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Research Master's Thesis

Vernacular Spaces in the Year of Dreams: A Comparison
Between Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution

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Chapter Outline

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Abstract

The year 2011 was a year of dreams. From the revolutionaries in the Arab Spring to the occupiers of Wall Street, people around the world organized in order to find alternative ways of living. However, they did not do so in a vacuum. Protesters were part of the same international network of activists who routinely shared tactics, theories, and footage from their endeavors. They were also part of the same wave of protests against state oppression and the inequalities of capitalism. In popular conception, these occupations were seen as a disappointment, for they either failed to enact change, or failed to sustain change. However, their value lies in the short-lived experiments they participated in: direct democracy, consensus politics, tending to people's needs, and dreaming of alternative ways of life outside of the state's grasp. By asking the research question of *Are the protest movements of Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution part of the same global occupation movement?*, this thesis will look at two events from the year 2011: the Egyptian Revolution, and Occupy Wall Street. Through an ideal-type comparison I will explore if both these events created and operated within *vernacular spaces*, an ideal-type environment in which demonstrators attempted to return public spaces to the people, and reshape the relations they had with each other. This has the opportunity of being a learning opportunity both for scholars interested in global protest movements, and for activists on the ground willing to draw inspiration from one another.

Introduction: The Global Occupation Movement of 2011

The year 2011 was a year of dreams. From the revolutionaries in the Arab Spring to the student protesters in the UK, and from the *Indignados* to the occupiers of Wall Street, people around the world organized in order to find alternative ways of living. However, they did not do so in a vacuum, as they participated in an international network of activists who routinely shared tactics, theories, and footage from their endeavors. Moreover, the very thing that they were protesting against is a universalizing force that has spread throughout the world, namely capitalism. Using occupation tactics, demonstrators camped in major points of interest such as Tahrir Square and Wall Street and not only forced the response of the state apparatus by their sheer presence, but in the meanwhile also reshaped and often recreated the relationships they had with each other. Questions of legitimacy, of representation, and of demands for change permeated the camps. Occupiers tried to negotiate between discussing such matters in democratic consensus politics, organizing working groups to tend the demonstrators' needs, and protecting the camp from outside incursions by the police or state apparatus disruptors.

In popular conception, these occupations were seen as a failure, for they either failed to enact change, or failed to sustain successful change. However, their value lies not in the relationship the protesters had with the state, but in the short-lived experiment they participated in. Direct democracy, consensus politics, tending to people's needs, and dreaming of alternative ways of life outside of capital's grasp were the actual demands of the occupiers. Whether or not the demonstrators were successful in their own term is another question entirely, one that is debated within their circles to this day. It is clear then that the consequences of these movements were not to be seen in the immediate aftermath of their presumed success or failure. It is fitting perhaps to look at them now, as during the writing of this thesis we have passed the 10 year anniversary of the global occupation movements of 2011. In order to gauge the impact of these movements, and to see whether or not they actually belonged in the same global occupation movement, a comparison is necessary.

This thesis will look at two movements from the year 2011: the Egyptian Revolution and Occupy Wall Street. Through an ideal-type comparison I will explore whether these events operated within *vernacular spaces*, an ideal-type environment in which demonstrators attempt to return public

spaces to the people, and reshape the relations they have with each other. This ideal type is characterized by the presence of knowledgeable and rational “typical” actors that are able to negotiate power with the state and within their own group, through the use of humor and creativity, nonviolent resistance, and the imagination of a critical utopia. A comparison will be made between these two cases and the ideal type, highlighting the characteristics that make each case confirm or disprove the type. Afterwards, a comparison will be made between these characteristics from the two cases in order to see what we can learn from such a study. The value of such a comparison is twofold. First, it makes it possible to look at two cases which would not necessarily be comparable otherwise, in this case Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution. Second, by looking at these cases through the ideal type we can discern new learning opportunities which would be invisible to us in a normal comparison. At the end of the day, I wish for this thesis to be valuable for both scholars interested in contemporary anti-capitalist struggle, and activists curious to learn about past movements. In the following lines I will explain my research question and methodology, my case selection and sources, and some short observations about conducting such a study in the midst of a global pandemic, and my personal motivations for researching this topic.

Research Question & Methodology

In this section I wish to elaborate on what exactly I am trying to answer in this thesis, and how I will attempt to do so. My main research question is: *Are the protest movements of Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution part of the same global occupation movement?* This question has several points which need further elaboration, starting with the one about a global occupation movement. I do not wish to essentialize the occupation movements of 2011 or relegate them to their most basic fundamentals. The universal characteristics of the occupations I will look at will be seen through the ideal type created, which in turn is partly inspired by voices of those on the ground. The ideal type of vernacular spaces will be created in order to collect the demands and dreams of the participants in a coherent theory, which will then be juxtaposed with the empirical facts on the ground. This will not only show the discrepancies between what the demonstrators wanted and what they actually achieved, but it will also make a comparison feasible, since there were many common demands that occupiers had regardless of their encampment location. The discrepancies that will inevitably show up between the theory and the empirical facts will be the key elements that give each case its unique, distinctive features that played a part in the occupation.

Second, I need to mention that both these movements were anti-capitalist at their core. While some scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Ranajit Guha argue that the type of capitalism present in Europe and North America differs from “colonial capitalism” in other parts of the world, the fact of the matter is that there is no real difference in power relations between the workers and the bourgeoisie.¹ While some archaic power relations and traditional symbols may remain, the fact that they are changing is consistent with the universalizing tendency of capitalism.² Such it is that coercion can be present in both liberal democracies and authoritarian states, and the use of force, while varying, is used on protesters around the globe. This is perhaps even more true at the time of the writing of this thesis, when financial capital coupled with an American style of capitalism is spreading throughout the globe.³ Following this argument, I argue that resistance against capitalism is also part of this universalizing tendency, and as such was an essential feature of the cases I am looking at. This makes looking at two distinct cases such as Occupy Wall Street (henceforth OWS) and the Egyptian Revolution together feasible.

The sub-questions and chapter structure are deeply linked, as each chapter will deal with its own set. Chapter One will create a theoretical basis for the rest of the thesis. The ideal type, following Max Weber, will be created in conjunction with the voices of those on the ground, and recent theories surrounding protest tactics in the contemporary age. During this time, multiple questions will be answered, such as: *What is the value of an ideal-type comparison when dealing with global occupation movements? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such a method? What type of sources and methodologies are required for such a method? How does an ideal-type situated within the global occupation movement of 2011 look like?* The chapter will also provide the necessary terminology for the rest of the thesis, explaining terms such as “vernacular” or “typical actors.” At the end of this Chapter, the reader will be ready to approach the case studies in the following chapters. It is perhaps important to note here that I wish this ideal-type framework to be

¹ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Convergences (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey University Press, 2008); Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013), 125.

² Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, 125.

³ Tariq Ali, *The Extreme Centre: A Second Warning* (London, New York: Verso, 2018); Raluca Bejan, ‘The Universalisation of American Capitalism’, *Left History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Historical Inquiry and Debate* 20, no. 2 (February 2019), <https://doi.org/10.25071/1913-9632.39433>; Susanne Soederberg, ‘Universalising Financial Inclusion and the Securitisation of Development’, *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (May 2013): 593–612, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.786285>.

used in further studies as well, both of my own and of others. The empirical case studies that follow are not only there to help us research new insights into occupation movements, but also to test the ideal type itself and see what kind of changes it needs in order to be strengthened for further use.

Chapter Two will look at the Egyptian Revolution and the occupation of Tahrir Square. A brief introduction to the movement will be provided, although it is not necessarily the aim of this thesis to elaborate in detail about the contexts of the Arab Spring. I will merely look into what led to it briefly, then spend a considerable time seeing whether or not the occupation of Tahrir Square was indeed a vernacular space, and if the demonstrators on the ground managed to reshape relations with themselves during their 18 day occupation. Multiple questions will be asked here as well, such as: *What was the Egyptian Revolution? Where does it fit in the broader occupations movements of 2011? Was the occupation of Tahrir Square a vernacular space? Who were the typical actors of Tahrir Square? How did they operate within the spaces they created? What were the features of Tahrir Square that make it adhere to the ideal type created? What are those that make it differ from the ideal type? What can we learn from comparing Tahrir Square with the ideal type?* The key points of this chapter will hopefully relate to how Egyptians managed to reclaim the term “the people” for themselves, how the encampment of Tahrir Square was a vernacular space despite overwhelming odds, but also how some decisions of the actors involved made it so the hard earned unity of the movements quickly collapsed after their aims regarding free elections were met. In the end, several key characteristics that link Tahrir Square with the ideal type (or not) will be highlighted to be used in the comparison of Chapter Four.

Chapter Three follows a similar pattern to the previous chapter, but it deals with Occupy Wall Street and the actual occupation of Zuccotti Park. Similarly, several questions will be asked: *What was Occupy Wall Street? Where does it fit in the broader occupations movements of 2011? Was the occupation of Zuccotti Park a vernacular space? Who were the typical actors of OWS? How did they operate within the spaces they created? What were the features of OWS that make it adhere to the ideal type created? What are those that make it differ from the ideal type? What can we learn from comparing OWS with the ideal type?* The main arguments of this chapter not only relate to identity building in the so-called “99%” and experimentation in direct-democracy on the ground, but also on questions of legitimacy and who has the right to speak for whom, which ultimately disrupted the movement. As with the previous chapter, the key characteristics of OWS will be highlighted in the end in preparation for the comparison.

Chapter Four is the culmination of this thesis, where both occupations will be compared, in line with the key characteristics presented in the previous chapters. The questions answered are thus: *How can we compare elements from OWS and Tahrir Square? What are these elements, and why are they different or similar? What can we learn from such a comparison? Is such a comparison worth it?* The focus here is not necessarily to prove that these movements are in fact comparable – this argument permeates the entire thesis, and it is perhaps up to the reader to discern whether or not that is true. The main argument is to show that these movements are connected in certain ways, as they manifest similar expressions: claiming the mandate of the people against the state apparatus, claiming legitimacy by presenting themselves as “the people” or “the 99%,” and claiming the past experiences of the demonstrators before them as a guide for the present. Moreover, the presence of online networks made transnational cooperation possible. However, I argue that the movements were also disconnected, partly due to their cultural and historical contexts, the leadership forms they adopted within the occupations, and the unity of the demonstrators.

Finally, the Conclusion will be a space of exploring what this comparison thought us, and what possibilities for further research there are. I will also muse on how these occupation movements influenced the ones that came after them, as during the writing of this thesis we have already passed the 10 year anniversary of both Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution. Lessons that both scholars and activists could learn from such a comparison will be highlighted. I will also delve into the characteristics of the ideal type that made this research possible, while also arguing that some of its elements do need changing in order to be used prolifically in the future (and I argue that there is indeed a future in which such a study can be made drawing from more case studies of global protest movements). In the end, I will also meditate on my experiences of writing a Masters Thesis without the ability of visiting the spaces I studied, interviewing the people I wrote about, or contemplating about such things with my fellow researchers.

Case Selection and Sources

Early readers of this thesis were surprised at the fact that from all the myriad movements of 2011, I chose to focus on Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution. I admit that the case selection is not obvious, as at first glance these two seem diametrically opposed to one another. On the one hand you have a group of mostly white suburban males joining an occupation against the abstract

force of “financial capital,” in a movement reminiscent of 1960s peace movements in the US.⁴ On the other hand, you have a massive movement of individuals from all walks of life partaking in a more or less classic revolution, fighting an oppressive regime that does not shy away from using lethal force against its constituents. However, there is a single global image that links these two cases to one another – that of the occupation. The demand of *occupation* is made with full knowledge that the space in question is pre-occupied by the state and the police, and that the presumed open and democratic characteristics it may have are always at threat of eviction.⁵ That is why the occupation is not only about taking possession of a space, but about provoking a response and framing it in advance.⁶

The iconic footage of both of these movements are not of individuals, but of the spaces they occupied. Both the Egyptian Revolution and OWS (which was heavily inspired by the former) refused to have a face come forth and voice their demands, for they quickly realized that the movement was not about individuals, but about how they relate to one another. Images of mass movements and popular politics: nineteenth century scholars would have called them “the spirit of revolution,” while in the twentieth century Marx and Engels referred to them as a specter haunting Europe. Likewise, in the twenty-first century we are greeted by a reappearance of local assemblies and their methods. While it is the reshaping of unlicensed printing through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, or the corresponding societies recreated in the people’s microphone, street artists, or drum circles of the occupations, we are witnessing what Hannah Arendt called:

the space of appearance [that] comes into being wherever men [and women] are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm Unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men . . . but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves.⁷

⁴ Amy Schrager Lang, ed., *Dreaming in Public: Building the Occupy Movement* (Oxford: New Internationalist Publishing, 2012).

⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘The Violence of Public Art: “Do the Right Thing”’, *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 4 (1990): 880–99.

⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation’, *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (September 2012): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1086/668048>.

⁷ Hannah Arendt, Danielle S. Allen, and Margaret Canovan, *The Human Condition*, Second edition (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 178.

In this sense, the occupations of Tahrir Square and Wall Street are comparable. At the heart of these movements was not politics, but an attempt by the collective to return public spaces to the public. The comparison is also about the struggle of these individuals to engage in the *praxis* or methodology of occupation. Occupations are characterized by a renouncing of practical demands towards the state, while also opening the space for numerous demands to be discussed within the occupation. This links with other strategies such as refusing to designate representatives, and experimenting in radical direct-democracy politics.⁸ The aim therefore is not to seize power, but to negotiate what it might mean to speak together as equals. One might see this space as prior to politics itself, as through the general assemblies, the working groups facilitating people's primary needs, and community oriented action, it is the place where radical politics can be born. As such, occupy movements are able to contain within them a multitude of contradictions. As I will argue in the following chapters, "the 99%" in Zuccotti Park or "the people" in Tahrir Square, hosted a number of individuals and groups that in normal conditions would not even come close to each other. In Tahrir, the Muslim Brotherhood camped next to Coptic Christians, radical fundamentalists, secular liberals, and Marxist revolutionaries, while in Zuccotti Park Tea Partiers and actual millionaire celebrities camped with homeless occupiers.

It would be remiss of me to not mention my personal reasonings for choosing this topic. While writing this thesis from home during the pandemic, I could not help but follow the acts of injustice that permeated throughout 2020 and early 2021 and how people reacted to them. From the #BlackLivesMatter protests in the United States to the show of solidarity for Palestinians living in apartheid Israel,⁹ it was clear to me that a wind of change was blowing throughout the world. From my own privileged vantage point in Europe, I was amazed to see how European rallied in support of both Black Americans and Palestinians. The nature of the global network of activists, that perhaps was radicalized even further during the Coronavirus quarantine measures dawned on me. This refusal of individuals across the globe to not excuse state oppression anymore and unite under a common banner was reminiscent of the year 2011 for me, and it was partly why I chose to delve more into this subject. It is safe to say that I am deeply biased in this topic, and while it may come

⁸ Morgan Rodgers Gibson, 'The Anarchism of the Occupy Movement', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 3 (September 2013): 335–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2013.820687>; Mitchell, 'Image, Space, Revolution', 11; Daniel Lang, 'The Politics of the Impossible', in *Dreaming in Public*.

⁹ Omar Shakir et al, 'A Threshold Crossed. Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution', *Human Rights Watch*, 27 April 2021, accessed 11 June 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>.

up during this thesis I have tried to tone it down the best I could. In the end, being an activist historian is all about negotiating such things.

This brings me to my sources. I at first foolishly believed that while accessing archives would be impossible during the pandemic, talking to people about their lived experiences via interviews would be easier, since everything would be virtual. Sadly, the pandemic affected many people and their livelihoods, especially those in the lower strata of society that actually participated in these movements. Moreover, my aim to visit Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park in order to gauge how these spaces were actually used in the occupations was also disrupted by travel bans, and my own wish to isolate for safety. There was however an alternative, one that I used in the writing of this thesis. There are many collections of testimonies from both OWS and the Egyptian Revolution. These require some explanation, which I will do below.

In order to understand the use of these testimony collections I wish to talk about the historiography of occupation movements, and of protest movements in general. Each chapter has its own myriad of secondary sources, used to strengthen the arguments taken from the ground, to provide context for the events that unfolded during the occupation, or to showcase academic discussion about protest movements. These will be discussed thoroughly in their respective chapters, but a few observations can be made here as well. There is a rich body of literature surrounding occupation movements, at least for Europe and North America. There are meta-studies that contain over 150 academic references, presented and discussed at international conferences such as the “Street Politics in the Age of Austerity” Conference in Montreal, 2013, the 20th International Conference of Europeanists in Amsterdam, 2013, or the Congress of the Spanish Federation of Society in Madrid, 2013.¹⁰ However, the main issue is that most of these do not include books authored by activists or journalists, scholars’ interventions in demonstrations and assemblies, or the voices of those on the ground in general.¹¹ Scholars such as Ancelovici et al do not engage in these due to their polemical nature, but I do not see how an occupation movement “against austerity” is anything but polemical. Hopefully the contribution that I bring to this field is trying to bridge this gap between academic scholarship and the events as described by those on the ground. Moreover,

¹⁰ For an overview of these sources, see Marcos Angelovici, Pascale Dufour, and Héloïse Nez, eds., *Street Politics in the Age of Austerity: From the Indignados to Occupy* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

¹¹ Ancelovici et al, *Street Politics*, 13.

there are few authors who try to make a point for a global occupation movement truly existing in the year 2011, and I believe my contribution lays in there as well.¹²

A great amount of my sources are from testimonies and voices of those present in the demonstrations. The point that Marcos Ancelovici et al make about the diversity of testimonies making research difficult to navigate is salient. Even though the testimonies collected in the same volume have been probably selected for a purpose, there is disagreement to be found between the actors reporting on the same event, as their opinions on the matter differ. However, as I've mentioned before, the occupations were a space where internal contradictions could co-exist. Moreover, the ideal type is a way to resolve these contradictions by providing a steady theoretical basis with which to juxtapose them.

While discussing primary sources, I mention that my research also includes a great variety of media articles from multiple news outlets. This is done for multiple reasons. First, it shows the proliferation of these movements in the popular imagination – part of the argument about occupations is that they are impossible to ignore, even for state media. As such, even journalists who were critical of these movements found it compelling to draw comparisons between them.¹³ Second, the juxtaposition between the reports of mainstream media and the actual events on the ground is valuable to explore, as it shows an online network of protesters operating fully outside traditional media, simply through the way they chose to film themselves.¹⁴ Third, towards the conclusion several points will be made about how these occupation movements affected current protests, both in Egypt and in the United States. Media reports will be used during that part and well, and it will be noted that there has been a change in the way these situations are discussed, as

¹² Although not their focus, the following pieces do try to provide a comparison in some way: Peter Snowdon, *The People Are Not an Image: Vernacular Video after the Arab Spring* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2020); W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation', *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (September 2012): 8–32, <https://doi.org/10.1086/668048>; Paul Mason, *Why It's Still Kicking off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, (London ; New York: Verso, 2013); Pnina Werbner, Martin Webb, and Kathryn Spellman-Poots, eds., *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2014).

¹³ Sal Gentile, 'Egyptians March in Support of Occupy Wall Street. Are There Parallels with the Arab Spring?', *Need to Know | PBS*, 28 October 2011, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/the-daily-need/egyptians-march-in-support-of-occupy-wall-street-are-there-parallels-with-the-arab-spring/12147/>; "'Occupy Wall Street' to Turn Manhattan into 'Tahrir Square'", *International Business Times*, 21 May 2012, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120521094829/http://newyork.ibtimes.com/articles/215511/20110917/occupy-wall-street-new-york-saturday-protest.htm>.

¹⁴ Not only because of distrust their distrust towards media, but because of their different styles of reporting altogether: see Mark R. Westmoreland, 'Street Scenes: The Politics of Revolutionary Video in Egypt', *Visual Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (26 May 2016): 243–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2016.1154420>.

more of a focus is put on the harm done towards protesters, their material conditions, and life inside the camps.

There are still issues though. In the case of the Egyptian Revolution, I am dealing with testimonies and video images that have either been fully translated, interpreted in English, or spoken in English by the person giving the testimony. This puts me in a position where I need to trust not only the translation, but the collection process of the editor in question, or the lived experiences of an Egyptian fortunate enough to speak more than one language (which of course, come with a whole intellectual, societal, and economic package). However, these testimonies are limited, so I could not be too picky. For OWS the problem was perhaps the opposite, where every individual participating in the nation-wide occupation movement in the US felt a need to share their experiences on Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube. I have chosen to omit the great majority of them, for they would not have fit due to their language, bad-faith arguments, or other factors. As such, this thesis is certainly a product of the pandemic, but I believe it to be relevant still: not only because it provides a meta-study of collected testimonies, but it attempts to unite two separate events through the creation of a common theoretical basis of the ideal type. I do not claim to have any definitive answers for the questions I am posing, but I do believe that this is a sufficient starting point for both me and other scholars in the future.

Chapter One: The Vernacular Space as an Ideal Type

In the Introduction I clarified that vernacular spaces are a type of social action through which public spaces are returned to the community. The occupations, through the use of creativity, humor, and nonviolence, imagine a critical utopia based on shared traditions, customs, and histories. This of course is an idealistic over-generalization – but that is the point. It is not to say that the occupied spaces of Tahrir Square and Wall Street were fully returned to the community, but that the collective aspired to do so as a conscious form of resistance against power. As such, a comparison between what the community dreamed about and what their subsequent actions (and their consequences) were is fitting. The dreams of both OWS and Tahrir Square can be theorized through Max Weber’s *ideal type*, which will then be compared with the empirical data from the two case studies. This chapter will look into the theoretical part, establishing a baseline for the comparison in the following chapters.

The term “ideal type” need further clarification, as it is not used by many historians or sociologists. For historians the reasoning is simple – you cannot create a “type” of historical analysis, for every historical event is unique. This is a position I empathize with as well, but it is important to realize that as historians we still use generalizing types in our works, be it “working class,” “bureaucracy,” “feudalism,” and so on. Sociologists however are caught between celebrating Max Weber as one of the most influential comparative-sociological researcher and theorist of all time, and not actually using his ideal type.¹⁵ Some scholars bluntly state that this stems from researchers not understanding Weber’s ideal types, and if they do, from a refusal to engage in such a time-consuming undertaking with questionable immediate results.¹⁶ Others argue that Weber did not actually provide any guidelines for creating ideal types, so using them as the creator intended is impossible.¹⁷ In any case, it seems that the ideal type has taken a life of its own, often used without Weber’s name attached and maybe as a different word for “abstraction.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Matthew Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods* (London: SAGE, 2013), 144, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1110145>.

¹⁶ Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 83; Carl Hempel, *Typological Methods in the Natural and the Social Sciences*, 1965; Richard Swedberg, ‘How to Use Max Weber’s Ideal Type in Sociological Analysis’, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 18, no. 3 (August 2018): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X17743643>.

¹⁷ Gerhard Wagner and Claudius Härpfer, ‘On the Very Idea of an Ideal Type’, *Società Mutamento Politica* 5 (May 2014): 215-234, <https://doi.org/10.13128/SMP-14492>.

