CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE

Faculty of Humanities

Ioannis – Panagiotis Paraskevas,

BA in Political Science and Public Administration

The Process of Abstraction

Master's Thesis

Prague 2023

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Historical Sociology

Ioannis – Panagiotis Paraskevas,

BA in Political Science and Public Administration

The Process of Abstraction

Master's Thesis

.

Prague 2023

Statement

I hereby declare that I have written this diploma thesis solely by myself and I agree with its eventual publication in print or electronic form. All sources and literature have been properly cited. This work has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, June 29th, 2023   Ioannis – Panagiotis Paraskevas

Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like, as is customary on such occasions, to express my heartfelt thanks to some of the people who helped me in writing this study. First of all, Mr. Prof. Adam Coman, who agreed to be my supervisor on this academic journey and whose advice and guidance were instrumental in bringing my idea to fruition. Then I want to thank my parents who taught me to fight and dream, not to give up and to raise my head eight times if I fall eight times. Finally, I want to thank my dear Angeliki with all my sweetness. She knows the reasons.

Abstract

The process of abstraction is a theoretical experiment to understand the social change that takes place within capitalism. To understand this experiment, the study deals with the historical and critical review of social movements from the 1960s to the present day. In addition, mass communication media are analyzed with particular emphasis on the modern medium of social media, as social dimensions of technological developments. The question of identities, but also of their composition in the period under review, plays an important role for the action dynamics of social movements. The challenges faced by individuals and social movements, in the process of deepening capitalism under the ideological hegemony of capitalism, are targeted by this research. The juxtaposition of the evolution of social movements, technological developments as well as the functioning of neoliberalism in modern capitalism, composes the puzzle of the process of abstraction.

Key words: process of abstraction, social movements, social media neoliberalism

Theoretical Framework

I started working on the idea of this master thesis during the first year of my master studies at Charles University in Prague. My first contact with the theorists of Historical Sociology was during my undergraduate studies at the National Kapodistrian University of Athens in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. The academic course "Comparative Politics: Revolution, Parliamentarism and Dictatorship" with Mr. Professor Pantelis Lekkas, was for me a relationship of love and academic interest in Historical Sociology. Since then, I started reading Barrington Moore, Karl Polanyi, