and similar challenges, though already dealt with, are likely to continue over time. Consequently, rather than simply acknowledging such a continuity, it is theoretically and analytically more productive to investigate and disclose *how* this happens.

When the OWS emerged, a common discourse was the welcome engagement of fresh people into political activism. Nonetheless, subsequent in-depth investigation problematized it as a superficial statement. (Milkman et al. 2013) As one example, out of 36 interviews I have conducted with occupiers⁹, only 9 interviewees have said the movement was their first practical experience in activism and organizing. Having said that, questions about what kind of previous involvement and engagement people that have occupied Wall Street have should be raised. Considering the other 27 people of my sample, one can grasp diverse experiences in activism that are specified in the following list:

- Labor movement, unions and anti-sweatshop movements: 5 people*
- Antiwar, antipolice brutality and prison abolition movements: 4 people*
- Alterglobalization movement: 4 people*
- Community organizing: 4 people*
- Environmental movements: 4 people*
- Students' movement: 8 people*
- Food justice movements: 3 people*
- Fundraising campaigns and NGOs: 2 people*

⁹ Interviewees are 22 to 51 years-old and have taken part in different OWS working groups. Further information on data is available upon request.

Women's movements and pro-choice/abortion rights movements: 4 people

People of color's and racial justice movements: 2 people

Intellectual activism (e.g. critical journalism): 3 people

Immigrants' rights movements: 3 people

Anti-gentrification movements: 1 person

Artistic, bike and/or community garden activism: 3 people

Pro-Palestine activism: 1 person¹⁰

I acknowledge that this is a very small sample to say anything statistically rigorous about both previous occupiers' political and organizing experience and the differences between movements. However, once a range of movements is presented in the list, that shows how diverse occupiers' experience is and such a diversity do help those interested in finding out potential connections between the OWS and the AGM. The AGM was a recurrent reference among occupiers of my sample, but it is found among many other references and movements' traditions. So it is not possible to simply say that occupiers were old AGM activists. Some old AGM activists were intensively present in the meetings prior to the physical occupation of Zuccotti Park and had a prominent role in establishing guidelines for the assemblies and in the trainings that took place there. In some narratives, such experienced AGM activists are even portrayed as sort of mentors (Milkman et al. 2013). Nevertheless, if organizational and (non) programmatic similarities can be seen in both movements, it does not occur merely through personnel sharing—as if people have simply transported mechanisms from one movement to another. In this case, explaining similarities by this mechanism would mean overlooking other relevant aspects that structurally influenced the OWS's outlines. It would be mean also diminishing the diversity that is characteristic of such a movement. While remaining aware that movements that spread globally cannot completely eliminate their local chains (von Bulow 2014), I will focus specifically on aspects around the development of the AGM in the U.S.

I here acknowledge that resemblance between the AGM and the OWS goes beyond organizational and (non) programmatic levels as well. The label *the people* works within the

¹⁰ The sum of the numbers is 51, not 36, because some people have engaged in more than a single movement, as is very common in activist circles. I felt free to organize interviewees' answers into categories, naming each movement tradition.

AGM in the same way as *the 99%* works within the OWS, due to a concern with the spreading consequences of contemporary global economy that both movements share. Also, one can see a deep respect for artistic and creative intervention within the two movements and a use of common names and terminology—for instance, the Battle of Seattle as N30, and the OWS as S17, adopting the formula *month initial letter + day*. Therefore, similarities in frame alignment and movement repertoire make movement spillover process (Meyer and Whittier 1994) an extremely valid explanation and framework and it is worth pushing it further if one is concerned with expanding comparisons between the AGM and the OWS.

Since I am concerned mainly with organizational issues, I believe that my central question should be whether anarchist and autonomist values that have underpinned the AGM found fertile ground to bloom anew. In other words, it is a matter of checking whether and how an(other) anarchist-autonomist hegemony was once again possible—or how welcome some values could be within activist circles.