¹⁸ Ola Agevall, ‘Thinking about Configurations: Max Weber and Modern Social Science’, *Etica & Politica* 2 (2005).

Weber designed ideal types in an effort to find a middle position between idiographic and nomothetic analysis. In Kantian terms, idiographic is the way of the humanities, focused on subjectivities and unique particularities, while the nomothetic is the way of the natural sciences, focused on categorization and laws.¹⁹ For Weber, historical analysis portraying every single event as unique was blind to the social processes that might occur in similar ways and have similar causes. Likewise, the creation of abstract laws in order to get a sense of reality was doomed to fail since the process lost touch with real world events. As such, ideal types could provide abstract concepts in such a way as to see similarities and differences between cases – both trends and unique characteristics.²⁰ It is important to note that this is a simplified version of Weber's arguments, as at first he was also unsure of his theory. As Alfred Schutz argues, Weber found his footing only when he made a full transition from a theory of history to a theory of sociology.²¹

This is not to say that a theory of history is bad, or that Weber's initial definition has no merits. In his *Objectivity* essay from 1904, he discusses the use of the ideal type in all the social sciences, which for him at the time included the studying of individual phenomena.²² Later, he assigns the analysis of such phenomena exclusively to historians. This is perhaps why Schultz argues that Weber was involved in "the theory of history." The confusing aspect of Weber's *Objectivity* relates to his use of certain terms such as culture, values, and meaning. Weber argues that culture is a value concept – it involves meaning. In other words, culture and values are closely related. However, Weber argues that in order to create an ideal type, the most important action a researcher must take is *gedankliche Steigerung*, or "theoretical accentuation."²³ It is unclear here what exactly takes place when we must accentuate certain theories or concepts above empirical phenomena. It is also equally confusing what exactly we do with values and meaning, for even if they are used almost interchangeably, they are not the same: values are something we believe in and want to see

¹⁹ Swedberg, 'How to Use Max Weber's Ideal Type in Sociological Analysis'.

²⁰ Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods*, 144.

²¹ Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

²² Max Weber, *Collected Methodological Writings*, trans. Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster (London: Routledge, 2014).

²³ Weber, *Collected Methodological Writings*, 124; Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019).

realized, while meaning refers to how we understand reality.²⁴ Perhaps this is why Weber himself calls his theory at this point “sketchy and therefore perhaps partially incorrect.”²⁵

By 1920, Weber’s ideal type has slightly changed. In Chapter 1 of *Economy and Society*, the ideal type is only mentioned briefly in two pages, but it warrants more discussion. As argued before, the main issues of the *Objectivity* essay regarding the ideal type were the uncertainty regarding how values relate to meaning in the concept of culture, and how exactly to practically proceed when engaging in “analytical accentuation.” Weber clearly thought of these issues himself. In Chapter 1, he outlines his type of interpretive sociology, focused on what he calls “social action.”²⁶ During this, he completely gets rid of all references to “values,” sticking only to “meaning.”²⁷ Culture, the concept that ties them together, is also not to be seen. Action for Weber is behavior invested with meaning by an individual actor, and it turns into *social* action when it is directed towards a collective. Values and culture are gone.

Nevertheless, Weber does provide two steps for the creation of ideal types. The first step is to check for the existence of “adequacy on the level of meaning” (*sinnhaft adequat*). The second is to concentrate on the meaning of ideal types (*Gesteigerte Eindeutigkeit der Begriffe*). The first refers to what might be a correct way to act for an actor. In other words, the *meaning* that an actor has needs to be accompanied by a suitable *action*. The latter refers to the creation of several artificial assumptions about the typical actor. According to Swedberg, the most important of these are:

1. That the typical actor acts in a rational way;
2. That the typical actor has complete information;
3. That the typical actor is totally aware of what she is doing; and
4. That the typical actor does not make any mistakes.²⁸

The ideal type needs assumptions about the typical actor for a number of reasons. According to Weber, in order to concentrate on the element of meaning a scholar has to create a number of

²⁴ H.H. Bruun, ‘Weber On Rickert: From Value Relation to Ideal Type’, *Max Weber Studies* 1, no. 2 (2001): 138–60.

²⁵ John Drysdale, ‘Weber on Objectivity’, in *Max Weber’s ‘Objectivity’ Reconsidered*, ed. Laurence McFalls (University of Toronto Press, 2007), 31–57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt2tv3d6.5>; Jack Goody, ‘Weber, Braudel, and Objectivity in Comparative Research’, in *Max Weber’s ‘Objectivity’ Reconsidered*, 225–40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt2tv3d6.13>.

²⁶ Weber, ‘Basic Sociological Concepts’, in *Economy and Society*.

²⁷ Weber, ‘Basic Sociological Concepts’, in *Economy and Society*.

²⁸ Swedberg, ‘How to Use Max Weber’s Ideal Type in Sociological Analysis’, 7.

artificial assumptions about the typical individual actor. The ideal type is closely related to the concept of social action, and as such there is a need to not only mention the actors of that action, but also try to explain their motivations. Moreover, this also fits my understanding of vernacular spaces. My research does not only look at how the actual spaces of Tahrir Square or Zuccotti Park were organized, but at how individuals within those spaces operated. Due to the nature of their utopian project the creation of an ideal type was best suited to see how it related to reality. Individuals whose motivation relates to the actualization of a utopian project need to be analyzed within the project itself, or in this case the vernacular space.

The assumptions will be explored when arguing for *vernacular spaces* being ideal types, but it is easy at this point to criticize these assumptions. After all, none of them are true in an empirical sense. However, the point is not to say that it is impossible to reach these assumptions, but to see what exactly is in the way of (theoretically) achieving them. It is important to remember that these occupations and the people within them were human, and thus invariably flawed. An actor might believe she is acting rationally, but in many cases is limited by her values, surroundings, traditions, and other externalities. In the same vein, an actor might believe she has complete information, but in the age of manufacturing consent that is also impossible.²⁹

The assumptions are nothing but a heuristic tool. When confronting the ideal type with reality discrepancies will occur by design. These discrepancies should not be too large, as then the ideal type might be invalid. When the differences are adequate, then the researcher must account for the differences by discovering the peculiarities of each case. In his *Protestant Ethic*, for example, Weber provides a valuable argument that is closely linked with an ideal type, but does not expand too much on how that relationship is constructed.³⁰ He states that empirical proof is absolutely necessary to verify a hypothesis, and that it must include the *meaning* of the actors, but it is up to the researcher to discern what that means. It is important then to find the uniqueness of our cases, and avoid the dangers of getting too involved in the logic of our ideal types. A reminder is needed for the reader (and myself) that the use of ideal types in the context of this thesis is to bridge the aspirations that the global network of protesters had during the year 2011, to argue what elements

²⁹ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, A Vintage Original (London: Vintage, 1994).

³⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 106.

stood in the way of these aspirations, and to see whether or not these two occupation movements were part of the same family of protests. A proper use of the ideal type does not mean picking only what fits or does not fit from the empirical cases. The ideal type is merely another tool of the researcher to navigate otherwise difficult to grasp information, and to learn as much as possible from it.

This is somewhat of a complicated endeavor with dubious possible results. However, the ideal type should be seen for what it is – an imperfect solution for an imperfect world. I believe that even if it hurts, as historians we should confront the unknowing categories we engage in all the time, just as we need to confront our unknowing biases in our research. Max Weber provides a comprehensive method to use when dealing with both general trends and unique characteristics of case studies in a comparison. As such, as it will be argued below, the occupations of Wall Street and Tahrir Square provide an excellent opportunity to test a theory of vernacular spaces: they are both occupations, but have extraordinary particularities.

Constructing the Vernacular Space as an Ideal Type

What is the anatomy of a protest movement? One can see the streets as its veins, the main hubs as its organs. The organizational structure its bones, and the individuals sacrificing their time, capital, and lives its blood and tears. If one would participate, she would be one of the many cells traversing the body, perhaps passing through organs every once in a while, but never truly stopping. For the erudite protesters (or just the knowing urban-dweller), a trip through the intestines would usually stop at a McDonalds, as long as it remains open to demonstrators, at least.³¹ But not all protests are created equal, and it would be silly to assume that all follow the same rules.

However, there is value to such a comparison besides metaphor and humor. Protests are in most cases a rejection of the status-quo, and sometimes they are new forms of life in themselves.³² Individuals conceptualize their existence and grievances into a larger collective which acts as a body against power. This body becomes powerful when localized and contextualized in a space, both offline and online. And it is the relationship between the body and the space that forms the nature of the protest. Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park both witnessed a return of the public space

³¹ Daniel Lang, 'The Politics of the Impossible', in *Dreaming in Public*.

³² Peter Snowdon, *The People Are Not an Image: Vernacular Video after the Arab Spring* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2020), 28.

to the collective. This form of social action manifested itself in several ways that are common in both OWS and Tahrir Square: critical utopia, nonviolence, and creativity and humor. These are all behaviors that meant resistance for those involved.

Critical Utopia

Writing about the UK student riots of 2011, philosopher Slavoj Žižek described the protesters using the Hegelian notion of “rabble.”³³ The rioters, he argues, are part of a class that is outside the organized social sphere, who can only express their discontent through “irrational outbursts of destructive violence.”³⁴ This is not necessarily to be blamed on the protesters themselves, but on the fact that opposition to the system is limited even in its creation of alternative ways of living. Žižek argues that in such a situation, the underprivileged can only look at the slightly more privileged and strike in jealousy and anger, instead of using their emotions in a productive way: “The problem with the riots was not their violence as such, but the fact that it was not truly self-assertive— in Nietzschean terms, it was reactive, not active, impotent rage and despair masked as a display of force, envy masked as a triumphant carnival.”³⁵

The meaning of the 2011 UK protestors was anti-State resistance, but according to scholars like Žižek their *actions* were not adequate on the level of meaning. It is also a case of the dangers of not dreaming in public anymore. For there are many ways to think of alternate societies to the ones we live in today. People throughout time have been imagining what we could have if something about our ways of living changed – for better or for worse. Examples are numerous: Plato’s *Republic*, George Orwell’s (often misquoted) *1984*, or Enlightenment thought in Marxist and anarchist theory.³⁶ Readers will probably be acquainted with concepts such as *utopia* or *dystopia*, but not realize that they are faced not with a binary system of imagination but with a spectrum. Over the last two centuries, utopian thought has been analyzing questions of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, national liberation, and ecology, especially with the birth of “utopian studies” in the 1950s. This period saw the rise of a new type of utopian thinking, in line with the works of

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London ; New York: Verso, 2012), 53.

³⁴ Žižek, *The Year*, 53.

³⁵ Žižek, *The Year*, 60.

³⁶ Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, (Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2014), 9.

Joanna Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Samuel R. Delany, and others. Tom Moylan refers to their writings as the beginning of “critical utopias:”

The new novels negated the negation of utopia by the forces of twentieth century history: the subversive imaging of utopian society and the radical negativity of dystopian perception is preserved; while the systematizing boredom of the traditional utopia and the cooptation of utopia by modern structures is destroyed. Thus, utopian writing in the 1970s was saved by its own destruction and transformation into the “critical utopia.” “Critical” in the Enlightenment sense of critique – that is expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation. As well as “critical” in the nuclear sense of the critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction.³⁷

In occupation movements, there was an awareness of what the movement was *against*, it was difficult to pinpoint exactly what the movement was *for*. This is also what Slavoj Žižek referred to as the lack of a proper language for expressing our grievances not in terms of our current system, but of one not yet made.³⁸ But even with a lack of proper definitions for what they were doing, people nonetheless turned to each other and attempted to create alternative spaces. These were either based on something already there in the popular imagination (like the Egyptian *amara*), or created on the spot (like the “open-mic” of OWS), but in the end they were purely *vernacular*. Quoting Andre Gorz, this new movement is based on a freedom characterized by individuality and local community, which is antithetical to the state project itself. Such activities

unrelated to any economic goal which are an end in themselves: communication, giving, creating and aesthetic enjoyment, the production and reproduction of life, tenderness, the realization of physical, sensuous, and intellectual capacities, the creation of non-commodity use-values (shared goods and/or services) that could not be produced as commodities because of their unprofitability.³⁹

Occupy Wall Street and Tahrir Square are then critical utopias in a double sense. Both movements were experiments of dreaming of a better society born out of the rejection of state-driven structures

³⁷ Moylan and Baccolini, *Demand the Impossible*, 41.

³⁸ Slavoj Žižek, ‘Don’t Fall in Love With Yourself’, in *Occupy! Scenes from Occupied America*, ed. Astra Taylor (London: Verso, 2011).

³⁹ André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, Pluto Classics (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 81.

of power. But these movements were also critical of blind utopianism and its flaws, and were flawed movements in themselves. This fact will be further explored when discussing the typical actor, especially the point that she makes no mistakes. It will also come up when exploring the internal criticism that these movements had for themselves, especially when it comes to the unity of the movement, who could speak for it, and what the immediate aftermath entailed.

Nonviolence

Nonviolent action is an attempt to overcome violence and repression without using any violence yourself. This definition provided by Stellan Vinthagen has two aspects: nonviolence *without violence* and *against violence*.⁴⁰ It is important to note here that simply taking action without using violence, as in the first aspect, does not by itself make it nonviolence. Only occasionally do people take action to prevent violence committed by someone else, as in the latter case.⁴¹ The occupations of Tahrir Square and Wall Street are nonviolent acts against the violence of the state, and as such fit within this definition. The reason they are vernacular actions is because they operate outside the bounds of institutionalized political channels, and the procedures of determining the resolution of the conflicts in question are organized for those on the ground.⁴² Other examples include civil disobedience, strikes, or boycotts.

Some observers would stop at this point and ask themselves “wait, but the occupations *were* violent.” And that is true. In order to get to Tahrir Square, Egyptians had to fight riot police across the Qasr El Nil Bridge, and then repel several attempted sieges of their camp. In a smaller capacity but equally relevant, the occupiers of Wall Street had multiple incursions with the police when attempting to expand their camp elsewhere, culminating in the main camp being disbanded on November 15th, 2011. It would be important to state that the escalating figures in the circumstances stated above were state actors.⁴³ Authorities want to provoke a violent reaction in the protesters in order to give the media an opportunity to film these and present a whitewashed version of the

⁴⁰ Stellan Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works*, 2015, 61.

⁴¹ Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism: Creative Nonviolent Resistance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 170.

⁴² Kurt Schock, ‘Nonviolent Action and Its Misconceptions: Insights for Social Scientists’, *PS: Political Science and Politics* 36, no. 4 (2003): 705.

⁴³ Tim Gee, ‘Past Tents - A Brief History of Protest Camping’, in *Dreaming in Public*; Angel McRae, ‘Occupy Movement: Anarchy or Revolution?’, KSL, accessed 5 May 2021, <https://www.ksl.com/article/18075759/occupy-movement-anarchy-or-revolution>; Writers for the 99%, ed., *Occupying Wall Street: The inside Story of an Action That Changed America* (New York, London: OR Books, 2011).

events to the general public. Such a popular tactic used in the US is called “kettling,” where police barricade protesters inside an outdoor area and allow them to leave only in certain points – or do not allow them to leave whatsoever.⁴⁴ This is an example of escalation because protesters are slowly trapped in a smaller circle, with no access to water, food, sanitation, or shelter for hours. When conflict inevitably ensues, the blame is put on the protesters.⁴⁵

Nonviolent action itself is not inaction – it is not submissiveness, avoidance of conflict, or passive resistance. This type of resistance has been associated for the longest time with pacifists and peace studies, but non-pacifists vastly outnumber pacifists in nonviolent resistance.⁴⁶ Nonviolent resistance is not principled nonviolence. In fact, many activists *expect* violence to occur, not because of failures within their nonviolent movement but because such movements are seen as serious threats to power. There are many explanations for this: nonviolent protests are more likely to attract a critical mass of participants, using violence against nonviolent actors tends to remove the legitimacy of the oppressors, or that the oppressors depend on some sort of cooperation from their subjects, regardless of political system.⁴⁷

In some cases, activists themselves engage in conflict escalation, or at least welcome it as an unfortunate but necessary part of struggle. Nonviolent conflict escalation is a tactic used by protesters when previously unrecognized conflicts are intensified using nonviolent means. Escalation does not necessarily mean violence, but intensifying the conflict to a level where it can no longer be ignored.⁴⁸ In the words of Martin Luther King:

You may well ask, “Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn’t negotiation a better path?” You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a

⁴⁴ Matt Wells, ‘Police Crack down on “Occupy Wall Street” Protests’, the Guardian, 25 September 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/sep/25/occupywallstreet-occupy-wall-street-protests>; Olivia Katrandjian, ‘Occupy Wall Street Movement Reports 80 Arrested Today in Protests’, ABC News, accessed 2 June 2021, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2011/09/occupy-wall-street-movement-reports-80-arrested-today-in-protests>.

⁴⁵ Julian Joyce, ‘Police “kettle” Tactic Feels the Heat’, BBC News, 16 April 2009, accessed 2 June 2021, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8000641.stm; Sandra Laville and Duncan Campbell, ‘Baton Charges and Kettling: Police’s G20 Crowd Control Tactics under Fire’, the Guardian, 2 April 2009, accessed 2 June 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/apr/03/g20-protests-police-tactics>.

⁴⁶ Schock, ‘Nonviolent Action and Its Misconceptions’, 705.

⁴⁷ Majken Jul Sørensen and Jørgen Johansen, ‘Nonviolent Conflict Escalation’, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (August 2016): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21173>.

⁴⁸ Sørensen and Johansen, “Nonviolent Conflict Escalation,” 7.

tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work on the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I confess that I am not afraid of the word “tension.” I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth.⁴⁹

Sørensen and Johansen identified five main elements of escalation that are present in nonviolent movements.⁵⁰ These are *quantitative* (how long a protest takes place and how many people are involved), *innovation* (new methods to escalate struggles, many used by institutions like Greenpeace), *dilemma creation* (forcing the opponents to make a choice that was previously incomparable, like Iranian protesters shouting “Allah Akbar” against the regime in 2009), *provocation* (such as Russia’s Pussy Riot group concerting in a Cathedral in 2012), and *persistence* (escalating the effort behind the action). These are of course interlinked, and arguably all played a part in both the occupations of Wall Street and Tahrir Square. Occupations entail a high number of people reclaiming public space, using new means to exercise democracy and make the movement visible for outsiders, claiming legitimacy for the majority, forcing the authorities to take action, and encamping for as long as possible. In the end, it is important to neither glorify nor underestimate nonviolent action. However, nonviolence is a critical part of the vernacular ideal type, and of the occupations.

Humor and Creativity

The use of humor in politics is not new, especially when it comes to social movements and protests. During the French Revolution, approximately 80.000 pamphlets were published.⁵¹ Short, concise, topical, image-based, hard to control by authorities, and easy to disseminate, one could draw a comparison between these and today’s memes. Not all of these pamphlets were *libelles*, but the term came to popularity for the especially crude humor of some of them, depicting precarious scenes of Marie Antoinette, commenting on the infertility of Louis XVI, and arguing that killing

⁴⁹ David P. Barash, ed., *Approaches to Peace: A Reader in Peace Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 172.

⁵⁰ Sørensen and Johansen, "Nonviolent Conflict Escalation," 10.

⁵¹ Harvey Chisick, ‘The Pamphlet Literature of the French Revolution: An Overview’, *History of European Ideas* 17, no. 2–3 (March 1993): 149–66, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599\(93\)90289-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599(93)90289-3).

someone's cat was a hilarious prank.⁵² Laughter itself was used as a disruptive force during the National Conventions a total of 394 times from 1792 to 1794 in order to denigrate another's arguments.⁵³ The French revolutionaries were deeply aware of the political consequences of their humor.⁵⁴ Other social upheavals manifested different forms of humor as well: from the revolutionary satire of the Iranian Revolution macabre mixture of death and irony of the Russian Revolution of 1917.⁵⁵

These cases show us that humor is deeply context-specific and it serves different roles at different times. It can vilify the opposition, provide a sense of common identity amongst the protesters, be a coping mechanism in times of distress, and others. However, it is not straightforward to use humor in order to achieve political change, and sometimes activists struggle to convey their message or to not be misunderstood.⁵⁶ Understanding the circumstances surrounding these humorous attempts and actually listening to the voices of the participants is imperative in order to understand their humor, even though *we* might not find it "funny." I acknowledge the vast theories of humor that could be used in order to make sense of the events of OWS and Tahrir Square.⁵⁷ Of these, the conflict approach, the symbolic-interactionist approach, and the phenomenological approach would be most relevant. However, analyzing the humor of the protesters is not necessarily my main objective. For the purposes of this thesis, humor will be closely linked to creativity, as both were merely means of expressing grievances within the movements.

Creativity is in turn linked with innovative ways of protesting. The occupation movements described in this thesis certainly have significant historical continuities with other popular uprisings and movements, often in the same geographic area. But Occupy Wall Street and Tahrir Square were "new" in many ways: from their use of innovative political strategies in social media

⁵² Harvey Chisick, 'The Pamphlet Literature of the French Revolution.'

⁵³ Jacob Charcles Zobkiw, 'Political Strategies of Laughter in the National Convention, 1792-179' (PhD, Newcastle, University of Newcastle, 2015).

⁵⁴ Mike Rapport, 'Laughter as a Political Weapon: Humour and the French Revolution', in *Le Rire Européen*, ed. Alastair B. Duncan and Anne Chamayou, 241–55, <https://www.doabooks.org/doab?func=fulltext&rid=41288>.

⁵⁵ For Iranian satire of the Revolution, see 'Alī Akbar Dihkhudā, Janet Afary, and John R. Perry, *Charand-o Parand: Revolutionary Satire from Iran, 1907-1909* b(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). For satire during the Russian Revolution, see Marcus Levitt and Oleg Minin, 'The Satirical Journals of the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907: A Brief Introduction', *Experiment* 19, no. 1 (2013): 17–23, <https://doi.org/10.1163/2211730X-12341240>., David King and Cathy Porter, *Blood & Laughter: Caricatures from the 1905 Revolution* (London: J. Cape, 1983), John Etty, 'The Legacy of 1917 in Graphic Satire', *Slavic Review* 76, no. 3 (2017): 664–74, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2017.174>.

⁵⁶ Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*, 2.

⁵⁷ Giseline Kuipers, 'The Sociology of Humor', in *The Primer of Humor Research*, ed. Victor Raskin (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 361–98, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110198492.361>.

and networking, to their physical and sensual manifestations.⁵⁸ The other characteristics outlined above related more to the *performativity* of protest, but creativity shines best in its *aesthetics*. The two are deeply intertwined, as all art is political, and all politics is aesthetics.⁵⁹ The aesthetics of the protests of OWS and Tahrir Square are directly opposed to those of the ruling regimes, be they neoliberal or authoritarian. They draw inspiration from the vernacular, from social, political, and national histories of the people involved. In the contemporary age, the aesthetic struggle is also a struggle for visibility, or a visually productive process.⁶⁰ The creative process was not only visual, however, but also expressed in song, humor, poetry, and bodily participation.