Having said that, I would like to point out that it is interesting that the American AGM has not received the same degree of attention as the Latin American has and, especially, the European AGMs have¹¹. Scholarship is relatively distant from the American AGM despite American activists' essential contribution to one of the AGM landmarks:

Less well known—but well documented—is the fact that the vast majority of protesters in Seattle came from within the United States. A smaller, but still significant proportion were from the Canadian northwest, and insignificant numbers traveled to Seattle from the global South (...). But as the twentieth century drew to a close, it was mainly citizens in the heart of global capitalism

¹¹ For instance, there are innumerable studies on the rise and development of the AGM in Europe, either considering some featured organizations that are part of the network (e.g. ATTAC – *Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financière et l'Aide aux Citoyens* or, in English, Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens) or European participation in the WSF or regional forums.

who produced the most spectacular protest to date *against* capitalism. (Hadden and Tarrow. 2007a:211)¹²

Little attention from academia does not necessarily mean that a subject is not important. In this case, however, it expresses a relevant fact that affects my concerns: whereas the AGM in Europe has expanded after the events in Seattle, in the United States it has stagnated.

This does not mean that political activism, mobilization, and protests in general have stopped or even declined in the country nor that American activists have totally cut their ties with the transnational network.

Firstly, massive demonstrations emerged against the 2003 Iraq War, which were much stronger in the United States than elsewhere. Even in the immediate aftermath of the events on 9/11, there was considerable mobilization as some groups turned their energy to disaster relief (Hadden and Tarrow 2007a) or candlelight vigils in New York City neighborhoods as a call for peace against military intervention. The 9/11 attacks were definitely a turning point for the AGM in the United States, as it both strengthened police repression that blocked notably big and theatrical demonstrations and progressively fostered a nationalistic discourse that discouraged any kind of criticism of the United States or globalization. In this sense, tough state responses to the 9/11 attacks did not totally undermine political activity in the United States, but contributed to leading the American Left into deeper disarray and to a change in the AGM's political orientation, as I will soon explore.

Secondly, American participation in the WSF grew considerably from 2001 to 2005, even though the United States has never been the proportionally more involved country in the Forum. (Hadden and Tarrow 2007a) Also, from 2003 onwards, there has been great expectation for regional Social Forums hosted in the United States, which was an issue discussed beyond American borders, within the WSF International Council. (Smith et al. 2008) Not only was the

¹² Edelman (2009) challenges that there was little participation of the Global South in the Seattle events, presenting debates and activities carried out by peasants' movements throughout those days of gathering. I have not had access to first-hand data about the Battle of Seattle and I rely only upon the literature about it. It is thus a risk defending one perspective rather than the other. Great participation of the Global South does not exclude participation of the Global North anyway. The most important thing for my analysis is that Edelman stresses that peasants' and farmers' movements seized the opportunity to expand their contacts, make alliances and improve their knowledge and information. And all that is aligned with the idea of *movement building* I am going to discuss further.

importance of the United States to the broader AGM acknowledged, but it was also assumed that the country could follow the tendency witnessed by its European counterparts. The first United States Social Forum (USSF) came into existence in 2007, in Atlanta, and “Many USSF organizers had taken part in past forums, and built on the knowledge forged through those experiences”. (Smith et al. 2008:375)

It is important to mention that prior to 2007 there were smaller Forums around the country too—smaller in geographic terms, as they were focused on either cities, states, or regions. (Hadden and Tarrow 2007a; Hadden and Tarrow 2007b) Except for the failed-to-launch Northwest Social Forum (NWSF), all the American initiatives shared an important aspect: they were mainly domestically concerned. In other words, in the United States, there have been great difficulties in creating spaces that clearly expressed transnational perspective or the connections between global and local issues. There were organizational fragilities and internal conflicts grounded in different analyses over the impact of over-policing, the importance of grassroots movements’ participation and the balance between national and international struggles. As a result, the USSF leaned towards a *movement building* perspective. The venue gave priority to creating, developing, and strengthening “infrastructures that can enhance the capacity of the diverse movements that use the forum and potentially lead to the formation of new movements.” (Juris et al. 2014:334) Such infrastructures could be either at the individual/personal or the collective/group levels, in a way that they help enhance individuals’ organizational skills, feelings of solidarity, group cohesion, and/or movements’ resources. They could also work for creating inter-organizational coalitions and networks—either in a wider geographical scale or across different movement sectors.

As I said before, it is beyond my scope here to discuss the eventual potentialities and limitations of such a perspective. I just highlight that since the USSF had a great and diverse attendance¹³, movement building perspective seems to have been promoted to the core of American Left/progressive sectors. This seems even truer as in the midst of the recent American

¹³ “An estimated 12000-15000 people came together in Atlanta for the first USSF. The meeting was arguably one of the largest and most diverse political gatherings in U.S. history, as a significant majority of participants were people of color, low-income, indigenous, disabled, and/or gender-nonconforming.” (Smith et al. 2008: 374)

Left reorganization, (traditional) groups like unions could neither expand their influence nor get an important place in the USSF.

Consequently, occupying Wall Street was later on seen as a way of setting up a(nother) venue. As one occupier states: “Meetings at the Tompkins [Square Park, for organizing the OWS’s first day] were very practical, very pragmatic. Discussion might take place later, at the bar, having a drink with some people. But during the meetings the thing was ‘what we are gonna do that day.’” At that time, the idea of *finding each other, getting together, being left alone to debate* could easily frame activists’ expectations. Any group or person joining in would have to accept the commitment to the process once the New York City General Assembly (NYCGA) was set up, even if that meant compromising.

Overseas events did have an influence on the organizational outline adopted by the OWS. For instance, occupiers that arranged pre-Zuccotti Park occupation events did indicate the “quick guide on group dynamics in people’s assemblies” elaborated by Spanish activists as the protocol for meetings¹⁴. Besides that, participation in the OWS is only fully explained once other aspects are taken into account too—such as greater tendency to impoverishment, precarization of labor conditions, and confrontation with the Tea Party perspective.

Nonetheless, the *way* people’s participation was specifically managed has to be considered through a previous wave of activism that found in the movement building perspective “a response to the open-space-versus-political-actor question” (Smith et al. 2008:380). As was the case with the AGM, it was extremely important to consider the presence of different individuals, different political backgrounds and experiences brought together since the first meetings. Values and the pragmatism necessary to assemble such a crowd are then mixed in occupiers’ interpretation and evaluation: “It is funny that I used this word [strategy] now... Because, at that time, I really thought that we should not ask anything to the state. It was like a principle, yeah... But now I frame that as a strategy, and I think it was a correct strategy...”

Anarchist-autonomist hegemony was once again possible due to both a friendly environment brought about by the American AGM “spillout” (Hadden and Tarrow 2007b) and

¹⁴ August 4th post on www.occupywallst.org contains the following link, connected to the Commission for Group Dynamics in Assemblies of the Puerta del Sol Protest Camp (Madrid): <<http://takethesquare.net/2011/07/31/quick-guide-on-group-dynamics-in-peoples-assemblies/>> (retrieved May 19, 2015).

necessity of arranging a pacific interaction among different actors. It is not much different to the general reasons that have driven the AGM's emergence: favorable changes and conditions in the political structure and the search for a broad identity, with importance stressed on the latter.

Having exposed how these general reasons have been embodied in the United States, it is time to underline that the AGM and the OWS are not totally the same—even in terms of organizational structure and movement coordination. Since the AGM and the OWS are similar and connected when it comes to the two issues here discussed, how can one distinguish the differences between them? I aim at showing that in order to answer this question, one should look at how differently some aspects are stressed in each movement.