The very act of being part of the protests, both online and offline, meant that the participants were involved in a movement larger than themselves. In the case of the movements presented in this thesis, it is also when individuals *realize* that there is in fact a collective, and that they are part of it. This collective becomes “the people” – not in the sense used by the State and media to artificially create a collective identity, but in a new, *vernacular* way. It is what Peter Snowdon refers to as the fusion between the first-person perspective of “we” and the third person perspective of “the people,” with the end result being that “we” becomes “all of us.”⁶¹

Sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh refers to this transformation during his first-hand experiences in the Arab Spring:

Concepts that had been previously unimaginable or abstract became in the revolutionary climate concrete. That which was immeasurable as the manifestation of a collective became felt as the property of the person. One of those concepts, “the people,” was used so profusely in ways that suggest that it was felt to be a natural and organic extension of one’s own sense of truth and justice. The novelty (as well as rarity and passing nature) of feeling an abstraction as “the people” was evident in how it was used everywhere and without compulsion as a namesake of what everyone assumed to be intuitively true: “the people have decided ...,” “the people want ...,” “the people will not be humiliated ...,” “the will of the people is ...,” and so on. These usages were never expressed in terms of any precise mechanisms —i.e. how the people might translate its will into a policy, or even whether a

⁵⁸ Pnina Werbner, Martin Webb, and Kathryn Spellman-Poots, eds., *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 2.

⁵⁹ Werbner, Webb, and Spellman-Poots, 1.

⁶⁰ Lina Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 1.

⁶¹ Snowdon, *The People Are Not an Image*, 21.

revolutionary committee ought to be formed, somehow, so as to express this peoplehood efficiently.⁶²

Scholars have argued that in the absence of creating meaningful material change in the real world, protesters in developed states have instead made attempts at revolutionizing their state-of-mind first.⁶³ Whether it would be watching online footage of protests in what some would call “riot-porn” or educating themselves on an individual basis, when the time came for OWS there was already an intellectually seasoned collective of protesters ready to embark on the occupation.

When arguing about the nature of Tahrir Square, both its offline and online characteristics, one may refer to many definitions borrowed from scholars researching similar spaces: a “space of anarchy,” a “temporary autonomous zone,” or a “zone of offensive opacity.”⁶⁴ However, the prevailing argument is that Egyptians managed to reform their sense of solidarity by reclaiming an identity that was already theirs, in the streets or online. The vernacular spaces were also a chance for the collective to express shared values and practices that distinguish them from those who would want to rule them. These socially cementing practices are referred to by Ayman El-Desouky as *amāra*, an Egyptian practice of performing collective memory in everyday life.⁶⁵ This links to Bamyeh’s argument of reusable concepts and language that were new to the situation at hand, but already present in the collective imagination. It did not matter if they were purely sharing Tweets, or were organizing offline cinemas in the occupied squares – they were still as one. In this way, we see a double meaning for protestors: both resistance to the state, and a re-found sense of community.

Protesters moved by economic ideals congregated in the sites of occupation: either Wall Street, or Tahrir Square. There, they found themselves in a new world. It is here that their action changed, while the meaning stayed constant. Musa, a protester from the slums of Cairo, explains this sudden realization of being part of something bigger: “We chanted about economics, not politics. If you

⁶² Mohammed A. Bamyeh, ‘Anarchist Method, Liberal Intention, Authoritarian Lesson: The Arab Spring between Three Enlightenments’, *Constellations* 20, no. 2 (June 2013): 192.

⁶³ Maple John Razsa, ‘Beyond “Riot Porn”: Protest Video and the Production of Unruly Subjects’, *Ethnos* 79, no. 4 (8 August 2014): 496–524, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2013.778309>.

⁶⁴ See Mohammed A. Bamyeh, *Anarchy as Order: The History and Future of Civic Humanity* (Lanham, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010); Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, accessed 8 March 2021, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/hakim-bey-t-a-z-the-temporary-autonomous-zone-ontological-anarchy-poetic-terrorism>; Snowden, *The People*, 33.

⁶⁵ Ayman Ahmed El-Desouky, *The Intellectual and the People in Egyptian Literature and Culture: Amāra and the 2011 Revolution*, Palgrave Pivot (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 12.

are shouting ‘Down with Mubarak!’ in the slums, nobody cares. They care about food and shelter. So we chanted: ‘How expensive is bread; how expensive is sugar; why do we have to sell our furniture?’ And people joined in. We had no idea it was going to be a revolution, though. I thought it would be just a demonstration.”⁶⁶

The aforementioned theories will be the basis for the creation of the vernacular space. But these spaces were not empty, they were shaped and created by demonstrators acting as a collective. This is where further elaboration on “the typical actor” is needed. This will prove slightly problematic, as the global image of the movements on 2011 was not of a lone protester or organizer, but of masses of people occupying space. As such, the typical actor in this sense will most likely not apply to every person present in the protests. Even so, there are common threads in the demands of these movements, most of which were deliberated and thought of during the general assemblies, working groups, or social media that these occupations have developed. The decision to occupy space, to organize democratically, and to oppose the state ended up representing the movement, even if fringe groups within the movement itself disagreed with these actions. Likewise, the typical actors will end up representing the movement, or at least the ideal to which all other actors aspire to. This ideal can be seen through the assumptions discussed below: acting rationally, having full knowledge of one’s actions, being fully aware of one’s actions, and committing no mistakes.

Four key assumptions about the typical actor

Although subjectivities are certainly important, it is impossible to separate the individual from the crowd, in terms of the individual’s behavior. Collective action shapes the meaning and values of the actors involved, and it will be the starting point of the assumptions presented here. This is even more the case since some participants of these movements had previous experience in previous protests and uprisings, especially in the case of Egypt. As such, individual newcomers were greeted with a somewhat established sense of unity, in which they contributed their own subjectivity, bodily presence, creativity, and more. However, there were also cases where this presumed unity fell apart when new actors were introduced. The theoretical basis of the four assumptions will be juxtaposed with the actual case studies when the comparison is made. It is important to remember that Weber intended the ideal type to be mainly *heuristic* in nature and that the main concept he

⁶⁶ Paul Mason, *Why It’s Still Kicking off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, Rev. and updated 2nd ed (London ; New York: Verso, 2013), 17.

was urging us to look at its *meaning*. It is my expectation that the inevitable discrepancies between the theory and the empirical knowledge collected will provide valuable information into the meaning of both the protests and the protesters.

The typical actor acts in a rational manner

A common dismissal of protests that turn violent is that the actors within them are “irrational.” If only they were more civil and participated in a discussion with the powers that be, then all the fuss about revolting could be avoided. According to Fiorenzo Conte, determining that something is “irrational” is a conscious strategy used to legitimize a show of force.⁶⁷ This sort of discourse is common within media outlets that support the current regime, and it glances over the previous attempts at “rational” discussion that protesters had, before they even became protesters.⁶⁸ When Martin Luther King argued that “riots are the voice of the unheard,” he precisely meant that supporters of the status-quo did not *want* to hear those voices, regardless of their rationality. But what does it mean to be rational?

The dichotomy between rational and irrational is complex. Weber himself distinguished between several types of rationality, which ranked from goal-rational action to value rational, affectual action, and traditional conduct, with the first being the “most” rational and the latter the least.⁶⁹ For Weber, goal rational actions are the basis of modernity, as the others lean too heavily on tradition, values, and emotions. They run the risk of irrational consequences: “In these terms, actions of occupy movements are both value-rational and instrumentally rational: ‘Value-rational action is “determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently from its prospects of success”’.”⁷⁰

Weber’s rational types are clearly formulated within individual action, but others such as Jürgen Habermas have challenged these by developing a kind of social rationality. Habermas wrote about four different types of rationality: goal rationality, normative rationality, expressive rationality and communicative rationality. Goal rationality refers to Weber’s definition from before.

⁶⁷ Fiorenzo Conte, ‘Making (Non-) Sense of the Enemy: The Lari Massacre and the Palestinian Resistance’, *Do No Harm* (blog), 11 September 2011, <https://badcure.wordpress.com/2011/09/11/making-non-sense-of-the-enemy-the-lari-massacre-and-the-palestinian-resistance/>.

⁶⁸ Conte, ‘Making (Non-) Sense of the Enemy.’

⁶⁹ Stephen Kalberg, ‘Max Weber’s Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History’, *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 5 (1980): 1145–79.

⁷⁰ Werbner, Webb, and Spellman-Poots, *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 391.

Communicative rationality is a way of describing how human beings have a fundamental orientation towards understanding each other, even during times of distress. Expressive rationality is when people communicate their feelings and experiences. Finally, the concept of normative rationality is when through their actions, people hold on to the values and rule of behavior within their communities.⁷¹ Rationality for Habermas is then deeply connected to the world individuals live in, and it seems a better fit for Weber's ideal types than even Weber's own concepts of rationality.

Often times the concept of "rationality" is related to Enlightenment thought, which equates into a "Western" use of reason. This naturally depicts others, or non-Westerners, as irrational. A relevant example of this trend is the depiction of the "Arab Street" in Western academia and media, born out of both a general anxiety about the region and condescension about people who lived there. In this view, the "irrational Arab street," described in terms of "mobs, riots, and revolts" would never rise beyond its condition – not without US intervention.⁷² There are also scholars who argued that rationality plays a role in resistance according to the regime that is being resisted.⁷³

Some scholars argue that viewing emotions and rationality as polar opposites is inaccurate. For example, Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Christian Smith argue that outrage is a "logical reaction to the torture, disappearances, and assassinations of innocent civilians and to the lies disseminated by a government to cover its role as an accomplice to these atrocities."⁷⁴ Majken Jul Sørensen follows Nepstad's and Smith's line of argumentation, stating that while emotions such as anger are useful to kickstart activism, other emotions such as longing for a utopian society can be a useful supplement as well.⁷⁵ Nepstad's and Smith's argument can also be seen through the lens of legitimacy, for protesters argue that it is legitimate to demand change in the face of the acts of the state that they witness every day, be it violent oppression or economic injustice.

⁷¹ Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*, 175.

⁷² See Robert Bartley, 'Resolution, Not Compromise, Builds Coalition', *Wall Street Journal*, November 12, 2001; Robert Satloff, 'The Arab 'Street' Poses No Real Threat to US', *Newsday*, September 27, 2002.

⁷³ Mona Lilja, Mikael Baaz, and Stellan Vinthagen, 'Exploring "Irrational Resistance"', *Journal of Political Power* 6, no. 2 (1 August 2013): 202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2013.809212>.

⁷⁴ Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Christian Smith, "The Social Structure of Moral Outrage in Recruitment to the U.S. Central America Peace Movement", in *Passionate Politics : Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁷⁵ Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*, 188.

Another scholar who deals with rationality is Michel Foucault. He links his definition of rationality to his well-known concept of power.⁷⁶ According to his theory, what we see as rational and irrational is determined by *who* constructs these terms in the first place, and who controls the discourse about them. Power itself is not a monolith, as Foucault sees several dimensions of it: disciplinary power (training the actions of bodies, both positively and negatively), biopower (managing populations on a large scale), and sovereign power (legislative, prohibitive, and censoring).⁷⁷ In this vein, one can see how relation to power can shape how individuals perceive themselves and others as rational or irrational.

It is clear that there is not one definition of rationality. There is also no consensus whether resistance is rational or irrational. However, it is important to remember that individuals usually act within their own logic, which while influenced by dominant discourses of power, it is still born out of their individual minds. Following Habermas' definition of social rationality, such a concept needs to be linked with the dominant discourses, patterns, and practices of a society. In other words, rationality needs a link with power. This made sense for the protesters as well, for claiming the mantle of "the 99%" or the "Egyptian people" meant that they became the legitimate source of power, not the state. Following Lilja et al., "a rational resistance should be able to negotiate repressing relations of power that mark and position the individual within a given social context."⁷⁸ The rational actor within the ideal type is then the individual that, aware of his context, is capable of negotiating power. If the individual is unable to do so, then he engages in irrational action, or failed resistance. The link between the two is a useful heuristic device that will be explored when comparing the ideal type with the case studies.

The typical actor has full knowledge of what she is doing

Knowledge and rationality are often linked when discussing whether a subject is acting rationally or irrationally. In the previous discussion about the rationality of subjects, I've argued following Foucault's line that discourses of power and rationality are intertwined, especially in resistance movements. In the same vein, power and knowledge flow from one another. From manufacturing consent to cults of personality, ruling regimes disseminate forms of propaganda to the public that

⁷⁶ J.P Sharp, P. Routledge, C. Philo, and R. Paddison, *Entanglements of power: geographies of domination/resistance* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1–42.

⁷⁷ Lilja, Baaz, and Vinthagen, 'Exploring "Irrational Resistance"', 207.

⁷⁸ Lilja, Baaz, and Vinthagen, 'Exploring "Irrational Resistance"', 212.

pacify them into accepting their forms of life. For Foucault this is clear from the Middle Ages: *Let us not pay any attention to the fool.*⁷⁹ He labels the idiot's knowledge as 'subjugated knowledge', as it represents low-status or even directly disqualified knowledge. Foucault's way of conceptualizing reason then relies on an understanding of minds that are dominated by discourse while persuaded by hegemonic arguments. Foucault, in this sense, deviates from rational choice theory.⁸⁰

However, there is a tendency to examine propaganda as something uncritically received by the subjects of power. Marxists argue that state ideology is a form of "false consciousness" that is (subtly) forced on people to argue for their exploitation.⁸¹ Gramscian interpretations point towards a hegemonic argument of power, making subjects believe that their way of life is "common sense," and that there is no justifiable way to oppose the "normal" workings of the state.⁸² Following this line, scholars have argued that while state ideology prefers that subjects accept it as such, they do not necessarily do so, but constantly negotiate and re-interpret it.⁸³ This provides a valuable link with the negotiating rational typical actor described above. If the rational actor is capable of negotiating power, then he is also able of negotiating knowledge and her relation to it. This capacity of recognizing state propaganda and resisting it is key to this particular assumption about the typical actor.

An element that plays an important role here is pretense. Scholars have argued that in some instances, subjects recognize that state ideology is a false construction aimed at control, but they still behave as though they accept it to be true.⁸⁴ According to some more pessimistic readings, if

⁷⁹ Lilja, Baaz, and Vinthagen, 'Exploring "Irrational Resistance"', 206.

⁸⁰ Lilja, Baaz, and Vinthagen, 'Exploring "Irrational Resistance"', 206.

⁸¹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989); Benjamin Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991); Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 2012), 100–41.

⁸² Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man – Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1980); Antonio Gramsci, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988); Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol.1: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991); Terry Eagleton, 'Ideology and its vicissitudes in western Marxism', in Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 179–226.

⁸³ Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in Stuart Hall et al, eds., *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Routledge, 1980), 107–16; James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990) James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (London: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁸⁴ Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State – Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

something does not fundamentally change in the contexts of pretense, subjects can end up actually believing state propaganda. For example, Žižek states that while state subjects may be aware of propaganda, they still behave as if they believed it to be true.⁸⁵ Žižek argues following Lacan that they hold on to this out of their fear of the unknown (‘what would we do without the state?’). Žižek follows by stating that eventually, the subjects start to truly believe in the propaganda: “in the process of pretending, one ultimately (consciously but irrationally) ends up actually believing in the ideology.”⁸⁶ Others like Yael Navaro-Yashin however argue that this does not necessarily happen, as pretending to believe in state ideology is just a resistance mechanism “in order to survive within the limits of the constraints upon them.”⁸⁷ She argues that this does sometimes make subjects accomplices of the state, but does not automatically result in actual belief.⁸⁸ A great example of this is irony. Irony requires an intimate knowledge of dominant discourses—an intimacy that can also be considered complicity, which can become uncomfortable to some activists.⁸⁹

As such, the typical actor has full knowledge of what she is doing. In other words, she has full knowledge of the knowledge that is being disseminated to her, and is able of negotiating it in the forms of collective action and resistance. This will have interesting and complex implications when discussing the actions that people took against state propaganda in both occupation movements: from tearing down Mubarak posters to parading dressed up as caricatures of Wall Street executives. Of course, this assumption has its limitations. Bias, for example, plays a key role. While the subject is critical of state ideology and can negotiate it, ideology permeates the occupy movements as well. As such, there is a distinct possibility that the critical eye turned towards the state does not necessarily look towards the camp. However, there is also another form of knowledge that appears in this space: the knowledge that one belongs to a movement bound by a positive collective ethos, especially in the face of a regime that has always sought to morally denigrate all political opposition.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1995), 74–5.

⁸⁶ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 29; Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 159.

⁸⁷ Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 162.

⁸⁸ Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 162.

⁸⁹ Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*, 163.

⁹⁰ Jeannie Lynn Sowers and Christopher J. Toensing, eds., *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt* (London, New York: Verso, 2012), 66.

The typical actor is fully aware of what she is doing

This assumption can be explored in a close link with the previous two. If the actor is acting rationally and has full knowledge of what she is doing, then she is fully aware that she is negotiating power. Of course, as with the other two assumptions, this one will be disproven by looking at several elements that are outside rationality but still operate in the framework of social action: habits, traditions, and networks. As such, it could very well be that the habits of an actor are subverting power without her knowledge. Participation in the occupations, for instance, is a form of negotiating and resisting power, but it would be foolish to argue that *all* participants were aware of the implication of them being there. As always, this is a useful heuristic device.

The typical actor makes no mistakes

The nature of mistakes has not been studied much in the histories of resistance movements, and perhaps for a reason. Social action in the face of a repressive state can be tricky to maneuver in terms of mistakes, as the topic is quite sensitive – is it a mistake that leads to a protester getting killed or beaten up by the police? If yes, then how do we explore this without victim-blaming? In the face of collective action, can the mistake of an individual shape the course of the entire movement, or do mistakes themselves need to be common to have an impact?

Of course, the nature of mistakes is highly subjective, and can be explored through listening to the voices on the ground. It is however doubtful that these voices constitute empirical data in themselves, for one man's mistake is another's opportunity. Take for example a case study from OWS from something as mundane as washing clothes in the camp.⁹¹ Several actors complained that the process is too complicated, and while they were bickering a couple of others took matters into their own hands and solved the issue themselves, albeit at a more expensive price, which led to some confrontation.⁹² Where is the mistake here? The fact that basic procedures were not streamlined, or the lack of strong leadership, or the settling on a more expensive option without consideration?

While this is a small example in the grand scheme of the occupation, it is not irrelevant, for it reveals characteristics that permeated the movement and the actors involved. A focus on mistakes can reveal previously hidden traits of a movement. As such, the final assumption about the typical

⁹¹ Keith Gessen, 'Laundry Day', in *Occupy!*.

⁹² Gessen, 'Laundry Day,' in *Occupy!*.

actor will be that she makes no mistakes. Therefore, when she inevitably does, it will provide us with insight into what led to it, what the consequences were, and how the collective dealt with them. Moreover, protesters themselves argued about what constituted as mistakes, which I believe is the more ethical way of approaching this assumption.⁹³

I have then built our set of assumptions about the typical actor operating within the ideal type. She is a rational individual with the capacity to negotiate state power, she has full knowledge of the situation she is, she is fully aware of her actions and participation within the collective, and she is capable of doing all of this without making any mistakes. What we have then is a concoction of Weber's individualism, Habermas' collective action, and Foucault's power dynamics, all coming together in actions that individuals take in order to better their relationship to each other and the spaces they live in, all while consciously resisting state power and ideology.

Causal Adequacy & Adequacy on the Level of Meaning

The final step in creating the ideal type before moving on to the actual comparison is to check that causal adequacy is involved. In other words, we need to see if the action involved triggered the sought effect. For this, we need an examination of what the occupations wanted. If the social action is not powerful enough to make the actor realize her intentions, then the ideal type is not correct and needs to be changed or replaced.⁹⁴ So what did the occupiers actually want, and did they achieve it? As the answer for this question differs between the occupations, I will not go into much detail here since it will be more relevant to explore the differences in the comparison.

For the Egyptian Revolution and its occupation of Tahrir Square the answer is fairly simple. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now say that the movement actually failed in a concrete sense: not only did the protest movements continue after Mubarak's resignation and the election of Mohammed Morsi on the 30th of June 2012, but an army coup by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi removed any pretense of democratization in Egypt. However, the protesters in 2011 did not know this was coming. The next morning after Mubarak's resignation on February 11th 2011, Egyptians flooded Tahrir Square to clean up the occupation.⁹⁵ This can be seen as an attempt to have a clean slate – now that the tyrant has been removed, the occupation is not needed any more. Former

⁹³ Even though some protesters were not as nice as I am being here with their judgements. Examples will include “the party of the couch” in Egypt and the insistence of some in Zuccotti Park that the homeless do not belong there.

⁹⁴ Swedberg, ‘How to Use Max Weber's Ideal Type in Sociological Analysis’, 9.

⁹⁵ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 60.

protesters packed up the tents, dismantled the barricades, repainted the pavement, and removed graffiti.⁹⁶ However, the way the occupation was quickly removed from the visual imagery of Tahrir Square was also a sign of what to come. The collective ethos was similarly dismantled, and the post-Tahrir developments showed that without a clear tyrant “other,” religious, ethnic, gender, and political lines still divided the country. Nevertheless, the Egyptians did remove Mubarak and did have elections afterwards, and at the time they believed they had won. In this sense, there is causal adequacy between their actions and their sought effect.

For Occupy Wall Street it is a bit more complicated. Criticism of the movement is readily available on the Internet, even today. The most pervading ones refer to the fact that the movement did not have any leadership, and did not have “clear demands.” A comparison can be drawn between Occupy and the protesters in the Sixties, who demanded rights to vote in the Deep South or no military service in Vietnam, but were unable to spread their message that underneath these problems were not specific policies, but a broader understanding that the common folk were losing control of their lives.⁹⁷ As Slavoj Žižek commented, the Occupiers lacked a specific language that could express their demands to build an alternative space to capitalism, since like that space, the language does not exist.⁹⁸ However, Occupy organizers have themselves stated that they have no putatively answerable demands. The original Adbusters campaign was clear: “What is our one demand? #OccupyWallStreet.” This does not mean that the movement did not have goals, or did not achieve them. Rather than assuming that the shape of the world they want to see is already present somewhere and just needs emulation, the movement is a continuous practice in the present.⁹⁹ This in itself is not new, especially in the US, with antecedents provided by Black Panther Party’s citizens’ patrols and free breakfast programs, the Women’s Liberation Movement’s autonomous feminist health clinics and safe houses, and other similar projects in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰⁰ The camp was dismantled on the 15th of November, 2011, so in that sense Occupy Wall Street was also a failure. However, the movement revitalized activist activity even after the police dismantled the camp on November 15th, 2011. Occupy Sandy was a direct continuation of Occupy Wall Street which proved so effective in its relief efforts that even the

⁹⁶ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 60.

⁹⁷ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 11.

⁹⁸ Žižek, ‘Don’t Fall in Love With Yourself’.

⁹⁹ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 24.

NYPD followed their lead.¹⁰¹ Movements such as Rolling Jubilee were created in order to crowdfund debt abolition.¹⁰² And the US experienced the world-wide conversation change from austerity to inequality, taking one step further into a better future. In these terms, which are the activists' own, Occupy succeeded. As such, causal adequacy is present here as well.

However, we should not look at these movements through the lens of their perceived policy demands, or the change that they brought to their respective governments. The true adequacy can only be seen if looking at what the protesters actually wanted, which in both cases was experimenting in a form of direct democracy that takes care of people's needs. Both movements demanded system change by building something together, and by reforming a sense of collective identity. The names of some of the first OWS Working Groups signal this, as the movement was first concerned with filling the gaps in people's lives: *Comfort; The People's Kitchen; Town Planning; The People's Library; Sustainability; Sanitation*.¹⁰³ In Tahrir Square, protesters officiated weddings, and even gave birth to children.¹⁰⁴ These events were *occupations* and not *demonstrations* because they were a manifestation of a long-term resolve to enact radical change. Therefore, in terms of success or failure, both OWS and Tahrir Square succeeded. Not in terms of changing policy or dismantling neoliberal capitalism or an authoritarian state, but in the creation of an albeit short-lived but important shared reality.

Conclusion

As such, the ideal type of the *vernacular space* will be used in the following chapters to facilitate a comparison. As argued before, the vernacular space contains elements of creativity and humor, nonviolent resistance, and critical utopia. Its actors operate rationally, with knowledge of what they are doing and deep awareness of their histories and contexts. They make no mistakes, as far as it is humanly possible. Moreover, the behavior and the meaning of the actors were adequate, as were was the social action and the intended effect. Obviously, the occupations of Zuccotti Park and Tahrir Square will not perfectly fit into this artificially created mold. However, as I've also argued before, that is the point. The following chapters will look at the occupations through the

¹⁰¹ Sam Seder, 'Occupy Wall Street Was a Successful Activism Startup Incubator', *The Majority Report w/ Sam Seder* 2013, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZcnoY3O8JI&list=UU-3jIAInQmbbVMV6gR7K8aQ>.

¹⁰² The initiative of Rolling Jubilee can be accessed at <https://rollingjubilee.org/>.

¹⁰³ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 26.

¹⁰⁴ Mitchell, 'Image, Space, Revolution', 14.

lens of vernacular spaces, exploring new insights that would not have been possible in a simple comparison between the two movements. Similarities to the ideal type will emerge, and so will differences. In the end, these will be compared with the aim of seeing if we can state that these two occupation movements were part of the same family of protests, and what that means for both scholars and activists alike.

Chapter Two: “The People” of Tahrir Square

Western observers were caught by surprise when the Egyptians followed suit after the Tunisians ignited what would be called the *Arab Spring*. Their reasoning was that Egypt under President Hosni Mubarak was not a typical authoritarian state, but exemplified some characteristics present in liberal regimes. The theatre of democratic politics was allowed to continue, albeit in a weakened state. As such, political parties, associations, elections, and even some forms of protest were allowed, as long as they didn't go too far.¹⁰⁵ In a way, they couldn't go far anyways – the media was relatively free, so it could give vent to popular frustrations, while dissent was carefully managed, not crushed.¹⁰⁶ In this sense, past protesters found it hard to conceptualize an “other” who resisted their demands. For if the media seemed to understand them, and the state acted as if it just needed some time to rectify mistakes, what was there to protest about? While Egyptians knew, outside observers did not. After all, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared in January 25, 2011 that “the Egyptian government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people”.¹⁰⁷

Such observers were caught completely off-guard when this seemingly smart authoritarian regime was toppled in 18 days. Multiple explanations emerged for this, the most common to this day being the wave of young people on social media, and the outside pressure generated by the revolution in Tunisia. CNN correspondent Ben Wedeman called it a “very techie revolution.”¹⁰⁸ The New York Times came to the conclusion that regular Egyptian citizens were studying the works of American nonviolence intellectual Gene Sharp, and were applying his ideas on the ground.¹⁰⁹ Some outlets even managed to mention the material conditions to which working class Egyptians were exposed, citing that the real reason for the revolution was bread prices.¹¹⁰ Scholars argue that the reason for the sudden collapse of Mubarak's regime is simply the change of balance of power between the

¹⁰⁵ Asaad Alsaleh, ‘Introduction’, in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, Personal Stories from the Arab Revolutions (Columbia University Press, 2015), 51–54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/al-s16318.14>.

¹⁰⁶ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 30.

¹⁰⁷ Reuters Staff, ‘US Urges Restraint in Egypt, Says Government Stable’, *Reuters*, 25 January 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-egypt-protest-clinton-20110125-idAFJ0E7000KF20110125>.

¹⁰⁸ Eliot Spitzer, Kathleen Parker, and Ben Wedeman, ‘CNN January 26, 2011 Transcript’, CNN Transcripts, 26 January 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/110126/ps.01.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, ‘Shy U.S. Intellectual Created Playbook Used in a Revolution’, *The New York Times*, 17 February 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html>.

¹¹⁰ Hamida Ghafour, ‘Beyond Tahrir Square, a Turning Point for Egypt Awaits’, *The Globe and Mail*, 9 February 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/beyond-tahrir-square-a-turning-point-for-egypt-awaits/article565753/>.

ruled and the ruling. Mona El-Ghobashy states that during the most brutal days of fighting between January 25th-28th, the familiar scene of street protesters battling the police suddenly turned into a revolutionary situation.¹¹¹ The truth is that the Egyptian state faced an adversary well-versed in street politics, and its coercive apparatus started to deteriorate rapidly.

The notion that the Egyptians were already well-organized and motivated to politicize their demands on the streets clashes with the general understanding of the “Arab Street.” As argued in the previous chapter, the Arab Street is a false understanding of politics in the region as unenlightened.¹¹² According to some political experts and scholars, the masses in Arab countries were unable to mobilize for change since they were by nature lethargic. This of course extended to characterizations of the Egyptians as well. According to a memo leaked by WikiLeaks, a US diplomat who spoke frequently to political scientist ‘Ali al-Din Hilal stated that “widespread, politically motivated unrest was unlikely because it was not part of the ‘Egyptian mentality.’”¹¹³ Professor of psychology Muhammad al-Mahdi argued that “there could be a poor people’s revolt if the state fails to provide food. But we must bear in mind that Egyptians rarely explode and then only in specific cases, among them threats to their daily bread or national dignity.”¹¹⁴

The reality is that Egyptians have been practicing street politics for a decade before the eruption of the Revolution in 2011. This happened both on a national and local level. In January 2001, a local newspaper covered 49 protests alone.¹¹⁵ One of them involved workers at the new Health Insurance hospital in Suez which held a sit-in to protest the halt of their entitlement pay. State Security officers and local officials intervened, prevailing upon the authorities to reinstate the pay and fire the hospital director.¹¹⁶ By 2008, there were hundreds of such protests every year, big and small. Another example is from the slum of Moqattam in Cairo. Moqattam is home to about 65000 *zabbaleen*, or “garbage people.”¹¹⁷ Up until 2003, the *zabbaleen* had run Cairo’s trash collection system. However, as part of Hosni Mubarak’s son and heir Gamal’s modernization plan, three

¹¹¹ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 33.

¹¹² See Chapter One.

¹¹³ Sal Gentile, ‘Egyptians March in Support of Occupy Wall Street. Are There Parallels with the Arab Spring?’, *Need to Know / PBS*, 28 October 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/the-daily-need/egyptians-march-in-support-of-occupy-wall-street-are-there-parallels-with-the-arab-spring/12147/>.

¹¹⁴ ‘Interview with Muhammad al-Mahdi, professor of psychology at al Azhar University’, *Al-Shurouq*, October 15, 2010.

¹¹⁵ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 35.

¹¹⁶ Al-Ahali, January 3, 2001.

¹¹⁷ Mason, *Why It’s Still Kicking off*, 10.

sanitation companies were given cleaning contracts for Cairo. According to Ezzat Guindi, who was born and raised in the slum: ‘The old system worked. The recycling process was one of the most efficient in the world, people could live. There was no sub-dollar-a-day poverty among the *zabbaleen* until the multinationals came. Now, about 30 per cent are destitute; and it’s those who’ve been displaced and made redundant by the sanitation companies who are the poorest.’¹¹⁸ Following more measures against the *zabbaleen*, by 2011 all they needed was a push to fully revolt against the regime.

According to Mona El-Ghobashy, if one classifies Egypt’s protests by the type of mobilizing structure that brings people out into the street rather than the content of their claims, three sectors are salient, each with its own repertoire of tactics: the workplace protest, the neighborhood protest, and the associational protest.¹¹⁹ Examples of the former include the aforementioned strike at the new Health Insurance hospital in Suez, while the second has such case studies like the slum of Moqattam. The third sector includes professional associations such as lawyers’ and doctors’ syndicates; social movements such as the pro-Palestine solidarity campaigns, the anti Mubarak Kifaya movement and the April 6 youth group, and of course the youth wings of political parties such as Ayman Nour’s liberal Ghad, the Muslim Brothers, the liberal Wafd, the Nasserist Karama, and the Islamist Wasat.¹²⁰ The crux of the matter is that by the 25th of January 2011, all three of these mobilizing structures had some experience with police brutality, from university students to garbage collectors. However, up until the end of 2010 there had been no event that effectively brought these groups together on a national level.

Two things changed that year. The first was that in June 2010, a young Alexandrian by the name of Khalid Sa‘id was taken out of an Internet café by plainclothes police officers and beaten to death in broad daylight. This led to the creation of the now famous Facebook group “We are all Khalid Sa‘id” which effectively led to mass mobilization in public squares. However, the central role that this Facebook page played in the protests would deeply affect the actions of the protesters, which will be examined later. The second event that brought the three mobilizing structures together were the national legislative elections in November-December 2010, during which Mubarak’s sponsored party, the National Democratic Party, allegedly won 97% of the vote. This naturally

¹¹⁸ Mason, *Why It’s Still Kicking Off*, 13.

¹¹⁹ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 32.

¹²⁰ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 36.

enraged the more politically conscious Egyptians, leading to street fighting on December 12th, close enough to the events of January to still be fresh memories for those on the ground.

These events, coupled with the Tunisian people's toppling of Ben Ali, and the upcoming celebrations of Police Day on January 25th provided an extra boost for an already electrified population. January 25th would be the "day of rage" for Egyptians all over the country, with multiple groups confirming their participation. By evening, thousands of demonstrators were congregating in the squares of Egypt's main cities, particularly in Tahrir. As poet and El-Baradei campaign leader 'Abd al-Rahman Yusuf put it, 'It was one of the most profound moments of my life. The sight of the square filled with tens of thousands heralded the long-awaited dawn. As we entered the square, the crowds installed there cheered the coming of a new battalion, greeting us with joy. I wept.'¹²¹ By night, protesters stayed in Tahrir, building campfires, raising up tents, and bringing food and blankets. But at midnight they were expelled, through the tremendous force of 200 vehicles, 50 buses, 10000 riot police, and 3000 special forces.¹²² Footage from that night shows protesters holding up bloodied hands at the cameras, shouting 'They shot at us! Who are we, the enemy?'¹²³ The situation was similar in other cities in Egypt, such as Suez, Alexandria, Tanta, Port Said, and North Sinai. The next day however, protesters continued, despite heavy police resistance. It seemed like the Egyptian people had found their other after all.

It would be fitting to first analyze the actors that were involved in the occupation of spaces such as Tahrir Square. My aim for this part is to see to what extent the assumptions about the typical actor made in the previous chapter apply to the protesters from Tahrir Square. Due to the fact that this was a movement of millions, a collective approach will be taken. This is in the spirit of the Egyptian Revolution itself, when for a brief moment differences of ethnicities, religions, and gender were forgotten and a new "people" emerged. My assumption is that rational subjects, operating in large collectives and capable of negotiating power, can be identified in Tahrir. This will have two consequences, essential both to the field and the continuation of this thesis. First, the myths about the Arab Street and the distasteful peculiarities that make Egyptians (and Arabs in general) somehow different from other working class individuals will be dispelled. Second,

¹²¹ Cited in Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 31.

¹²² Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 44.

¹²³ Rawya Rageh, 'Egypt's 'unprecedented' Protests', *Al Jazeera English*, 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g58Sl_4GN0E.

having identified our rational subjects, we can move on to the creation of vernacular spaces, or in other words to their social action. At the end, we will be left with several characteristics that either strongly confirm Tahrir's nature as an ideal type, or prove the movement's uniqueness that distinguishes it from it.

The Egyptian typical actor acting within Tahrir Square managed to operate within a vernacular space. This is best exemplified through the redefinition of the term "the people." The previous chapter briefly touched upon the notion of a new meaning of the term forming in the beginning of the Egyptian Revolution. Mohammed Bamyeh argues that during revolutions, 'concepts that had been previously unimaginable or abstract' become concrete.¹²⁴ Egyptians realized that the word "the people" corresponded to something real, and was not merely an antiquated term used by manipulative rhetoric of nationalist, socialist, or liberal essentializing attitudes. The adoption of this new definition can be seen through the circulation of the phrase *al-sha'b yurid* ("the people want") from Tunisia to the Gulf States during the Arab Spring. Interestingly, the phrase is in formal Arabic, a language that some say has "no native speakers."¹²⁵ However, it was adopted by the colloquial Egyptian Arabic protesters anyways. Commenting on the full slogan, *al-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam* (the people demand the downfall of the regime), Samia Mehrez writes that even though the slogan was easily picked by revolutionaries, it requires proper contextualization in order to be explained: the "people," the "demands," and the "regime" change horizontally over time, as relations to and of power change.¹²⁶

Following Mehrez, Snowdon argues that the relationship that people have with power is not to be seen only in words and utterances, but in bodies as well.¹²⁷ Snowdon argues that the physical occupation of spaces by insurgent bodies and the physical occupation of discourse by insurgent utterances need to be conceptualized together, as each needs one another to be effective and affective.¹²⁸ As such, it is in this triangularity of space, body, and language that "the people" with a new meaning emerges. It is also in this space that the rational, ideal actor *performs*. The word performance is not incidental. Mehrez argues "that people in the Arab world have reclaimed the

¹²⁴ Bamyeh, 'Anarchist Method, Liberal Intention, Authoritarian Lesson'.

¹²⁵ Niloofar Haeri, 'Arabs Need to Find Their Tongue', *the Guardian*, June 14 2003, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/comment/story/0,3604,977260,00.html>.

¹²⁶ Samia Mehrez, 'Translating Revolution: An Open Text', in Samia Mehrez, ed., *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2012), 13.

¹²⁷ Snowdon, *The People Are Not An Image*, 58.

¹²⁸ Snowdon, *The People Are Not An Image*, 58.

right to be together as empowered bodies in public space exercising their right to linguistic, symbolic, and *performative* freedom despite the enormous price in human life that continues to be paid.”¹²⁹ Snowden argues that the field from which the people are born is “above all a field of performance.”¹³⁰ And if one looks at videos from the first day of the protests, she gets a sense of the people being performed, or acted, into existence. As Elliott Colla described it, “it was the collective act of stating that the people wanted something that created the sense there was a social actor by that name.”¹³¹ Arguably this is not something that was created out of thin air, but more of a remembering of a shared identity forgotten long ago, before collective identities became individualized and isolated under a repressive regime.

Let us take an example from what Snowden calls the “vernacular anarchiv,” the collection of videos from the streets of the Arab world during the Revolutions.¹³² These videos, unlike their mainstream counterparts, do not provide a disembodied aerial gaze or the faces of a select group of activists, but are taken amongst a crowd of likeminded individuals. Analyzing such videos is highly important for a clear view of the protests, away from the counter-revolutionary rehabilitation of “appropriate” images of protest, as shown in viral clips or news channels.¹³³ One such video is from Tunis, Tunisia, taken on the 14th of January 2011.¹³⁴ While it may seem awkward to talk about Tunisia in our case study of Tahrir Square, one must remember that the re-appropriation of “the people” echoed across the Arab world during the Revolutions, and the first to acknowledge this were the Tunisians. In the video, we mainly hear a man addressing a crowd that is not there, celebrating the victory of Tunisia’s people over Ben Ali. Although speaking to seemingly no one, the man includes and excludes himself during his speech, shouting “We won our freedom ourselves!” and “The Tunisian people made their own freedom!” The streets surrounding him remain empty, the only other voices being of the women recording him, who occasionally remark on how brave this man is.

¹²⁹ Mehrez, ‘Translating Revolution’, 14, emphasis my own.

¹³⁰ Snowden, *The People Are Not an Image*, 58.

¹³¹ Elliott Colla, ‘The People Want’, *Middle East Report* 263, 2012, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://merip.org/2012/05/the-people-want/>.

¹³² Snowden, *The People Are Not an Image*.

¹³³ Mark R. Westmoreland, ‘Street Scenes: The Politics of Revolutionary Video in Egypt’, *Visual Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (26 May 2016): 244, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2016.1154420>.

¹³⁴ rideaudur, ‘Joie d'un Tunisien - Avenue Habib Bourguiba - soir 14 janvier – Tunisie,’ 18 January 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eSc5H987QQ>

The events of this video are happening at multiple spaces and times that are nevertheless connected. The first is the street itself, where the man is reciting his praise for the Tunisian people. The second is the apartment from where the video is filmed by the women above, who can observe what is happening without being noticed. The third is the video itself, made by one of the women, who cheekily ends it by stating “I’m not filming! I’m just doing a bit of video...” This hints at the fact that the video will be later posted to the Internet, linking these spaces to countless other ones across the world. It also hints at a form of defiance in the face of adversity, coming in this case from an elder woman behind the camera. The fact of the matter is that what links these spaces is the people in them, or at least the formation of a new people. The man in the streets was not merely addressing no one in his speech, he was conjuring the very people he was speaking to. The women filming seem to acknowledge this, for they not only post the video online, but they also join with the man’s chanting, yelling “Tunisia belongs to us!” This “us” came to be known as the “people,” seen in the slogan that spread across the Arab world: *al-sha‘b yurid isqat al-nizam*, “the people demand the downfall of the regime.”

As such, I argue that the formation of “the people” was by no means incidental, but a rational attempt made by individuals negotiating power. This confirms that the typical actor of the ideal type of vernacular spaces did operate within the Arab Spring. Scholars like Bamyeh, Mehrez, Snowdon, and Colla argue that Egyptians also quickly adopted the slogan, which came with the same kind of rationale: mobilizing as a collective, reforming their identity and returning the public space to the commons.¹³⁵ Arguably, Egyptians were successful as revolutionary subjects in the sense of achieving some of their goals, like removing an authoritarian government and free elections. Other scholars like Judith Butler take it a step forward and argue that the very act of coming together signified a rational negotiation of power, as “the assembly is already speaking before it utters any words, that by coming together it is already an enactment of a popular will.”¹³⁶ Butler argues that even the consumption of images, film, and videos from the protests is an act of

¹³⁵ See Peter Snowdon, ‘The Revolution Will Be Uploaded: Vernacular Video and the Arab Spring’, *Culture Unbound* 6, no. 2 (April 2014): 401–29, <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146401>; Bamyeh, ‘Anarchist Method, Liberal Intention, Authoritarian Lesson’; Heba Salem and Kantaro Taira, ‘Reclaiming the City: Street Art of the Revolution’, in *Translating Egypt’s Revolution*, ed. Samia Mehrez (American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 143–79, <https://doi.org/10.5743/cairo/9789774165337.003.0005>.

¹³⁶ Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 156–57.

protest in itself, since it contributes to the localization, diffusion, and boundedness of the event.¹³⁷ As such, it can be argued that the typical actor had knowledge of tactics as well, at least from hindsight. However, the ideal type would have no value for this comparison if it fit perfectly with the events on the ground. By analyzing the empirical facts, we begin to see some discrepancies.

There was some tension between those who chose to go out in the streets, and those who remained at home. Those who chose to stay at home during the protests in Egypt were derisively known as *hizb al-kanaba*, “the party of the couch.”¹³⁸ In one of the viral videos to emerge from the protests a woman by the name of Asmaa Mahfouz directly addresses the camera, attacking those who choose to be inside.¹³⁹ She uses her identity as a woman to shame the men who choose to watch footage of the protests online instead of joining them: “Sitting at home and just following us on news or Facebook leads to our humiliation—leads to my own humiliation! If you have honor and dignity as a man, come! Come and protect me and other girls in the protest.”¹⁴⁰ The video is doubly unique – both because of the general absence of videos from indoor scenes, and because of the lack of traditional vlogs. The very genre of “vlog” is highly popular in the Euro-American world, generating around 40% of user online content in 2011, the percentage ever-growing since.¹⁴¹ However, Snowdon argues that this is not even a vlog, but an “anti-vlog,” since it eschews all of the personal trappings that a vlog might have – the certain type of intimacy with the subject and her surroundings is gone.¹⁴²

The video thus provides us with two essential bits of information. The first is that the boundaries between the home and the outside world are getting thinner and thinner, due to the regime’s intrusion into people’s lives. The second is that individuals were deeply aware of this fact and tried to convince others of it as well. We see it done in two ways. The first is the aforementioned “party of the couch,” which directly linked inaction to lounging in one’s home while others suffered in the streets. This somewhat aggressive stance appealed to people’s emotions and insecurities, or to such norms as gender values, like in the Mahfouz video. The other way is signified by the videos

¹³⁷ Judith Butler, ‘Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street,’ *Transversal Texts*, September 2011, accessed on 2 June, 2021, <https://transversal.at/transversal/1011/butler/en>.

¹³⁸ Ayman El-Desouky, *The Intellectual and the People in Egyptian Literature and Culture: Amāra and the 2011 Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 96.

¹³⁹ Iyad El-Baghdadi, ‘Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution’, 2 February 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjJgMdsEuk>.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 43.

¹⁴² Snowdon, *The People Are Not an Image*, 191.

in which the streets were invited into one's own home. The Mosireen Collective, a central space for virtual organization of the Egyptian Revolution, compiled many videos such as "The Martyrs: Toussi" which show the home as a central space for political speech.¹⁴³ This shows another aspect of the concept of *amāra* presented in the previous chapter, the practice of performing collective memory in everyday life, which also breaks the distinction between "public" and "private" spaces in the Arab world.¹⁴⁴ Egyptian protesters were thus deeply knowledgeable and aware of the contexts their protested within, and tried to negotiate power structures not only with the state, but with themselves as well.

By now the high number of video footage cited should be obvious. This is not done to showcase that the Egyptian Revolution was a "techie" movement, but to show that the occupation of space involves the occupation of virtual space as well. This is the entire point of Peter Snowdon's work, where he argues that in the 21st century the lines between analogue and online are becoming more blurred, and that one is simply an extension of the other.¹⁴⁵ My argument follows Snowdon in the sense that I state that while the struggle against the state was most visible in the grounds of Tahrir, the struggle for legitimacy was perhaps more visible in the media sphere, as protesters were aware of the fact that state media was deliberately misinforming Egyptians about the events of Tahrir.¹⁴⁶ It is no wonder that most of the footage from mainstream media of the protest was from a birds-eye view of Tahrir, while protesters mainly filmed from the ground.¹⁴⁷ The need of protesters to film actions themselves then proliferate them online or with their friends also establishes a new sense of community, built on the struggle of occupation.