Individuals and networks

Throughout this text, I argued that the AGM's and the OWS's structures had an anarchist-autonomist bias, due to a certain repertoire, a few tactics, and some organizational principles that consequently led both movements to invert a classic political formula. The first step in considering the differences between the AGM and the OWS is looking at how both movements were transformed into *networks*, which is a consequence of their anarchist-autonomist hegemony. I understand *network* through this succinct (yet landmark) definition: "Networks are forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange." (Keck and Sikkink. 1999:91)

The way in which political interventions and interactions have recently been framed and conducted through networks has been thoroughly studied. Consequently, a network structure is not a prerogative of movements like the AGM and the OWS. Considering the existence of many theoretical approaches, *network* can be either that form of organization abovementioned or a broader class of phenomena that involves "a set of institutions, knowledge practices, and artifacts thereof that internally generate the effects of their own reality by reflecting on themselves." (Riles. 2000:3) What is more, a network can be explained as either a simultaneously embodiment of *agent* and *structure* (Keck and Sikkink 1999) or the effect of a certain aesthetics. (Riles 2000)

Whichever definition and explanation are chosen, there is a single aspect that is in the forefront and that I address in this analysis: the centrality of information for and within any network. Such a centrality is due not only to a constant sharing of information within the network, but also “groups in networks create categories or frames within which to organize and *generate* information on which to base their campaigns. The ability to generate information quickly and accurately, and deploy it effectively, is their most valuable currency; it is also central to their identity.” (Keck and Sikkink. 1999:92) Since information is the fuel for the established patterns of communication and exchange, individuals able to find out, spread, and/or work out information are/become highly important. In this sense, they work as central hubs or “brokers” that keep the network flowing.

As with any network, the AGM relied upon some important individuals for its everyday interaction. However, that individuals’ centrality can be especially seen on some specific occasions. Firstly, consider the discussions and efforts to organize the Social Forums and other important venues. In this case, individuals of local organizations played a major role and, to a great extent, were able to influence the key decisions and the event’s final outlines. Secondly, individuals’ importance can be grasped from the AGM’s alignment to direct action. Once there was a plan to push forward a confrontational, risky, and/or impactful appearance or activity, it was not advised to spread the discussion around and, as a consequence, it was held in circles organized upon a basis of trust. (Graeber 2009)

In the case of the OWS, interviews show that not only did reliance upon individuals persist within the movement, but also that this reliance greatly increased. I highlight some topics emerging from conversation with occupiers and include some relevant statements from the interviewees to support such a conclusion:

1. Cooperation between OWS working groups: “it was informal”; “chaotic”; “you had to become friends with the people”; “I knew that if I needed to find out something, I had to find the central person in that working group.”

2. Frequent value judgment over other occupiers: “she’s an amazing woman”; “we work very differently, but she is honest”; “oh, gosh, I can’t even hear the name of these people.”
3. The way occupiers emphatically made recommendations to me: “you gotta talk to this person, she is really important”; “I think if you talk to the two of them, you will have a good picture of the thing.”
4. The strong feelings that are connected to the OWS, which made many people portray it as one or the most important moment of their lives but also what led them to considerable burnout: “In December, I remember that one friend told me ‘a lot of people are gonna be depressed...’ and it happened, right... He said ‘people are gonna be depressed because they thought the revolution was gonna happen and it didn’t.’ It is sad, yeah, but it is exactly what happened...”

Why has the OWS witnessed such an increasing importance of central individuals within and for the movement? The answer to this can only be understood once one grasps that, in the case of the OWS, the making of the movement and the making of the network are the very same process. As I said before, nobody was expecting to launch a movement on September 17th, 2011—instead, the idea was a day of protest and maybe camping out for one or two nights. In this sense, the OWS unfolded as people were getting to know each other, as more people were joining in, and as more needs were being embraced. Even though basic guidelines were clear from the beginning, the unexpected and lasting stay in the park along with growth of participation meant improvement of physical space, creation of more and more working groups and initiatives, and search for new collective spaces and tools that could manage the constant changing of the movement’s situation. As examples, I here name the idea of a Spokes Council, a bus tour to get in touch with other Occupy-type encampments, the Interoccupy network, and some Occupy National Gatherings. Strong disagreements over the legitimacy of all these spaces not only expressed the dual movement-network making process, but also enhanced the dependency on certain central people.