Let us talk for a moment about the invocation of cowardice in Mahfouz's first video. It manages to highlight a component that could be vital in disproving the ideal type actor, which is fear. When Snowdon and Butler argue about bodies being central to the protests, they also mention how martyrdom was an essential part of the Arab Revolutions. After all, the protests in Egypt started on the Facebook page Khalid Sa'id. Egyptians who went into the streets knew very well of the dangers to their own lives, and that danger was externalized and shared through video footage. For

¹⁴³ The Mosireen Collective, 'آخرتنا الزبالة؟ قصة توسي' | The Martyrs: Toussi', 21 January 2012, accessed 2 June 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz3Rg_heqAg.

¹⁴⁴ El-Desouky, *The Intellectual and the People*, 12.

¹⁴⁵ Snowdon, 'The Revolution Will Be Uploaded'; Snowdon, *The People Are Not an Image*.

¹⁴⁶ See Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East*.

¹⁴⁷ Snowdon, *The People Are Not an Image*, 170–73.

example, there are countless videos who prove the fragility of human life through the death of the cameraman-protestor, where no word is spoken but the footage suddenly drops on the ground, followed by seconds or even minutes of either silence or the screams of those around.¹⁴⁸ These examples are rare on YouTube, since they tend to get deleted – either by their creators, or by YouTube itself for being against the platform’s Terms of Service.

Fear is one of those complex emotions that provide a counterpoint to our ideal type. After all, I argued following Weber that social action is behavior invested with meaning by the participants. In the occupations, the behavior was protest invested with anti-authoritarian and anti-poverty meaning, with a sprinkle of community building and mutual aid on top. However, how does this look when fear enters the mix? In some cases, participants were aware of the difficulties they and their comrades faced, but they chose not to act out of fear. In other words, the typical actor had full knowledge of the situation at hand, was rational and capable of negotiating power, but chose not to out of fear. It is not my meaning to disparage these individuals, for not everyone can be on the front lines of a revolution. It is however a fascinating way to disprove some peculiarities about an ideal type, as fear of violence and bodily harm is definitely an empirical fact observed during the Egyptian Revolution.

Take for instance the testimony of Jordan Fitzgerald Smith, an American student in Cairo during the events of January 2011. Her attitude towards Egyptians echoes stereotypes of the “Arab Street,” stating that change “was impossible in a country that one man had been ruling for 30 years,” and joking with her flatmate that “this was not going to be a real revolution.”¹⁴⁹ She did not join the street protests, and in her testimony does not necessarily see herself as part of the Egyptian collective in any ways. Nevertheless, she states that she “is proud to have lived through something so potentially dangerous.” The potentiality of something being dangerous while you are not actually observing it from the inside, but from state media, is not to be taken for granted. The fact that she was a foreign American student visiting Egypt also adds to the statement, as for ordinary Egyptians the situation was simply dangerous, not “potentially.” Nevertheless, this is a testimony who’s arguments can be extended to her group of friends, and perhaps to the entire

¹⁴⁸ Peter Snowden, ‘5.1 talbesasyria280511’, 20 December 2015, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://vimeo.com/149565049>.

¹⁴⁹ Jordan Fitzgerald Smith, ‘The Egyptian Revolution’, in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, 64–67.

student apartment, since Egyptians found it necessary to actually stay there and comfort the students.¹⁵⁰

Other accounts mostly refer to participant's parents, that were trying to dissuade their sons and daughters from joining the demonstrations.¹⁵¹ Those fears had real causes, as people got arrested, beaten by the police, or killed during the events at Tahrir and across Egypt. There are also cases of individuals facing their fears head on, despite death and injuries surrounding them. Amor Eletrebi almost died, yet he returned to the square.¹⁵² Videos show people retreating from police gunfire, yet in a show of spectacular bravery charging back towards them, occasionally carrying the martyrs away.¹⁵³ Al-Mutazbellah Ahmad Ali al-Abd got shot himself and spent the remainders of the Revolution in the hospital, but does not seem to regret it (in fact, he seems proud of it).¹⁵⁴ The pride does not come from being injured, but from having a clear badge of participation from the occupation. It is similar to how protesters keep videos of themselves in the protests as an opportunity to show them to their friends.¹⁵⁵

Another assumption that we've made for the typical Egyptian actor is that they act without making any mistakes. This of course is impossible due to the millions of protesters on the ground, but how does one look at mistakes without judging those involved? Human error is present everywhere, and in this case it appears somewhere in-between the behavior of the protester and her intended action. We can only infer these mistakes from the voices of those in the street alone. Anything other than that, especially from me as a person who has not personally attended these movements, would be nothing short of offensive. Luckily, those who were on the ground are more than willing to talk about what went wrong. They do not always agree on what was a mistake – some consider the burning of police stations one, while others lament the fact that they couldn't convince their

¹⁵⁰ Smith, 'The Egyptian Revolution', 65.

¹⁵¹ Sara Hany and Asaad Alsaleh, 'It Is Just the Beginning', in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, 67–70; Amor Eletrebi and Asaad Alsaleh, 'Welcome to Utopia!', in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, 71–75.

¹⁵² Eletrebi and Alsaleh, 'Welcome to Utopia!'

¹⁵³ 17thFebRevolution, 'Protest in Souq Al Jumma - Tripoli طرابلس الجمعة - مظاهرة في سوق الجمعة', February 27 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdlBRgi0BFc>.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Mutazbellah Ahmad Ali al-Abd, 'The Bullets Are Still in My Leg', in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, 78–83.

¹⁵⁵ Snowdon, *The People Are Not an Image*, 170.

parents of the worthiness of protesting.¹⁵⁶ However, they do agree on one point – the collapse of unity after the ousting of Hosni Mubarak and the return to sectarian politics was indeed a mistake. Virtually every testimony and written account from the Egyptian Revolution I’ve come across starts with wonder at how sectarian lines were overcome during the 18 days in Tahrir, and disappointment at how they were swiftly reintroduced afterwards. Kholoud Said Amer, an editor and translator at Bibliotheca Alexandrina recounts her experiences with the Egyptian Revolution, stating that “we made a mistake by leaving the streets and squares after he stepped down. We will continue. God is with us, and people who have a right always win.”¹⁵⁷ Claudia Wiens, a German photojournalist argued that despite the initial optimism, after the fall of Mubarak people realized that “the responsibility lies with them and that a true revolution does not happen overnight.”¹⁵⁸ Ahmad Shokr writes that Egyptians made a mistake by cleaning up Tahrir too soon after the success of the Revolution, as “many memories inscribed on the walls were erased, and with them testimony to the kaleidoscope of possibilities created in the square.”¹⁵⁹ There is one benefit to this analysis – these protesters were fully aware of their disunity not even one year after the events at Tahrir.

The Egyptian Revolution can be seen through a process of double vernacularization. By this I mean both the social imaginary practices that were developed in public spaces (especially in Tahrir), and the emergence of 21st century media practices. These spaces cannot be separated from one another, as we saw before being argued by Butler, Snowden, and others. After all, the vernacular is the main domain of the people’s resistance to the emerging State colonization of their everyday forms of life.¹⁶⁰ This type of space manifests itself as a form of life that opens up new possibilities of living together through what we hold in common. In the case of the Egyptian Revolution, scholars have described this vernacular as a type of “anarchist gnosis,” which combines this return of a collective way of living with an autonomous civil society existing largely outside and independent of the State.¹⁶¹ This is most evident in the occupations, with Tahrir being

¹⁵⁶ See Mona Prince, ‘Funny Beginnings and Happy Endings’, 60–63, Maha Hindawy, ‘My Egyptian Revolution’, 75–78, Kholoud Said Amer, ‘Telling My Secret’, 93–98, Al-Mutazbellah Ahmad Ali al-Abd, ‘The Bullets Are Still in My Leg’, 78-83, all in *Voices of the Arab Spring*.

¹⁵⁷ Amer, ‘Telling My Secret’, in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, 98.

¹⁵⁸ Claudia Wiens, ‘Diary to Democracy (Inshallah [God Willing])’, in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, 93.

¹⁵⁹ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 60.

¹⁶⁰ Snowden, *The People Are Not an Image*, 27.

¹⁶¹ Mohammed A. Bamyeh, *Anarchy as Order: The History and Future of Civic Humanity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

the frontrunner, where people established tents both as a symbol of resistance and a form of mutual aid.

The vernacular space contains several characteristics which the typical actor can exploit in order to negotiate power. These are critical utopia, nonviolence, and creativity and humor. They are means through which actors accentuate and force the state to react to their goals. These goals vary, especially in a movement that is characterized by a lack of formal organization. However, organization of the organizationless does exist, and several demands were heard from the collective. While these mostly related to standards of living, the main threads were that these could be achieved if Hosni Mubarak was removed from office, his son made unable to succeed, and free elections held. After all, we've seen that the main slogan was "the people want the removal of the regime." I also argue that the meaning and behavior of the protesters changed, even if their goals were more or less the same. Many protesters have argued that while past movement involved street politics to a degree, nothing came close to how the occupation of Tahrir looked like. This is where the vernacular spaces come in. In the following lines I will look at the characteristics of Tahrir to see how the collective organized itself in a space both against and incomprehensible to the State, even if for a brief while.

The city center of Cairo was built in the 19th century by Khedive Isma'il as a symbol of modernity, and ever since it has been a favorite for popular gatherings, from soccer victory celebrations to the mourning of famous Egyptians. Notably, after the Free Officers coup in 1952, Egyptians went to Tahrir to celebrate the birth of a new republic. However, the security apparatus of the state was not unaware of Tahrir's significance, and since the turn of the century restricted flow into the square more and more. This was done by limiting access to the public to some areas, police blockades, and new structures that diminished the square's space.¹⁶² As such, Tahrir Square, literally "Liberation" Square, was not synonymous with emancipation for Egyptians before 2011. In fact, it came much closer to symbolize authoritarian rule and the decline of public space. However, this was perhaps the reason for Tahrir's transformation into an alternative space – not any pre-established notion of radical utopia, but simply an urge to keep the area from regime encroachment.

¹⁶² Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 55.

Writing from his experiences in Tahrir, poet Amor Eletrebi notes the abundance of signs reading “Welcome to Utopia!” In a somewhat derogatory notion, he argues that those were probably the only words the people carrying the signs knew how to write, or that at least they were written by someone else.¹⁶³ It would be easy to say that yes, Egyptians were aware that they were creating a utopia for themselves, but Eletrebi’s comments cannot be ignored. Whose utopia was this? I’ve argued that the kind of utopias built in vernacular spaces are of the *critical* kind. Critical utopias are to be seen in a double sense – both critical meaning that they have the critical mass of people needed to revolutionize their way of living, and critical in the sense of being self-aware of their advantages and disadvantages. The utopian characteristics of Tahrir are well noted in literature on the subject. Ahmad Shokr for instance refers to the space as a “commune,” writing about its inclusivity to all groups, the fact that “resources were the property of no one,” and that the atmosphere was one of an “endless carnival.”¹⁶⁴ Victor Turner referred to these types of spaces *liminal*: places in-between the old rules and the new ones, where a new type of community (the *communitas*) not based on earlier identities could be achieved.¹⁶⁵

While this is true, it should be noted that Egyptians were not so quick to fall into a carnivalesque frenzy of utopia the minute they ended up in Tahrir. This argument is but a rehash of the “Arab Street,” not so different from claiming that Egyptian as a whole are too lenient to protest any government measure. After all, I’ve argued so far that most Egyptian protesters are rational subjects, capable of negotiating power. The following examples will outline how Egyptians were also acutely aware of their surroundings, and quick to criticize tendencies within their own movement. But even during such disagreements, the double meaning of critical utopia is present. Protesters still act as a collective, and in a show of democratic thought manage to air their disapprovals publicly and even debate them. This is not new to occupation movements, or any horizontal movements that are deemed organizationless.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Eletrebi and Alsaleh, ‘Welcome to Utopia!’, 71.

¹⁶⁴ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 57.

¹⁶⁵ Victor Turner, ‘Liminality and Communitas’, in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 94–113.

¹⁶⁶ Rodrigo Nunes, *Organisation of the Organisationless: Collective Action after Networks*, PML Books (London: Mute, 2014).

Take, for instance, this anonymously (as most of them are) published video from the 25th of January, entitled “Day One of the Freedom Revolution Dokki, Giza1.”¹⁶⁷ The video shows a critical mass of protesters marching down the street and chanting such slogans like “Down with Hosni Mubarak” and “Hosni Mubarak is going, he is going.” In an almost documentary fashion, the camera swings around to the right, revealing a woman named Leila standing there as if waiting for her turn to speak. She proceeds to deliver what seems like an almost rehearsed speech, talking about the lack of bread in shops, the price of education, the lack of meat. She reappears four times during the video, effectively taking control of the camera. Each time it becomes more difficult for her, and in the end one can hear an argument in the background between her and some other men stating that they are here to listen to everyone’s problems, not just one person’s. To this, Leila replies “I know. I am trying to make all our problems felt.”

At its core, this encapsulates a debate about political and sociological representation. It also showcases the nature of the discourse surrounding legitimacy at these movements. At one end, you have the individual which seeks not to control the movement, but to make it and its demands identifiable. At the other end, you have the collective which seeks not to congregate within one unit, but to articulate itself horizontally into distinct subject positions. The point here is not to choose between one or another, but to see the revolutionaries of Tahrir as capable of negotiating between these two points. Even the video itself ends as a synthesis between the two strands of representation exemplified here, as the crowd regroups and continues to chant and march collectively for whatever it is that they see in the revolution. In a sense, this revolution can be called what Rodrigo Nunes dubs not leaderless or leadership-based, but “leaderful.”

Regardless of what individuals’ ideas about decision making, leadership and representation might be, and the practices that they derive from these, their general and most constant framework of interaction is best described, from the point of view of the system, as distributed leadership. It is not that there are no “leaders”; there are several, of different kinds, at different scales and on different layers, at any given time; and in principle anyone can occupy this position. That is, they are not leaderless but, if the poor wordplay can be forgiven, leaderful.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ FreedomRevolution25, ‘Day One of Egypt’s Freedom Revolution | January 25, 2011’, 24 January 2012, accessed 2 June 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Co-oJUK_P_A.

¹⁶⁸ Nunes, *Organisation of the Organisationless*, 23.

As such, at least the moment caught in the frame of the video can be called a critical utopia. But the added fact here is that the videos produced in the midst of the Egyptian Revolution themselves are critical utopias. Videomakers as typical actors were analyzed in the lines above, but it should be added here that they do not merely record their testimonies and their actions, but redistribute authority over the videos they make and the reality they inhabit by giving power to act and speak to anyone who might appear before the camera. I mentioned before that vernacular spaces in the case of occupations need to be seen both online and offline. In the words of Peter Snowden, the videos are not only captured frames of a fleeting moment that could have been something greater, but are “also messages that continue to circulate, their power to effect change intact and undiminished, and that may still one day reach their true and most effective destination.”¹⁶⁹

A note should be made about Islam. There are also other voices who proclaim that Islam has radical emancipatory potential, citing such examples as the Haitian Revolution.¹⁷⁰ In reality, Islam is not only a mobilizing structure deployed to push for change in a certain direction, but also the subject of intense social struggle to define its place in society and politics.¹⁷¹ Bayat argues that globalization, the decline of grand ideologies, and the growth of democratic sensibilities in the region formed “post-Islamist refo-lutions” in the region, or a mix of revolution and reform.¹⁷² The Egyptian Revolution was broadly popular and civil, with the main demands being change, freedom, social justice, and bread. That is why I have argued that the formation of “the people” was a collective movement, and it can be added here that this means it was free from sectarian divides.¹⁷³ This collective action was rapidly mourned by the general population, who as I argued before considered their lack of unity post-Tahrir as a mistake. After 18 days of triumph the protesters expected a similarly fast change towards their ideal society, guided by the incumbent powers of the previous regime – the military. Such is the anomaly of Tahrir Square – it enjoyed enormous social power for a time, but it lacked any administrative authority. They gathered impressive hegemony, but they did not rule.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Snowden, *The People Are Not an Image*, 167.

¹⁷⁰ Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 65.

¹⁷¹ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 10.

¹⁷² Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 277.

¹⁷³ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 278.

¹⁷⁴ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 290.

Approximately six months after Hosni Mubarak was ousted, protesters took to the streets once again. Tahrir Square was again occupied with the same tents raised up by the same people. However, two things had changed in the previous months that similarly affected the protesters – their relationship with their past actions, and their relationship with the space they inhabited. For the former, a brilliant example is the formation of Cinema Tahrir, and the similar Kazeboon project.¹⁷⁵ These revolutionary street screenings enabled demonstrators to know not from the images, but *with* the images, as they saw themselves yet again in a different time, but in the same space. Originally, their modest ambition was to show those in the square images that they had not seen, or to remind them of the events of January. However, it soon became clear that they were much more, as they took place in the very space of potential liberation, and their public and illegal manner made the viewing experience as revolutionary as the acts filmed themselves.

The consequences of the January Revolution might be seen only in the long term, but it is clear that the way people relate to each other, the space they inhabit, and what they make of these relationships has changed. What I take as the key vernacular elements of Tahrir Square were the redefining of “the people,” the ways in which Tahrir Square was constructed as a place that served people’s needs, and the ways in which ordinary Egyptians organized en-masse to oppose a repressive state. However, the unity post-Tahrir seemed to be lacking. I believe this will be best explained when presented in juxtaposition with OWS, since my research shows that the occupiers of Zuccotti Park had a similar problem, albeit from different causes.

¹⁷⁵ Helen Stuhr-Rommereim, ‘Tahrir Cinema Displays Revolutionary Power of Archives’, *Egypt Independent*, 20 July 2011, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/tahrir-cinema-displays-revolutionary-power-archives/>; Nina Grønlykke Mollerup, ‘Making Media Public: On Revolutionary Street Screenings in Egypt’, *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015): 2903–21.

Chapter Three: “The 99%” of Zuccotti Park

How does one begin describing #OccupyWallStreet, a movement which since its apotheosis in 2011 has had its share of criticism or approval from all sides of the political spectrum, academic and laymen alike? One could call it a disorganized mess which failed to come up with any concrete criticism of the American way of life, full of internal contradictions and disagreements that eventually led to the movements failure.¹⁷⁶ One could also call it a moment caught during a waking nightmare of a post-austerity condition, when individuals banded together to dream of an alternate way of living, unshackled by the bonds of the State and of financial capital.¹⁷⁷ On the 15th of November 2011 when the police threw the protesters out of Zuccotti Park, we were left with two elements from the previously stated descriptions – a movement which attempted to create an alternate space for all, and a movement which in many eyes ultimately failed to bring about any concrete change. While OWS was late to the party of worldwide #Occupy movements, it did not seem like its tardiness affected its outcome in any significant way.

Of course, for our analysis such observations do not have real value. As I’ve argued in the Introduction, the success of a movement like OWS does not only rely on its immediate effects, but on the longer period. This includes the general imagination that the collective has towards the movement in the future, and the impact the movement had on subsequent attempts at similar protest. As will be argued in the following lines, the Occupy movement was not dead on November 15th in the United States, but continued both immediately afterwards during Occupy Sandy and closer to the writing of this thesis during the digital occupations of stock in 2021.¹⁷⁸ The current chapter will look at the occupation of Zuccotti Park in relation with our ideal type. As with the previous chapter, my aim is to look at the actors operating within Occupy Wall Street, figure out their behavior in relation with their beliefs, and see what similarities and discrepancies there are between the realities on the ground and the ideal type. Moreover, it will be argued that the occupation was vernacular – both in the sense that it was created without regard for commercial

¹⁷⁶ Andy Ostroy, *The Failure of Occupy Wall Street*, HuffPost, 6 December 2017, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-failure-of-occupy-wall-street> b 1558787.

¹⁷⁷ Amy Schrager Lang, ed., *Dreaming in Public: Building the Occupy Movement* (Oxford: New Internationalist Publishing, 2012).

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth Lopatto, ‘How r/WallStreetBets Gamed the Stock of Gamestop’, *The Verge*, 27 January 2021, accessed June 2 2021, <https://www.theverge.com/22251427/reddit-gamestop-stock-short-wallstreetbets-robinhood-wall-street>.

or institutional values, and because it incorporates the people's own ways of knowing which are illegible to the state.

It would be fitting to first talk about the inception of OWS. Occupations movements were not new by September 2011, in fact we've already seen another example of this in Tahrir Square. The Egyptian Revolution heavily inspired the élan of the demonstrators in Zuccotti Park. Suffice to say that OWS itself was not the first occupation movement that the US has seen during the turn of the century – other examples include the 2008-2009 New York City student occupations, the 2009 California college tuition hike protests, and others such as Miami's Take Back the Land, or Chicago's Republic Windows and Doors sit-down.¹⁷⁹ The Occupy Movement in the US, like Tahrir Square, was part of a global movement that did not diffuse from one place to another, but resonated between each other, strengthening local activists through the creation of global networks.¹⁸⁰ At the same time as the Egyptian Revolution, students and workers set up a community of occupiers within the Wisconsin State Capitol, and Tahrir was frequently invoked.¹⁸¹ OWS, like other occupation movements in 2011, was initially a protest movement against austerity measures following the financial crash of 2008, but it ended up being much more. In the words of Manolis Glezos, a former MP for the Syriza Party in Greece, occupation movements are a “lesson in democracy,” but not yet real democracy itself – for that, more than merely a square occupation needs to happen.¹⁸²

What happened during the occupation of Zuccotti Park? For starters, the protest on September 17th, 2011 was called for by Adbusters, a Canadian anti-consumerist organization. Their call to arms started on the 2nd of February, proposing a peaceful occupation of Wall Street to protest corporate influence over democracy, the lack of consequences for those responsible for the global financial crisis, and the increasing disparity in wealth.¹⁸³ Following Adbusters, many other groups online promoted the protests, like Anonymous and the U.S. Day of Rage.¹⁸⁴ The diffusion of material

¹⁷⁹ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 25.

¹⁸⁰ Ancelovici et al, *Street Politics in the Age of Austerity*, 229.

¹⁸¹ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 25.

¹⁸² Ancelovici et al, *Street Politics in the Age of Austerity*, 247.

¹⁸³ Kono Matsu, 'A Million Man March on Wall Street', *Adbusters*, 2 April 2015, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150402104218/https://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/million-man-march-wall-street.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Tiffany Gabbay, 'Who Is Behind The "US Day Of Rage" Against Wall Street?', *Business Insider*, 19 August 2011, accessed 4 June 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/who-is-behind-the-us-day-of-rage-2011-8>; Michael Saba,

continued on Facebook and Twitter, the former alone registering over 125 Occupy-related pages by October 2011.¹⁸⁵ The protesters at the scene were quickly met by the New York Police Department, and out of their three choices of zones of occupation, they were left with only their last one: Zuccotti Park.¹⁸⁶ OWS itself gave rise to the Occupy Movement in the US which spanned hundreds of similar occupations. OWS formally lasted until November 15th, 2011 when protesters were forced out of Zuccotti Park by the NYPD, citing unsanitary and hazardous conditions.

The evolution of protest movements in the US and the resounding voices of demonstrators across the world amplified by the power of the Internet affected the way OWS activists organized and presented themselves, both inwardly and outwardly. Whereas leading activists built their own ideal way of organizing the movement, they faced several difficulties and internal arguments which hampered the occupation, and which can for the purposes of this study be classified as mistakes or irrational decisions. The argument from OWS remains that it was not a movement with clear answers for the struggles of late stage capitalism, but merely an experiment in alternative ways of living. The internal organization of the occupation, the wide range of tents providing critical support to the movement, and the People's Library are chief examples of this. By looking at these actors and the movement they created, perhaps we can answer whether or not OWS was a success or a failure, and for whom.

Who were the actors of OWS? This is a question not only relevant for this study but also one which was deeply influential on the development of the #Occupy movement in the US. Originally, there was a lot of talk about percentages. The focal point of OWS was income inequality and wealth inequality in the US, which prompted the creation of the “We are the 99%” slogan. This originated on a Tumblr page with the same name, which explains it: “We are the 99 percent. We are getting kicked out of our homes. We are forced to choose between groceries and rent. We are denied quality medical care. We are suffering from environmental pollution. We are working long hours for little pay and no rights, if we're working at all. We are getting nothing while the other 1 percent

‘Wall Street protesters inspired by Arab Spring movement’, *CNN*, 17 September 2011, accessed 4 June 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2011/09/16/tech/social-media/twitter-occupy-wall-street/index.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Ben Berkowitz, ‘From a single hashtag, a protest circled the world’, *Brisbane Times*, 19 October 2011, accessed 4 June 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131015214136/http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/technology/technology-news/from-a-single-hashtag-a-protest-circled-the-world-20111019-1m72j.html>.

¹⁸⁶ The previous ones were One Chase Manhattan Plaza, and Bowling Green Park (where the famous “Charging Bull” is).

is getting everything. We are the 99 percent.”¹⁸⁷ The Tumblr page prompted the public to submit selfies of themselves holding up a piece of paper with a declaration of why they were part of the 99%. They ranged from homeless veterans to students in debt, and from single moms to disabled pensioners. The percentage talk was so engrained in the movement that it acquired a decent level of criticism, both from voices outside the movement which were stating that protesters were merely jealous of the 1%, and from inside the movement with ironic memes such as “99% of the world’s cookies are consumed by 1% of the monsters – #OccupySesameStreet,” or “12.5% of the planets have 71% of the mass - #OccupyJupiter.”¹⁸⁸ This is but a small taste of the humor present in OWS – both directed at the 1%, and self-depreciably at the 99%.

It is worth looking into why some occupiers were unhappy with “We Are The 99%” – not with the slogan, but with the realities of it. For the demonstrators of OWS were rationally capable of examining their own shortfalls, and this one was an immediate threat. The tactic of occupation refers to reclaiming public spaces for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or class. However, there was an issue – most of those who initiated the early occupations were white suburban males. This was an immediate reality for the organizers, and the early days of the movement were full of essays and pleas for greater unity and cooperation between the white and minority communities in NYC. In “Occupy Where? What’s in it for Black and Brown People?” Bruce A. Dixon argues that the unfortunate reality of US politics makes is so that “if the first occupiers in Zucotti Park had been young and black, they’d instantly have been branded a street gang and arrested en masse, with or without violence, but certainly with little media play or sympathy.”¹⁸⁹ Due to the lack of reach towards minority groups by original OWS organizers, these groups were alienated from the movement. In “Forget Diversity, it’s about ‘Occupying’ Racial Inequity,” Rinku Sen, like Dixon, argued that it is up to racial minorities to weave themselves into these protests and argue for a more inclusive movement.¹⁹⁰ Writing from her memories of the occupation, Manissa McCleave Maharawal notes that she originally did not want to attend because it was well known in her

¹⁸⁷ ‘We Are the 99 Percent’, accessed 28 April 2021, <https://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/?og=1>.

¹⁸⁸ For the former see Scott Horsley ‘The Income Gap: Unfair, Or Are We Just Jealous?’, *NPR*, 14 January 2012, accessed 4 June 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140502234240/http://www.npr.org/2012/01/14/145213421/the-income-gap-unfair-or-are-we-just-jealous>; for the latter see Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 213.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce A. Dixon, ‘Occupy Where? What’s in it for Black and Brown People?’, *Black Agenda Report*, 2 November 2011, accessed 4 June 2021, <https://www.blackagendareport.com/content/occupy-where-whats-it-black-and-brown-people>.

¹⁹⁰ Rinku Sen, ‘Forget Diversity, It’s About “Occupying” Racial Inequity’ in Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 179-181.

community that OWS was a mostly young white male scene.¹⁹¹ She remembers how she was present during the drafting of the Declaration of the Occupation of Wall Street, and how a particular line struck her – “being one race, the human race, *formerly* divided by race, class...”¹⁹² She and her colleagues forced their way into the conversation and managed to get the lines changed. The change was small – taking out the line about “being one race, the human race,” but it expressed a larger ethical concern about erasing a history of oppression, and acting as if current oppression was not still going on.¹⁹³

The occupation was also not so inclusive when it came to the ultra-poor. One of the more heated debates during the days of OWS was regarding the homeless. After all, those forced to living on the streets due to their assets being seized or simply not affording rent are certainly part of the 99%. Even so, some organizers were concerned about the appearance of the movement to outsiders, and what it would mean for people who “do not contribute” to the camp using its resources.¹⁹⁴ Christopher Herring and Zoltan Gluck are two of the many that collected testimonies of those on the ground complaining about the presence of the homeless, in order to showcase one of the many debates present within the working groups of OWS. From the collected voices and their experiences within OWS, Herring and Gluck argue that the “homeless question” was a heated debate within occupations across the US, being seen through a sort of utilitarian lens. One collected testimony from a legal attaché to OWS writes:

If you are not contributing to the movement, then why are you here? If you do not go on marches, why are you here? [...] This is not a place for free food or free cigarettes. If you live in New York, go home. If you are homeless in New York, there are plenty of spaces to be homeless. Go there. [...] But don't stay here. Don't cause trouble. This society gives us enough trouble.¹⁹⁵

Some voices within OWS were arguing that the very term “occupation” should be discarded since the word “erases both histories of colonialism and experiences of military rule” when used so trivially.¹⁹⁶ This makes the demand of demonstrators outside NYC for locals to “go home” ironic.

¹⁹¹ Manissa McCleave Maharawal, ‘So Real It Hurts. Notes on Occupy Wall Street’, in Lang, *Dreaming in Public*.

¹⁹² Emphasis my own.

¹⁹³ Maharawal, ‘So Real It Hurts.’

¹⁹⁴ Taylor, *Occupy!*, 163.

¹⁹⁵ Taylor, *Occupy!*, 165.

¹⁹⁶ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 21.

Nevertheless, the quote above shows several characteristics that are surprising to find in a progressive movement, but no so surprising to find in the general attitude towards the homeless: the association with crime and loitering, the association with drugs, the belief that the homeless never contribute to anything and perhaps it is their fault for being in the streets. Some occupiers believed that the homeless were an asset to the movement, due to their experiences with rough conditions on the streets, or simply because they added numbers to the movement.¹⁹⁷ This of course sparked debate between these two camps, with the central question being that of belonging: “why are you here?” This question was especially invoked in debates surrounding “disruptive behavior.”¹⁹⁸ The issue of course is that several groups, such as the aforementioned communities of color or the homeless and impoverished, were considered disruptive by default. In other words, if you were not white, or were too poor, you had to prove whether or not you were worthy of the 99%.

There are other examples of tensions within OWS that can be seen as divisive. Some occupiers had a problem with tourists joining the camp, “enjoying” its facilities, then moving on with their day.¹⁹⁹ A particular feud was with the many drummers joining the carnivalesque sections of the occupations, but which due to their noise made relations with the neighbors difficult and discussions within the democratic consensus groups troublesome.²⁰⁰ The reason why these are discussed is because they are part of a movement willing to reinvent itself. It is true that the mostly white and male original organizers did not realize the need to reach out to other voices such as racial minorities and women, partly due to their privilege and organizational backgrounds. However, in many cases they were outnumbered. The same goes with the anti-homeless demonstrators being met by more inclusive activists, or with minority groups claiming their voices in the debates surrounding messaging. In the end, OWS was a movement of activists in the full sense of the word – not just speaking out against the system, but against themselves when necessary. We’ve seen that the questions surrounding the meaning of the 99% and who exactly belongs there were one of the central tensions within the Occupy movement. The other central question is related to the nature of encampment, of holding on to public space with no planned end point. The issue of belonging appeared here but in another guise, as demonstrators outside the core

¹⁹⁷ Taylor, *Occupy!*, 166.

¹⁹⁸ Lang, ‘The Politics of the Impossible’, 28.

¹⁹⁹ Eli Schmitt, Astra Taylor, and Mark Grief, ‘Scenes from an Occupation’ in Taylor, *Occupy!*, 3.

²⁰⁰ Mark Greif, ‘Drumming in Circles’, in Taylor, *Occupy!*, 55.

were unsure whether or not encampment was a good strategy, while the core of the demonstration mistrusted those who did not participate in the camp, or did not sleep overnight in the Park.²⁰¹

One can argue then that OWS was a critical utopia, as per the definition outlined in the first chapter. As argued before, demonstrators were quick to criticize others, including themselves, when they detected bad behavior. Moreover, the movement was utopian when compared to the reality of late-stage capitalism as well. According to some of its organizers, it was not an act that foreshadowed a promised future, but “the creation, on however a small scale, of a present reality.”²⁰² Through working in the kitchen, hauling trash, printing shirts, or amplifying voices during the “people’s mic” protesters simply participated by taking part in the occupied space. According to Judith Butler, the very coming together of bodies in Zuccotti Park made democracy, not whatever demands the movement might have come up with.²⁰³ This is then the true value of occupied spaces – not the way they change state policy, but the way they change how people relate to one another. By blurring the spaces between observer, visitor, and active participant, and by reclaiming space and time for the public, OWS related to both the present and the future.²⁰⁴

I’ve argued so far that the participants of OWS had a difficult relationship with one another. This has made the typical actor both frustrating and exciting to analyze, as testimonies are aplenty. In what follows I will analyze how these actors related to the space they occupied, and the organizational structure they employed in said occupation. A few examples will be look at. These are the People’s Library, the people’s mic, and the various necessary tents established during the occupation. I argue that these are not only unique characteristics of anti-establishment protests, but they are part of a movement of activists deeply aware of the challenges they face, and of the methodologies required to face these challenges.

Adbusters’ well known poster advertising the original protest shows a dancer atop Wall Street’s iconic Charging Bull statue. Behind it, amidst a veil of tear gas, protesters are marching. The poster does not contain many words, just the main slogan of the movement, misinterpreted by many observers: “What is our one demand? #OccupyWallStreet.” As argued shortly before, the criticism of the movement not having any coherent demands is unwarranted, since the demonstrators refused

²⁰¹ Lang, ‘The Politics of the Impossible’, 28.

²⁰² Lang, ‘The Politics of the Impossible’, 30.

²⁰³ Judith Butler, ‘Bodies in Public. Remarks at Zuccotti Park, October 23’, in Taylor, *Occupy!*, 192.

²⁰⁴ Lang, ‘The Politics of the Impossible’.

to have any negotiations in the first place. Moreover, another short demand is present on the poster, below the date of the original manifestation. This one is targeted towards the protesters themselves: “Bring tent.” Short and sweet, at first this seems like a subtle nod towards those willing to join, telling them that this will be no short endeavor. However, it is also a gesture towards other past protest camps which occurred before OWS – the tented city in Egypt’s Tahrir Square, the *Indignados* in Spain, and the youth protests in Israel, all in 2011.²⁰⁵ The setting up of tents is one of the most likely methodologies of bringing about societal change, both because of the effect it has on the demonstrators, and the pressure it puts on the state. This is also an important element for our typical actor – the original organizers of OWS, although becoming irrelevant after the camps were set up, were deeply aware of how protest movements work, and how effective recent practices of protest were.

OWS was criticized for being a leaderless movement. Although online groups such as Adbusters or Anonymous tried to guide the protests in a certain direction, most of the actual work happened on the ground. We are left with a question then – if the original organizers wanted people to bring tents, but then left the scene, what did the demonstrators in Zuccotti Park do? In other words, were they as knowledgeable about this sort of protesting? I believe that the answer lay in the way the camp was organized in the first place, and in the way those on the ground referred to it as an experiment in direct democracy. The Zuccotti Park encampment functioned like a small city.²⁰⁶ Around 200 people slept in the park each night prior to its closure and hundreds of others joined in during the day. There were tents, both for those sleeping in and for specialized needs, such as sanitation, medication, food, clothes, cultural and intellectual sustenance. There were no bathrooms, but protesters went to local establishments that tacitly supported their efforts, with the Burger King next-door becoming a sort of symbol.²⁰⁷ The camp, then, embodied the movement’s spirit and ethos – the effectiveness of the camp to sustain the demonstrators’ basic needs made it possible for the movement to devote its energy to discussing change, but also to stubborn problems

²⁰⁵ Gee, ‘Past Tents - A Brief History of Protest Camping’, 360.

²⁰⁶ Karen Matthews, ‘Wall Street Protest Functions like a Small City’, *The Associated Press*, 9 October 2011, accessed 4 June 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20111009172825/http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5j1cCvOt8hya8vGX0L0BuZu6lxt_A?docId=0b872a8c42874850a511343166b0b871.

²⁰⁷ Taylor, *Occupy!*, 22.

that detracted from the movement, such as the aforementioned “homeless question” or the drummers.

One might jump to the conclusion that the camps were a misguided strategy, since the nature of the occupation and its enclosed space led to silly questions of belonging. However, it is not the camps that are the problem here, but how the core of the OWS protesters saw the camps. They were true to recognize the radical potential of camps to obtain change, but perhaps they were too aware of it: in the words of Slavoj Žižek, they fell in love with themselves.²⁰⁸ This is worth exploring. We have a case of knowledgeable protesters: they know the nature of their protests, who they are protesting against, the recent history of protests of their kind, and how to organize themselves. They build camps, and correctly use them in an emancipatory matter, providing shelter, food, and intellectual sustenance for those in need. Žižek delivered his warning in the context of protesters losing spirit after the camp would have been inevitably closed down. However, leaks of that spirit were appearing during the occupation itself. The builders of this direct democracy movement were unknowingly building their own version of a vanguardist core, either knowingly by not including several groups (like the homeless or “tourists”), or unknowingly by virtue of the systems they were brought in (mostly white and male). From within the movement, the direct exclusion of some groups is seen as its biggest mistake, and is corroborated by several activists and groups.²⁰⁹ It would be easy to add it as a mistake in the ideal type as well, but arguably it is more than that. By not recognizing their implicit discrimination during the movement itself, the core of protesters betrayed its privilege. For if they acted all-knowingly during the movement, yet this major fact escaped their understanding, then perhaps they were not so all-knowing after all. In other words, the fully knowledgeable typical actor was not fully present in OWS.

The People’s Library was another focal point of the occupation. One may write about the collection of more than 5000 books, magazines, newspapers, and other material that was seized during the destruction of the encampment on November 15. The library was raided in the middle of the night, and all material was thrown in dumpsters or destroyed.²¹⁰ The demonstrators were then invited to

²⁰⁸ Žižek, ‘Don’t Fall in Love With Yourself’.

²⁰⁹ See Lang, ‘The Politics of the Impossible’; Christopher Herring and Zoltan Gluck, ‘The Homeless Question’; Audrea Lim, ‘Chinatown Is Nowhere’, all in Taylor, *Occupy!*.

²¹⁰ Christian Zabriskie, ‘The Occupy Wall Street Library Regrows in Manhattan’, *American Libraries Magazine*, accessed 3 May 2021, accessed 4 June 2021, <https://www.webcitation.org/63J3Pw49t?url=http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/news/11162011/occupy-wall-street-library-regrows-manhattan>.

collect the remaining material at the precinct, but found only smashed laptops, irreparably destroyed books, and missing material entirely.²¹¹ The destruction of the Library was not only another example of police brutality against protesters, but a targeted attack on values of freedom and democracy. As the American Library Association President Molly Raphael stated on the 1st of December, 2011:

The dissolution of a library is unacceptable. Libraries serve as the cornerstone of our democracy and must be safeguarded. An informed public constitutes the very foundation of a democracy, and libraries ensure that everyone has free access to information. The very existence of the People's Library demonstrates that libraries are an organic part of all communities. Libraries serve the needs of community members and preserve the record of community history. In the case of the People's Library, this included irreplaceable records and material related to the occupation movement and the temporary community that it represented. We support the librarians and volunteers of the Library Working Group as they re-establish the People's Library.²¹²

The presence of a library in an encampment is not just a nod towards a hobby that most people have. For a specific type of socialists, libraries are one of the few remaining public spaces that individuals can enjoy without a monetary transaction being necessary. It is not only a space where people go to read, but in many cases one where communities congregate and organize events for themselves. The act of borrowing books itself is one of *usufruct*, which according to Murray Bookchin is “the freedom of individuals in a community to appropriate resources merely by virtue of the fact that they are using them.”²¹³ The idea of libraries is then expanded to be part of an alternative space project that is both utopian and pragmatic in nature. Some activists refer to the idea of “library socialism,” not only due to the possibility of making all products and services readily available for everyone for their immediate needs, but also as a way of community-building and mutual aid.²¹⁴ This is the way we should look at the People's Library as well, especially in relation with the aforementioned tents and the encampment as a whole. If one looks at the aims of

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² ‘ALA Alarmed at Seizure of Occupy Wall Street Library, Loss of Irreplaceable Material’, *American Library Association*, 17 November 2011, accessed 4 June 2021, <http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2011/11/ala-alarmed-seizure-occupy-wall-street-library-loss-irreplaceable-material>.

²¹³ Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, Calif: Cheshire Books, 1982), 50.

²¹⁴ Noon, ‘Library Socialism’, *New Economy Journal* 2, no. 4 (4 August 2020), <https://www.neweconomy.org.au/journal/issues/vol2/iss4/library-socialism/>.

the protesters – not to demand things from the state, but to experiment in real democracy, then this is a clear example of adequacy between behavior and meaning. However, it is also an example of causal adequacy. It is no accident that the destruction of the camp and of the People’s Library was so violent, especially clashed with the police were limited when compared to another encampment like Tahrir Square. In the theatre of neoliberal democracy, a certain amount of protesting is allowed, but when it becomes dangerous then force is used to disperse any threats.²¹⁵

We’ve seen how initially the demonstrations were called for by Internet groups such as Adbusters and Anonymous, and how they lost influence on the occupations as they spread across the United States. Each occupation became its own microcosm, with its own organizational structure. OWS was no different. But it did not mean that the movement’s link with the Internet was severed. What movements like OWS show is that with the aid of the Internet, a movement can organize itself without having a rigid hierarchical structure.²¹⁶ In “Organisation of the Organisationless,” Rodrigo Nunes claims that in order to understand 21st century anti-capitalist movement, a new grammar is needed by differentiating between different forms of networks and networking: network-systems, network-movements, and movements.²¹⁷ The first refers to a system of different networks, such as social media accounts or physical spaces, that produce so many layers of interaction that it is impossible to focus on just one. By seeing an event like OWS as a network-system, it allows us to look beyond individual statements or political expressions, and to picture the event as an ever evolving entity, a verb instead of a noun. Meanwhile, a network-movement is the conscious understanding of the fact that a network does exist, complete with its differing and interacting systems of actors, goals, intentions, behavior, and meanings.²¹⁸ Network-movements are in fact network-systems that are directly affected as a consequence of actors being conscious of their belonging in a movement. As such, for Nunes the difference between the two is this element of awareness of both oneself as part of the movement, and of the movement as a whole. As I’ve argued before, this awareness of one’s belonging in the movement is a key aspect of the typical actor of the ideal type, and is definitely part of OWS as a whole.

²¹⁵ Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*, 18.

²¹⁶ Nunes, *Organisation of the Organisationless*, 9.

²¹⁷ Nunes, *Organisation of the Organisationless*, 20.

²¹⁸ Nunes, *Organisation of the Organisationless*, 25.

There has been much research done on online informal networks. Like the Arab Spring, observers have argued that the core of OWS was deeply involved in spaces such as Twitter and YouTube. Benjamin Gleason argues that informal learning played a big part in the formation of online networks, as protesters on Twitter were not only willing to share information about the movement, but educate observers on related subjects as well.²¹⁹ His observations led to the discovery that around 48% of Tweets with hyperlinks contained user-generated content, meaning that they were created independently by the users.²²⁰ The fact that the movement was highly decentralized online as well is seen through the myriad of ways that users Tweeted about it, as there were more than 1000 hashtags about OWS.²²¹ This of course made it quite difficult for newcomers to find new information about what was happening on the ground. Gleason argues that the prevalence of hyperlinks also makes it difficult for technologically unskilled users to navigate the information thrown at them, but this is an observation that could be made for anything online.²²² Many Twitter links redirected to YouTube, as the latter was a valuable set of communicative publics interested in the Occupy movement.²²³ The fact that informal networks were present both online and offline makes it difficult for scholars to effectively study such contemporary movements. Videos get taken down, either by their authors or by YouTube, while many hyperlinks cease functioning, especially those related to file sharing, the links of which expire.

The prevalence of these informal networks provides more evidence to the fact that OWS was deeply influenced by anarchist thought and praxis. This, coupled with the aforementioned lack of organization, were common criticisms towards the movement.²²⁴ It is then important for us to take a moment and conceptualize the actual methodology of OWS to pursue a different form of politics that wishes for radical democracy.²²⁵ The organizational structures that originally boosted the

²¹⁹ Benjamin Gleason, '#Occupy Wall Street: Exploring Informal Learning About a Social Movement on Twitter', *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 7 (July 2013): 966–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213479372>.

²²⁰ Gleason, '#Occupy Wall Street', 972.

²²¹ Gleason, '#Occupy Wall Street', 977.

²²² Gleason, '#Occupy Wall Street', 977.

²²³ Kjerstin Thorson et al., 'Youtube, Twitter, and the Occupy Movement: Connecting Content and Circulation Practices', *Information, Communication & Society* 16, no. 3 (April 2013): 421–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.756051>.

²²⁴ See Shannon O'Meara, 'What Do We Want Again? Occupy Wall St Takes Hold of Australia', *NewsComAu*, 14 October 2011, <https://www.news.com.au/world/bank-on-it-occupy-wall-sts-a-global-phenomenon/news-story/4ff30c7c68db988a3c4306ecd507c152>; Jon Friedman, 'Occupy Wall Street Is 99% Dead', *MarketWatch*, 2 November 2011, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/occupy-wall-street-is-99-dead-2011-11-02>; Angel McRae, 'Occupy Movement: Anarchy or Revolution?', *KSL*, 14 November 2011, <https://www.ksl.com/article/18075759/occupy-movement-anarchy-or-revolution>.