Bringing the AGM back in is very useful at this point. It is true that the AGM did come into existence once a specific network could be distinguished. However, there had been a long previous process of exchange and communication that gradually linked different groups and collectives around the world and made the AGM possible. Also, groups and collectives had an independent existence, in spite of shared connections and common spaces. Some initiatives did come out of milestone events—such as the Direct Action Network (DAN), the most famous North American chapter of the AGM, and the Independent media emerging after the Battle of Seattle. But Jubilee 2000, ATTAC, la Via Campesina, Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement and many other important AGM members kept their own boundaries and agendas. Even in Seattle, “after the WTO ‘everyone went back to their own business.’” (Hadden and Tarrow. 2007b:367) Such movements might have been influenced by the AGM, and certainly gave it some momentum. However, it is not correct to say that the AGM gave birth to them. In the case of the OWS, on the other hand, emergence of new groups and re-arrangements of boundaries seems the prevalent outcome. The making of the OWS resulted not only in a new scenario of activism but also in new players.

Having considered movement and network as closely linked, I question some conceptual differentiations some authors engage in when discussing civil society at the transnational level. Though useful in some cases, clear (theoretical) lines between *movement* and *network* are not of interest in understanding both the AGM and the OWS cases. Fox (2010) traces lines between networks, coalitions and movements, according to degrees of relationship density and cohesion. Networks would have less internal shared information, social base, mutual support, material interests, identities etc. than movements would do. Such a distinction, however, could lead to misinterpretations, as it does not lend visibility to the fact that low density and loose cohesion sometimes might be movements' *raison d'être* and might even be taken and celebrated as (their) political achievements.

Still regarding differences between the AGM and the OWS, other aspects can be pointed out as well. For instance, the AGM features *corporations* whereas the OWS gives much more attention to the *financial capital*. The former took place in response to the emergence of neoliberalism whereas the latter emerged when such an economic system revealed limits. Even

though I acknowledge the differences in the movements' emerging structures, my discussion of the differences between the AGM and the OWS also focused on exposing issues close to the debate around organizational structure and coordination.

Final words

When the OWS started, in 2011, it was oftentimes celebrated as something new. In this paper, I illustrated some connections between this movement and the AGM, which had emerged around a decade before, and questioned the discourse of novelty around the OWS. The two movements are not exactly the same. The AGM and the OWS have emerged in different moments of global economy, and they have distinct frames—yet resemble each other in many aspects. Throughout the previous pages, I exposed that a more fertile comparison between the AGM and the OWS emerges when one focuses on the movements' organizational structure, which is guided by an anarchist-autonomist hegemony. With this in mind, I hope it was clear that the “old” can be found in the “new”, although the “new” does not plainly repeat the “old.”

Why have the AGM's tactics dilemmas and challenges re-emerged in the OWS? Using the discussions around transnational social movements and networks and the debate around recent American political landscape as frameworks, I unveiled that there were favorable conditions for another anarchist-autonomist hegemony that repeated what the AGM had experienced. Such favorable conditions can be summed up as the spread of a movement building perspective throughout the American Left and progressive sectors and the persistence of the struggle to build a broad(er) identity.

With respect to differences, my discussion emphasized that within the AGM and within the OWS, the importance of individuals for the network flow is not the same: the OWS seems to have relied upon central, key individuals much more than the AGM has. Such an increased importance is explained by highlighting that, in the OWS, the making of the movement and the making of the network are the very same process. Once OWS's endurance was not expected, the movement grew at the same time as connections were being made and common spaces were

being set up. On the other hand, the AGM was carried out by actors with some degree of independence, which came together after a long process of communication and exchange.

Throughout the text, some questions were raised, but could not be fully answered. This does not mean that they were not relevant questions. What are the potentialities and limitations of the inverted political formula—*tactics* ↔ *strategy* ↔ *goals*? What are the potentialities and limitations of the network way of organizing? Following these questions further, what does social change mean in movements that encourage such open and loose ties? The AGM and the OWS did not implement any programs, but have definitely occasioned some changes. However, such changes are difficult to measure. So, how should the AGM's and the OWS's outcomes be taken?

These movements' overlapping borders and loose structures have posed theoretical challenges to analysts. All questions named here should therefore be subject of further investigation. It must be clear nonetheless that the consequences of the findings would go far beyond any theoretical discussion.

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