²²⁵ Gibson, 'The Anarchism of the Occupy Movement', 336.

movement such as Adbusters were quickly abandoned since it conflicted with the democratic ethos of the movement, as it was seen by the demonstrators. OWS instead pursued a complex form of consensus politics through its General Assemblies and open microphones, rejecting any form of representation or hierarchy – everyone was free to participate (with some exceptions of course, such as we have talked about before). Consensus politics has a long history, but its birth is more often than not associated with the Zapatistas of Mexico.²²⁶ The way consensus politics works is that instead of voting for or against particular proposals, groups work on a proposal until everyone involved finds it acceptable.²²⁷ The New York City General Assembly explained it best: “consensus is a creative thinking process: When we vote, we decide between two alternatives. With consensus, we take an issue, hear the range of enthusiasm, ideas and concerns about it, and synthesise a proposal that best serves everybody’s vision.”²²⁸

In line with its critical utopian vision, OWS recognizes that this type of politics has its problems, as it can promote authoritarianism when stronger voices shape and silence others. The NYCGA stated: “democracy is not served by trying to get a large group to do a full consensus process on every detail of a meeting – people who have limited time and energy will leave’ or, for other reasons, will be unable to contribute, denied the opportunity to participate in decision-making.”²²⁹ As such, OWS employed a certain type of fluid democracy, where everyone could participate if they wished to, but were not forced to do so. This is seen best in the working groups, which functioned alongside the General Assemblies. These working groups were decentralized but connected, ranging from concrete ones such as food, medical, and legal, to safer spaces, women’s issues, and art.²³⁰ Moreover, OWS adopted mutualistic organizational practices, by incorporating cooperative libraries, healthcare clinics, childcare centers, and collective kitchens, among others.²³¹

²²⁶ For a fantastic overview of the Zapatista Movement, see John Holloway and Eloína Peláez, eds., *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (London, Sterling: Pluto Press, 1998).

²²⁷ Gibson, ‘The Anarchism of the Occupy Movement’, 343.

²²⁸ L.A. Kauffman, ‘The Theology of Consensus’, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 26 May 2015, accessed 4 June 2021, <http://berkeleyjournal.org/2015/05/the-theology-of-consensus/>.

²²⁹ Cited in Gibson, ‘The Anarchism of the Occupy Movement’, 344.

²³⁰ Marina Sitrin, ‘One No, Many Yeses’, in Taylor, *Occupy!*, 8.

²³¹ Gibson, ‘The Anarchism of the Occupy Movement’, 345.

These characteristics make OWS fall in line with other anarchical practices of collective self-organization and mutualism.²³² It is once again clear that the movement had a core of self-aware actors that were not only knowledgeable enough to set up camp in an anarchistic tradition, but were also deeply aware of previous such experiments. Moreover, this self-awareness is also seen in the movement's rejection to embrace anarchism as an identity, despite clearly sharing its praxis. I believe this is a mixture of the movement's refusal to engage in labels and categorization, its acknowledgement of the fact that anarchism is seen as an insult in most political communities (including the broader left), and recent scholarship on anarchism that at the time distinguished between ideological anarchists and actors inspired by anarchist values.²³³ Whatever the core of OWS might have been, their meaning and behavior did coincide, despite voices of critics. If Occupy wanted the creation of a directly democratic space without strict hierarchical social relations, then predetermined demands or engagement with an undemocratic and hierarchical system would have been antithetical to the movement's principles. As such, this proves adequacy on the level of meaning, as outlined in Chapter 1.

This concludes our look at the vernacular space of occupied Zuccotti Park and its occupiers. This chapter has argued that the typical actor, the collective of protesters, adheres to the ideal type presented in the first chapter. The typical protester at Occupy Wall Street was knowledgeable enough to create an alternate space abstract to the administrative vision of the state, rational enough to discuss its development with others, and aware of the fact that the occupation was not a means to an end but an experiment in what was called "real democracy." However, they were not without their limitations – occupiers were often times unaware of their own privileges, which led to undesired discrimination, like in the case of women and people of color not being included. Moreover, they were sometimes so fully absorbed with themselves that actively discriminated against other potential occupiers by imposing questions of belonging and participation, like in the homeless people example. This also led to deep uncertainties towards who is really a protester, and who is a police spy, or subverter. The occupation was the behavior through which the typical actors manifested their meanings, and it too adheres to the ideal type. OWS was firmly a critical utopia, as it created a space that both criticized the state and the occupiers themselves through

²³² Jenny Pickerill and John Krinsky, 'Why Does Occupy Matter?', *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (August 2012): 279–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.708923>.

²³³ See for example Giorel Curran and Morgan Gibson, 'WikiLeaks, Anarchism and Technologies of Dissent', *Antipode* 45, no. 2 (March 2013): 294–314, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01009.x>.

utilizing such methods as direct democracy, consensus politics, and library socialism. It was a nonviolent endeavor, through its long duration and persistence. And it was a deeply creative and sometimes humorous action, seen best through the caricatures and irony present at the occupation, and the myriad of tents and groups dedicated to the arts and intellectual cravings. As such, there was adequacy on the level of meaning in OWS – in their aim to create real democracy, and with the full knowledge of how to create such an experiment, demonstrators occupied Zuccotti Park and unleashed every tool at their disposal to create a vernacular space.

In the end, the camp was demolished on November 15th, 2011. This however did not mean that the occupation was over, or that it is over. It was not in the hopes of protesters that they would be in Zuccotti Park forever, but a type of uncertainty regarding when the state would actually react to their occupation was always there. In their words, “none of us knows what comes next; we will build it together.”²³⁴ After all, even the ideal type requires a certain reaction from the opposing party, in the form of causal adequacy. Nonviolent escalation through persistence and quantitative protesting also inevitably leads to a certain response.²³⁵ However, causal adequacy for OWS did not mean only showing the bad side of the state. After all, in the age of the Internet a video of police brutally evacuating a park is but a fleeting image (partly because of the widespread nature of such images). As such, it can be argued that the goal of OWS was simply to build something together, to try to fill some gaps in people’s lives, as shown by some of the first working groups in Zuccotti Park: *Comfort; The People’s Kitchen; Town Planning; The People’s Library; Sustainability; Sanitation.*²³⁶ In the long term, Occupy Sandy was a direct continuation of OWS which even managed to force the NYPD to cooperate. Other movements such as Rolling Jubilee were created in order to crowdfund debt abolition. The US experienced the world-wide conversation change from austerity to inequality, taking one step further into a better future. In these terms, which are the activists’ own, Occupy succeeded. And in other terms, which are our own, Occupy was a vernacular space.

²³⁴ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 30.

²³⁵ Sørensen and Johansen, ‘Nonviolent Conflict Escalation’.

²³⁶ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 26.

Chapter Four: Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park in Perspective

At the end of the day, the struggle of both these movements was one of legitimacy. Protesters claimed the mantle of “the 99%” and of “the people” as a way to both signify adversity towards the regime, and to build a collective sense of identity for themselves. This can also be seen in the language evoked throughout the past chapters: the spaces they occupied were not conquered, but *reclaimed*. The idea of critical utopia permeates this struggle – one of rallying the people against an unjust state, but also one of finding out what it means to be part of the 99% or the people, and what these things actually mean. This way of manifesting these expressions of legitimacy connects the two occupation movements. The nonviolence of these occupations, coupled with the fact that they displayed new and creative ways of achieving their goals makes them vernacular spaces. The typical actors were part of a transnational network of activists that shared tactics and iconography that transcended the differences that their backgrounds might have implied. In this sense, they were part of the same family of occupation movements from the year 2011.

However, things are not so simple. The previous two chapters compared the ideal type of vernacular spaces with the empirical evidence from the occupations. While it was argued that both occupations did fit in the ideal type, there are of course striking differences between the two events. These stem from a multitude of factors, such as historical context, cultural background, the response of the state, the type of regime protesters lived in, and others. As such, this chapter will look at both Occupy Wall Street and Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution through a comparative lens. The aim here is purely heuristic – not to argue which occupation was “better” or “more successful,” but to see what can we learn from this type of comparison. My expectation is that the learning process will be twofold – both related to how the ideal type is constructed and how to improve it, and to how scholars and activists can learn to study different but interrelated protest movements.

The comparison will be limited to the elements that strongly make each case part of the ideal type, and the elements that make it differ from it. This will lead to a better understanding of occupation movements in the 21st century, and will possibly make a case for the application of the ideal type, albeit in perhaps a modified form, to other such movements around the globe. For it is my belief, as stated throughout this thesis, that since capitalism has universally extended across the globe leaving no place untouched, resistance to it is also universal in certain ways.

The previous chapters revealed several significant characteristics of both OWS and Tahrir Square that can be viewed through a comparison. The first is the “vernacular” part in the vernacular spaces – the fact that both movements, in the eyes of their participants, succeeded in returning public space to the people, albeit for a short while. For OWS, this meant the myriad of tents dedicated to satisfying demonstrators’ primary needs, and the People’s Library. For Tahrir Square, this meant the coming together of all strands of Egyptian society in order to fight for the space and defend it against state incursions, while simultaneously building an encampment. The vernacular also extends to the renewed relationships that people built with one another in the occupation. For OWS, this meant the adoption of consensus politics and working groups in order to facilitate discussion about both trivial and critical issues to the camp, such as laundry and declarations. For Tahrir Square, this meant the return of the term “the people” to the actual people, away from the hands of the state’s propaganda machine. Both movements also claimed legitimacy for themselves in similar ways: by using the same type of language, and by expressing it against an unjust enemy, be it financial capital or an oppressive state.

The last two chapters also revealed traits that made the movements shy away from the ideal type. The most striking one is the mistakes as they were seen through the eyes of the protesters. These mistakes all lead to the same effect – disunity. For OWS, demonstrators after the camp was demolished lamented over the fact that the movement was not inclusive enough, especially to people of color and the homeless. For Tahrir Square, a similar lamentation was felt in the weeks and months after the perceived success of the occupation, when sectarianism and political divides quickly returned. This debate over unity affected the way protesters saw the outcome of the occupations as well – for OWS, a dream demolished by the police, and for the Egyptians, a successful deposition of an authoritarian dynasty. While speaking of the differences, it will be important to mention the contexts of the encampments as well. Egyptians had a powerful enemy in the state apparatus of Hosni Mubarak, an adversary which did not shy away at spilling blood in order to quell the manifestations. On the other hand, occupiers in the US did face the brutality of the police numerous times, but the bloodshed did not come even close. This lack of a deadly enemy and the need of conceptualizing an other might have contributed to the lack of unity in OWS. But more on that later.

Let us begin then with those characteristics that made both OWS and the Tahrir Square occupation adhere to the ideal type. As mentioned before, these are the elements which made both occupations

vernacular, in the sense that they returned public space to the people, and they reshaped the way individuals relate to themselves and to their collectives. Following other scholars, I've argued that the main vernacular characteristic of the Egyptian Revolution is the redefinition of the term "the people." The phrase *al-sha'b yurid* ("the people want") echoed all over the Middle East, adopted from a language "with no native speakers" – formal Arabic.²³⁷ Likewise, the occupiers in Zuccotti Park were drawn to Wall Street by the original Adbusters campaign that promoted the "we are the 99%" slogan, and the ensuing Internet pages that followed.²³⁸ Through the ideal type, we've seen that this is a rational attempt made by typical actors to negotiate power in the spaces they operate in. This is seen in the spaces they occupied as well, and how they transformed them. Both Wall Street and Tahrir Square had special significance for the movements, with the first being the site of financial capital in the United States and the latter being a place of celebration for Egyptians. The transformation of these spaces was similar, and it followed a model established before by other occupation movements such as the Zapatistas (although it can be argued that the Egyptians in Tahrir re-popularized occupations as a methodology).²³⁹

Both movements consisted of an experienced core of protesters, which had engaged in similar forms of street politics in the past. OWS drew from US social justice movements since the Second World War, which had an emphasis on daily practice and experimentation with new structures that met the needs of the community.²⁴⁰ Some examples of this include the Black Panther Party's breakfast and medical aid programs, the Women's Liberation Movement's autonomous health clinics, and other which have continued up until the early 2000s. The Egyptians' experience with street politics up until 2011 was deeply linked with the realities of living under a regime which did not tolerate serious forms of rebellion.²⁴¹ By the time of the Tahrir Square occupation, virtually every strand in Egyptian society had experienced some kind of police brutality, be it healthcare workers protesting wages in 2001 in Suez, fishery workers from Burg al-Burullus blockading major highways, or students joining pro-Palestine solidarity campaigns and youth groups of various political parties.²⁴² Moreover, it is a characteristic of contemporary protests movements that they do not only manifest themselves in occupied physical spaces, but in online ones as well.

²³⁷ Snowdon, *The People Are Not an Image*, 58.

²³⁸ 'We Are the 99 Percent'.

²³⁹ Ancelovici et al, *Street Politics in the Age of Austerity*, 132.

²⁴⁰ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 24.

²⁴¹ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 35.

²⁴² Sowers and Toensing, 36.

This makes it possible for a network to be created both locally and globally. The online network becomes a space where protesters not only challenge each other to respond by emulating or surpassing the actions recorded, but also provide an opportunity for the feelings and actions of individuals to be compared with others.²⁴³ Ayman El-Desouky calls videos and posts shared thus online *amāra*, a form of “socially cemented speech and embodied gestures” that are recognized by the participants and are invaluable to building solidarity and relations between them.²⁴⁴

Looking at these cases through the ideal type also showcased a key difference within the tactic of occupation, namely how hierarchical or horizontal these movements were. For example, it is true that on the ground, both New Yorkers and Egyptians engaged in the praxis of occupations. Demonstrators from both sides built camps, raised tents, and provided amenities for the community. However, those in Zuccotti Park had decided to occupy the Park in the first place through a different form of leadership than those in Tahrir – an assembly.²⁴⁵ The form of leadership assumed by each movement at the beginning had consequences over their developments. OWS was a root identity from which other collective identities derived, such as Occupy Oakland, Occupy London, Occupy Sandy, and others. The occupation of Tahrir Square on the other hand was part of a more divided cluster system of movements, which were in turn organized by several Facebook groups, such as “We are all Khaled Said,” the 6 April Youth Movement, Egypt’s National Association for Change, or the Mosireen Collective.²⁴⁶ However, the former page directed much of the activity on the ground, such as encouraging followers to participate in “Silent Stands,” or later to explicitly go to Tahrir and demand change.²⁴⁷ One could argue that such a vanguard-type organization was present in OWS through the initial post by Adbusters, but the problem with that argument is that OWS did not actually occupy Wall Street, but only Zuccotti Park. The decision to encamp there and explore other alternatives was arrived at through the General Assembly.²⁴⁸

²⁴³ Snowden, *The People Are Not an Image*, 205.

²⁴⁴ El-Desouky, *The Intellectual and the People*, 29–37.

²⁴⁵ Nunes, *Organisation of the Organisationless*, 36.

²⁴⁶ Kara Alaimo, ‘How the Facebook Arabic Page “We Are All Khaled Said” Helped Promote the Egyptian Revolution’, *Social Media + Society* 1, no. 2 (1 July 2015): 205630511560485, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604854>.

²⁴⁷ Alaimo, ‘How the Facebook Arabic Page “We Are All Khaled Said” Helped Promote the Egyptian Revolution’.

²⁴⁸ Besides, the Adbusters page and several others which tried to capture the movement such as Anonymous failed in doing so.

I believe that the leadership styles of both movements had consequences on the level of unity expressed in both movements, both during the events and afterwards. Let us talk about Egypt first. Wael Ghonim, the owner of the page “We are all Khaled Said” was described as being a “coach” for Egyptian revolutionaries.²⁴⁹ Ghonim also wrote a book titled “Revolution 2.0” in which he translated and explored most of the posts in his Facebook page. The page’s actual contents follow a leadership style found in vanguard parties: attempts at radicalizing followers, insisting that Egyptians can be agents of change if they follow instructions, and deeply action-oriented posts such as “if we all act, no one can stop us. And believe me, the army will take our side if we strategize correctly.”²⁵⁰ Ghonim’s long-term strategy was to slowly change the views of his followers so that in time they would be comfortable with greater levels of political dissent. He hand-picked activities that his followers would be open to do online and offline, and carefully changed language and tone to be more appealing to others.²⁵¹ In the end, Ghonim’s page was not entirely responsible for every action taken by Egyptians, but it proved to be a catalyzer for many who were waiting for one.

Scholars are unsure whether or not Ghonim’s page had such an important role to play in the developments of the Egyptian Revolution.²⁵² Scholars like Mona El-Ghobashy argue that there was already an experienced core of protesters made of three distinctive blocks (workplace protests, neighborhood protests, and associational protests) that coalesced during the events of January 2011.²⁵³ Howard and Hussain argue that there were four phases of the Arab Revolutions: a preparatory phase where activists found each other online; an ignition phase that triggered the

²⁴⁹ Alaimo, ‘How the Facebook Arabic Page “We Are All Khaled Said” Helped Promote the Egyptian Revolution’.

²⁵⁰ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 274–75.

²⁵¹ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, 61–67.

²⁵² The list is immense, but for example see: Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, ‘The Upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia: The Role of Digital Media’, *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 3 (2011): 35–48; Linda Herrera, *Revolution in the Age of Social Media: The Egyptian Popular Insurrection and the Internet* (Verso Trade, 2014); Nahed Eltantawy and Julie B. Wiest, ‘The Arab Spring| Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory’, *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 18; Nadine Kassem Chebib and Rabia Minatullah Sohail, ‘The Reasons Social Media Contributed to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution’, *International Journal of Business Research and Management (IJBRM)* 2, no. 3 (2011): 139–62; Taghreed Alqudsi-Ghabra, ‘Creative Use of Social Media in the Revolutions of Tunisia, Egypt & Libya.’, *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 6, no. 6 (2012); Amir Hatem Ali, ‘The Power of Social Media in Developing Nations: New Tools for Closing the Global Digital Divide and Beyond’, *Harv. Hum. Rts. J.* 24 (2011): 185.

²⁵³ Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 41.

population; street protests; and the climax of the movement.²⁵⁴ Not only that, but even when he got arrested by State security forces in January 27th 2011, the page was updated by his friends, and his supporters still followed.²⁵⁵ This suggests that the followers of the Facebook page were not necessarily looking for Ghonim's leadership, but for some leadership in general.

Testimonies from those on the ground seem to corroborate the fact that the page did affect their relationship to the protest movement. Mona Prince, a university professor in Suez, describes herself as not belonging "to any political party or particular intellectual school. I believe in freedom of expression."²⁵⁶ She mentions that she joined the protests on January 25th 2011 "almost one hour before the demonstrations were supposed to start, as stated on the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said."²⁵⁷ Sara Hany, a visual artists from Alexandria, remembers being amused with her friends at the notion of the revolution being amused with a time and date on Facebook: "How can you organize a revolution and give it a date?! A revolution just bursts out with no date. Giving it a date will make the police and the regime ready to crush it."²⁵⁸ Maha Hindawy, a manager of a car company in Cairo also joined the Facebook page, and notes how it "was very well planned in terms of where to meet, what to chant, what to carry and what not to carry, and acceptable types of shoes."²⁵⁹ Al-Mutazbellah Ahmad Ali al-Abd, an Arabic instructor on Cairo, also mentions the very specific instructions received on Facebook: "on Friday, January 28, I headed, as did thousands of Egyptians, to one of the many meeting points previously determined on Facebook."²⁶⁰

Does that mean that the revolution in Tahrir was less vernacular than expected, since it was not a movement of the people, but more of an organized attempt by a core of Internet activists? Not necessarily. While several key events and marches were planned on Facebook, activists remember that they had no end date or plan. As such, planned events such as the "Silent Stands" morphed into marches towards Tahrir Square – not because the organizers on Facebook planned it, but because the people willed it. The taking of the Square, its occupation, and its defense from state encroachment are still spontaneous actions that belonged to those on the ground, with the Facebook

²⁵⁴ Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, 'The Upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia: The Role of Digital Media', *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 3 (2011): 41–42.

²⁵⁵ Alaimo, 'How the Facebook Arabic Page "We Are All Khaled Said" Helped Promote the Egyptian Revolution'.

²⁵⁶ Prince, 'Funny Beginnings and Happy Endings', 60.

²⁵⁷ Prince, 'Funny Beginnings and Happy Endings', 61.

²⁵⁸ Hany, 'It Is Just the Beginning', 67.

²⁵⁹ Maha Hindawy, 'My Egyptian Revolution', in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, 75.

²⁶⁰ al-Abd, 'The Bullets Are Still in My Leg', 81.

group trying to stay ahead of the events. In a way, this proves even more the presence of typical actors in the ideal space, for we can identify two main strands: the protesters on the ground, and the activists on Facebook who tried to negotiate events and rationalize best decisions and courses for the Revolution.

However, I argue that this is also why the unity of the protesters quickly faded once that enemy was out of sight. As mentioned before, the main empirical factor that distinguishes the Egyptian Revolution from the ideal type is the lack of unity after the protests, when Egyptians quickly cleaned Tahrir Square, and with it also their attempts at community building. Since the movement was not built on the ground, protesters did not have the opportunity to engage in decision-making themselves. While post-January 2011 events showcase a return to community-building, particularly through events such as “Cinema Tahrir,” it is important to note that these were also organized from a top-down vantage through organizations such as the Mosireen Collective.²⁶¹ Egyptians have since endured much hardship, and waves of protests continue until the present day. It is perhaps also important to note that while the recent 2020-2021 protests also started online under the hashtag “WeDontWantYou” (a call for a referendum to dismiss president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi), the protests themselves were quite decentralized in nature.²⁶² The argument I’ve made in Chapter Two about the long-term consequences of the protests in January 2011 is becoming clearer. However, the case remains that in the period following the protests, the Egyptians themselves lamented over their lack of unity, and this is partly due to how the protests were organized. This is more evident when compared to OWS, its style of leadership, and consequences. While Ghonim’s page provided a hierarchical form of leadership for the Egyptians in Tahrir, the occupiers of Zuccotti Park worked within a more or less horizontal framework. I say more or less since as I’ve shown in Chapter Three, while the core of the OWS demonstrators organized within General Assemblies, they were quite wary about who joined them. While for example women of color were generally accepted once they raised their voice, the space for them to actually raise it was not always there. As such, while Manissa McCleave Maharawal is an exceptional individual

²⁶¹ Menna Taher, ‘Egyptian Cinema in 2011 between Activism and Art - 25 January: Revolution Continues - Egypt’, *Ahram Online*, accessed 22 February 2021, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/114/30336/Egypt/-January-Revolution-continues/Egyptian-Cinema-in-between-activism-and-art.aspx>.

²⁶² ‘Online Calls for Anti-Sisi Protests in Egypt May Fall Flat’, *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, 7 September 2020, accessed 20 May 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/09/egypt-anti-sisi-journalists-freedom-activists.html>; ‘One “Killed” in Egypt as Protesters Demand El-Sisi Resign’, *Al Jazeera* 26 September 2020, accessed 20 May 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/26/one-killed-in-egypt-as-protestors-demand-el-sisi-resign>.

in the sense that she took up the space necessary to change the wording of the Declaration of the Occupation of Wall Street, against a collective not that sensitive to race issues.²⁶³ Her action is admirable, but in a movement of the 99% one should not require additional courage in order for her voice to be heard. This is of course notwithstanding the homeless participants, who were practically invisible unless they were causing “trouble.”²⁶⁴ We are faced then with a movement that seemed to be by all means disunited, but which continued to show unity even after the Zuccotti Park encampment was destroyed by the police. The answer does lie in the forms of organization taken by OWS, but additional context is needed, especially in relation with Tahrir Square.

OWS did not have a visible enemy. By this I mean that while financial capital did lead to the ruination of many people’s lives (one only needs to look at the dedicated Tumblr page of the #wearethe99% movement), it did not put occupiers in a life or death situation during the occupation. This is in stark comparison with the experience of Egyptian occupiers, which not only had to fight with the state security apparatus for Tahrir Square, but also had to defend it against police and hired thugs (so called *baltagis*). Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soeuf recalls her experience on the 3rd of February 2011, walking around central Cairo:

I go to look at the front line of yesterday’s battle. The pavements are broken up and the corrugated-metal sheets are stacked in case they are needed again. “Don’t assume treachery, but be on your guard”: men lie on the treads of the army tanks to prevent them moving. The regime’s *baltagis* have been beaten back but they’re regrouping on the flyover. Lines of young men with linked arms protect the entrance to the Midan. The clinic that was set up when the *baltagis* were beaten back hums with activity. Doctors in white coats change dressings on wounds, take details. Two lawyers—in their legal court gowns—take statements. A woman sees me writing and comes up: “Write,” she says, “write that my son is in there with the *shabab*.²⁶⁵ [...] My son, it took an hour to dig out the pellets from his legs.”²⁶⁶

This scene is unlike any occupation present on American soil. While OWS protesters did have an enemy in the police, and while that enemy did respond with an unproportionally high degree of violence, they did not shoot live ammunition or bring tanks to Zuccotti Park. The only instance

²⁶³ Maharawal, ‘So Real It Hurts. Notes on Occupy Wall Street’, 187.

²⁶⁴ Herring and Gluck, ‘The Homeless Question’, in *Occupy!*.

²⁶⁵ In translation, “youths.”

²⁶⁶ Soeuf, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, 121–22.

that comes close to this type of state sanctioned violence against protesters was during the 2020 #BlackLivesMatter protests, when the use of “less than lethal” weapons sparked a nation-wide discussion about how the police handles unrest, one that continues to the moment of this thesis’ writing.²⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the occupiers of Zuccotti Park and other encampments during the year 2011 in the US were faced with a challenge. While they mentioned the need for a “Tahrir Moment,” it was difficult for them to conceptualize who that moment would be against. After all, who is the 99%, and who is the 1%? I’ve already argued that it was hard to conceptualize a united 99%, as marginalized groups, racial minorities, and women were assumed to have a shared experience with the core of (mostly) white, young men. This also exceeded demographics, as Amy Schragger Lang argues: “Who counts as the 99%? Cops? Ron Paul libertarians? Sectarian leftists? Can a movement committed to inclusivity draw a political boundary around itself? Must it allow full participation to all comers? By what means can these questions be decided, and how can a decision, once reached, be enforced?”²⁶⁸ For Egyptians, it was easier to conceptualize themselves as a united people, since they had a strong “other.” But for OWS protesters, that other needed conceptualization itself.

In recent years the term “othering” has escaped the confines of academia and is now being used more widely.²⁶⁹ It still bears some explanation here however, in the context of identity building during the vernacular space. In the case of the Egyptian Revolution, I’ve argued that the Egyptians recaptured the term “the people” from the state apparatus, effectively reshaping it in order to fit their albeit short vision of life and politics. This was possible due to the fact that the Egyptian state was a strong other, through its use of violence and coercion against anyone who opposed it.

²⁶⁷ See for instance: Eric Leonard, ‘Federal Judge Limits LAPD Use of “Less Lethal” Weapons at Protests’, *NBC Los Angeles*, April 19 2021, accessed 21 May 2021, <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/lapd-less-lethal-weapons-judge-protests-black-lives-matter-george-floyd/2576870/>; Oscar Schwartz, ‘After the Protests, Lingering Trauma: The Scars of “Non-Lethal” Weapons’, *the Guardian*, 12 August 2020, accessed 7 June 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/12/george-floyd-protests-lingering-trauma-non-lethal-weapons-scars>; Jordan Culver, “‘It Seems Systematic’: Doctors Group Finds 115 Cases of Head Injuries from Crowd Control Weapons during Nationwide Protests”, *USA Today*, 14 September 2020, accessed 21 May 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/09/14/analysis-115-head-injuries-rubber-bullets-less-lethal-weapons/3468771001/>.

²⁶⁸ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*, 28.

²⁶⁹ See for example John A. Powell, ‘Us vs Them: The Sinister Techniques of “Othering” – and How to Avoid Them’, *the Guardian*, 8 November 2017, accessed 6 June 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/08/us-vs-them-the-sinister-techniques-of-othering-and-how-to-avoid-them>.

Othering in this sense is a way of self-identity, as conceiving another group as one's binary opposite allows the in-group to more easily define itself. This definition mostly follows from Said's work on Orientalism, but recent scholars have expanded on that and argued that the dichotomy between the outsider group and the in-group is not always absolute.²⁷⁰ This is also exemplified at times in the Tahrir Square occupation by protesters that have tried to argue with the State apparatus, stating that perhaps Hosni Mubarak is not aware of the plight of his people: "Maybe he's not guilty. Maybe nobody tells him the truth..."²⁷¹ Nevertheless, the few examples such as this are but exceptions from the rule. Egyptians did not struggle to create an insider-group identity, but they did struggle to keep it after the dust settled and Hosni Mubarak was deposed.

The same is not true for OWS. While the question of who the 99% was pertinent throughout the occupation, the 1% remained even more mysterious. Plenty of those who would technically be in the 1% actually showed up "in support" of the Zuccotti Park encampment, such as Yoko Ono, Kanye West, or Russell Simmons, the latter who owns a credit card company.²⁷² Since it was unsure exactly who or what OWS was opposing, even those who would be in the opposing side could join the protesters, in good faith or otherwise. Moreover, since the enemy of the movement was hard to grasp, protesters couldn't rely on othering so much in order to form their own collective identity. One would assume that in this case said collective identity would be weak, and crumble after the movement would be defeated. However, I've argued that OWS's legacy is perhaps stronger than the 2011 encampment itself, with "occupy" movements continuing to the present day.

This is where I believe the argument made earlier about the type of leadership in these movements comes in. While those in Zuccotti Park did not have to fight for their lives to continue the occupation, the fact that they did not face a strong other meant that they resorted to organizing on the ground and forming their identity based on that. The same happened in Tahrir, with many onlookers pleasantly surprised by the sense of mutual aid in Tahrir, but the fact that their organization mostly came from above did not help in solidifying the collective. A form of

²⁷⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Tarak Barkawi and Ketih Stanski, *Orientalism and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Zachary Smith, *Age of Fear: Othering and American Identity during World War I* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 7.

²⁷¹ FreedomRevolution25, 'Day One of Egypt's Freedom Revolution | January 25, 2011', 24 January 2012, accessed 6 June 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Co-oJUK_P_A.

²⁷² Shiv Malik, 'Celebrities Turn up to Show Their Support for Occupy Protests', the Guardian, 28 October 2011, accessed 6 June 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/28/celebrities-support-occupy-protests>.

collective identity was necessary for the Egyptians as well, since one required a certain type of support from a trusted network in order to risk her life for the cause.²⁷³ However, I argue that this was a continuation from the previous experiences that virtually every group in Egyptian society had with police brutality, which only expanded during the events of January 2011. The Egyptian Revolution was merely a coalescence of these different groups, who at a basic level also managed their identity in opposition to the dictatorship they lived under. This form of organization coupled with direct instructions from above and other regional uprisings proved highly effective in deposing said dictatorship, but not so well-equipped in dealing with the aftermath. On the other side, while OWS also had a wealth of experienced activists they did not face a regime so eager to escalate violence (apart from the eviction and clearing of US encampments). American occupiers therefore spent their energy building a movement that resembled a society where they would have already won. This explains the People's Library, the working groups, and consensus politics, and the attitude of the protesters who called the movement an "experiment" or a "dream."²⁷⁴ This also links with criticism of the movement from the left, like those of Slavoj Žižek, who urged occupiers to not "fall in love with themselves" after the occupation is done: "we will someday just go home and then we will meet once a year, drinking beer and nostalgically remembering what a nice time we had here."²⁷⁵ The experimental nature of OWS made the movement illegible to some onlookers, but its spirit continued after the occupation, in events such as Occupy Sandy, Rolling Jubilee, and others.²⁷⁶ In that sense, even if the vernacular space ceased to exist, the typical actors continued their endeavors. This is in opposition with the actors of Tahrir, who not only stopped operating once their social action was concluded, but removed the vernacular space by cleaning it up the next day, effectively removing any trace of the cooperation they had in those 18 days together.

In the end, I believe that both OWS and the Egyptian Revolution do belong in the same family of occupation movements of the year 2011. I argued that while both occupations fit within the ideal type created in Chapter One, they did so with variances between them. In this sense, we discovered that the occupations were not a tactic on their own, but included many types of organization within them. The striking difference was between the hierarchical model adopted by Egyptian

²⁷³ Doug McAdam and Ronnelle Paulsen, 'Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism', *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 3 (1993): 640–67.

²⁷⁴ Lang, *Dreaming in Public*; Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*.

²⁷⁵ Žižek, 'Don't Fall in Love With Yourself', 69.

²⁷⁶ See the conclusion to Chapter Three.

revolutionaries, and the horizontal one taken by OWS. They each came with their advantages and disadvantages, and were firmly established in the historical and political context of their appearance. Through this comparison, I argued that the continuation of the unity presented in the occupations varied between Egypt and the United States. This also shows that observers need to practice care when addressing the “success” of these movements. In hindsight it is possible to say that the Egyptian Revolution “failed,” as Egyptians were quickly faced with another dictatorship in the following years after the occupation of Tahrir. However, in the immediate period, they believed they had won. The same observation can be made for OWS as well – while the movement was deemed a failure since the encampments were cleared out by the police, the NYPD itself required the cooperation of Occupy Sandy when dealing with its aftermath. The actors are what shaped these movements, and their actions after the spaces they inhabited were over are perhaps most important. This is something to consider for scholars if they want to explore more cases through the ideal type of vernacular spaces.

Conclusion: Occupy Everything?

My hope is that this thesis has at least begun the discussion on the possibility of comparing different occupation movements through the use of an ideal type. I argued that while the creation of such an ideal type is tenuous, it can lead to the discovery of empirical facts about occupation movements, through a comparison which would not be self-evident otherwise. But where does that lead us? In the Introduction, I stated that my wish for this thesis is to be relevant for both scholars and activists, and anything in between. In the following lines I will conclude by showing the relevancy of such an endeavor for those groups, and by highlighting further possibilities that this kind of comparison can have. I will also describe what this means for the ideal type created within this thesis, and how it could be improved on in the future. Finally, a few words about the occupation movements themselves are needed, as at the time of the writing of this thesis we have already passed their ten year anniversary.

Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution were both vernacular events. This is both in the sense of the demonstrators trying to build a common language of belonging with each other, and in their attempts to recapture public space for the masses. The latter part was the unifying force in this comparison, and it is why I decided to create an ideal type based on it – that of the vernacular space. The iconic moments and images of the global revolutions of 2011 were not of individuals, but of spaces. My wish was to create a theoretical framework based on occupation as a methodology. The vernacular space had commonalities all around the globe, and a comparison between two seemingly diametrically opposed cases showcases these similarities: the specialized tents and working groups, presence of utopian thought, creative and sometimes humorous messaging, and nonviolent approach. Moreover, the typical actors operating within these spaces were part of an international network that shared tactics and footage of demonstrations, then tried to apply them on a local level with historical context in mind. They were rationally capable of negotiating power relations in their group and with the state, were knowledgeable of their tactics and perceived outcomes, were aware of what an occupation entails, and although they committed mistakes, they were willing to solve them or at least discuss them with their peers. Finally, the vernacular space added to my argument that in a world where capitalism has universally spread across the globe, resistance to it is also universal, with the added contexts and characteristics of each specific region.

Of course, the aim of this thesis was also to showcase what differences there are between these two cases, apart from the obvious ones. While it is easy to see how the Egyptian Revolution was more or less classic in its degrees of violence and demands for regime change, while OWS was a more soft revolution which experimented with another form of democracy, the ideal type highlighted other differences that were shrouded otherwise. Through the use of vernacular spaces I have argued that there were different degrees of unity between OWS and Egyptians in Tahrir Square, which became evident for the demonstrators on the ground only months after. Through a comparison between the two I made the point that the type of organization found in these two movements, although relevant, shaped the way protesters formed networks with each other. As such, while Egyptians in those 18 days of occupying Tahrir were pleasantly surprised at the degree of unity shown, they quickly found out it was temporary.

This has consequences for activists interested in drawing inspiration from past or even simultaneous protest movements. As shown in the previous chapters, demonstrators and occupiers were part of a global network that interacted with each other. Activists in the United States during the 2011 occupations were asking other Americans to join them in what would have been their “Tahrir Moment.” However, activists also need to be aware of the differences present even in what may seem as identical methodologies of protest. During the Egyptian Revolution, Egyptians adopted a more hierarchical style of leadership, where everything from education to protest directions was handled by a central authority in the form of a Facebook group. This led to a higher degree of initial unity, especially when faced with a brutally repressive state apparatus. On the other side, occupiers in Zuccotti Park were disappointed at the lack of unity originally shown, especially if they were persons of color, women, or impoverished. However, those brave enough to challenge this and engage in consensus politics contributed to a newfound collective that operated long after the encampment was destroyed by the NYPD. The vernacular type thus revealed that the occupation was not a methodology of protest in itself, as the leadership style in the occupation could vary with drastic consequences.

Scholars can also learn from this type of comparison, especially when it comes to the ideal type employed. While the ideal type helped in revealing some hidden characteristics of these protest movements and what they meant for the unity of the demonstrators, the empirical facts on the ground also affected its strength. This is not surprising, as an ideal type comparison is supposed to teach us something about both the actual events and the theoretical device used to compare them.

As such, this requires some musing. The advantages of using such a comparison are manifold, especially if one wishes to look at categories which present a large variety within them such as “occupation movements.” However, the one point I found difficult to showcase was about the typical actor not committing any mistakes. It is not to say that demonstrators in Tahrir Square or Zuccotti Park did not make any errors – that would be impossible, simply on the virtue that they are human. What I struggled with is associating the sometimes gruesome task of protesting with mistakes, especially in the case of Tahrir Square. That is why I have instead chosen to discuss what the demonstrators themselves considered mistakes. For OWS, this was the inability of the privileged core to see beyond their ingroup, and exclude people of color, women, and the homeless from the occupation, either willingly or unwillingly. For Tahrir, it was the inability of protesters to remain united after the occupation was “successful,” and perhaps their militancy in decreeing some protesters as useless, such as “the party of the couch.” I hope that the ethical conundrum here is evident, as I would find it difficult to say that “the party of the couch” was mistaken in not going outside, when people were actively being murdered by the state apparatus. Perhaps another way of viewing the actions of typical actors and their unintended consequences is needed. Mistakes in the ideal type are just a “wrong” type of action that is still invested with the same meaning as any other “right” action, but for some reason fail in delivering the intended consequence. Instead of being a category on their own, mistakes could be integrated in the adequacy of meaning and behavior, or simply used as an empirical fact when protesters choose to talk about them. Of course, one also needs to be careful about what is included as a mistake, as too many of them would make the ideal type fall apart as a consequence of its actors not relating at all to the ones found on the ground.

As per further research opportunities for scholars, there are aplenty. This thesis was originally meant to include more case studies, such as the Indignados in Spain, the student riots in the UK, other countries during the Arab Spring, and other occupied spaces in the United States, all during the 2011 global movements. This was not feasible, both because of time constraints, and because of the unfortunate events of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they do present viable avenues for myself and others to compare, using the ideal type. After all, one of the arguments made in this thesis is that they are in fact comparable, one only needs to show to what degree. Moreover, research can also be done on the ideal type itself. The one created during the writing of this thesis was prolific, but I do recognize that it needs refining, especially with the mistakes part discussed

above. A possible collaboration between experts in comparative history and researchers interested in the empirical facts that drove the revolutions of 2011 would in my opinion be a valuable long-term research project, which might translate into a PhD in the future. The questions of inclusion and belonging are also relevant, especially in a non-combative space like OWS where protesters were more picky about who could actually be in the movement. Judith Butler's statement about "bodies occupying space" seems to be over-generalizing, as not every body was deemed equal by demonstrators. I do believe this theory could be extended to further cover the typical actors in these spaces, as I have merely focused on their behaviors and meanings in this thesis, not necessarily on their bodily presence and its impact on the spaces.

In the end, the spirit of both Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution lives on. However, there is still much to learn. During the 2020 #BlackLivesMatter protests, an autonomous zone was declared in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood on the 8th of June.²⁷⁷ It had many names, but they settled on Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ). A comparison could be made with Occupy Wall Street, although the CHAZ's militancy and its repression were much violent, including from paramilitary groups such as the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer.²⁷⁸ However, there is an aspect that is similar to the Zuccotti Park encampment, and that is an elevated sense of disunity, especially on racial lines. On the 20th of June, two black men were killed following arguments which included racist slurs: a 19 year old by the name of Horace Lorenzo Anderson Jr., and a 33 year old named DeJuan Young.²⁷⁹ Another victim was shot on the 21st of June, another on the 23rd, and 2 more on

²⁷⁷ There was ample coverage of this in the media, from all sides of the political spectrum. For example, see 'Seattle Protesters Set up "autonomous Zone" after Police Evacuate Precinct', *NBC News*, 12 June 2020, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/seattle-protesters-set-autonomous-zone-after-police-evacuate-precinct-n1230151>; 'Seattle-Area Protests: Live Updates on Saturday, June 13', *The Seattle Times*, 13 June 2020, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-area-protests-live-updates-on-saturday-june-13/>; 'Protesters Have Occupied Part of Seattle's Capitol Hill for a Week. Here's What It's like Inside', *CNN*, 15 June 2020, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/15/us/seattle-capitol-hill-autonomous-zone-monday/index.html>; Katelyn Burns, 'Seattle's Newly Police-Free Neighborhood, Explained', *Vox*, 16 June 2020, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/6/16/21292723/chaz-seattle-police-free-neighborhood>.

²⁷⁸ "'Remember Who We're Fighting For": The Uneasy Existence Of Seattle's Protest Camp', *NPR*, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/17/879041066/seattle-strangers-discuss-racial-injustice-while-protesting>; Kelly Weill, 'The Far Right Is Stirring Up Violence at Seattle's Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone', *The Daily Beast*, 16 June 2020, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/seattle-capitol-hill-autonomous-zone-visited-by-violent-proud-boys>.

²⁷⁹ 'Teen Who Died in CHOP Shooting Wanted "to Be Loved," Those Who Knew Him Recall', *The Seattle Times*, 22 June 2020, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/teen-who-died-in-chop-shooting-wanted-to-be-loved-those-who-knew-him-recall/>; 'Man Critically Injured in CHOP Shooting Says He Was the Victim of a Racial Attack', *KIRO 7 News Seattle*, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/man-critically-injured-chop-shooting-says-he-was-victim-racial-attack/ZHXSJZLBEBGSHOUOO3FMWKQGF/>.

the 29th.²⁸⁰ An argument is to be made here about racial conflicts escalating in the United States after the election of Donald Trump, but that is for another research paper. Still, it is clear that occupations are still a popular form of protest, but remain imperfect by themselves, as it is the individuals who define them.

The events of the Egyptian Revolution also reverberated in the recent past as well. Observers stated that “protests are making a comeback” in the Arab world in the years 2018-2020, but the truth is that they haven’t really stopped since 2011 – they just received less coverage.²⁸¹ In Egypt, parliamentary elections were held in January 2012, which was what Egyptians fought for during their 18 days in Tahrir. However, a survey made between August and September 2011 revealed that 70.6% of the population thought that only chaos will ensue after the elections.²⁸² When Mohamed Morsi was elected president on the 30th of June, many Egyptians were unhappy and protested, culminating in approximately 10 million protesters flooding Tahrir on the 30th of June 2013. On the 3rd of July, the army stepped in and General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi took over the reins of power. Egyptians have been protesting his rule since.²⁸³ However, some report that this time around the protests are more decentralized and focus on occupying rural areas, since the government has banned Facebook and heavily cracks down on urban mobilizing.²⁸⁴ This long wave of protests has not received much attention, partly because the Arab Spring is still seen as a

²⁸⁰ ‘Shooting at Seattle’s CHOP Protest Site Kills 16-Year-Old Boy, Leaves 14-Year-Old Seriously Injured’, *The Seattle Times*, 29 June 2020, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/crime/shooting-at-seattles-chop-protest-site-leaves-2-in-critical-condition/>; ‘Seattle Mayor Proposes \$20M in Cuts to Police to Help Budget’, *AP News*, 21 April 2021, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/seattle-shootings-us-news-wa-state-wire-police-ee8ed2680ebbd15cef8b3b899d2b7c1>; ‘17-Year-Old Shot in Seattle Protest Zone’, *CNN*, 22 June 2020, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/22/us/seattle-teen-shot-chop/index.html>.

²⁸¹ ‘Talk of Spring - Protests Are Making a Comeback in the Arab World |’, *The Economist*, 29 February 2020, accessed 6 June 2021, <http://archive.ph/jb8Gf>.

²⁸² Alsaleh, ‘Introduction’, in *Voices of the Arab Spring*, 53.

²⁸³ ‘Online Calls for Anti-Sisi Protests in Egypt May Fall Flat’, *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, September 2020, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/09/egypt-anti-sisi-journalists-freedom-activists.html>; ‘Anti-Gov’t Protests in Egypt’s Giza amid Tight Security Presence’, *Al Jazeera*, 21 September 2020, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/21/anti-govt-protests-in-egypts-giza-amid-tight-security-presence>; ‘Demonstrations in Egypt Continue for Third Day’, *Middle East Monitor*, 23 September 2020, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200923-demonstrations-in-egypt-continue-for-third-day/>.

²⁸⁴ ‘Egypt Police Kill Luxor Man Then Shoot Mourners at His Funeral’, *Middle East Monitor*, 1 October 2020, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201001-egypt-police-kill-luxor-man-then-shoot-mourners-at-his-funeral/>; ‘One “Killed” in Egypt as Protesters Demand El-Sisi Resign’, *Al Jazeera*, 26 September 2020, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/26/one-killed-in-egypt-as-protesters-demand-el-sisi-resign>.

once in a lifetime opportunity for the region, which was squandered. This may also be part of the aforementioned “Arab street” stereotype.

Nevertheless, it seems that occupation movements are here to stay. It is then our responsibility as scholars to study them, but not as separate entities. Occupations should be seen as a global phenomenon, both because of the spread of capitalism worldwide and because of the Internet networks that activists engage in. The Coronavirus pandemic has made it clear that the wealth divide is not getting any smaller, and that more people are willing to take action against it. The occupation of public squares is not only a way to vent frustration against a state which does not care about the commons, but also a way for protesters to find a sense of community and organize themselves democratically. This, coupled with the fact that they are impossible to ignore by the media and state apparatus, makes occupations relevant for both scholars and activists alike. It is unclear what the future hold for occupations, but this scholar is willing to report on them from the front lines, for that is the best way to engage and learn with them.

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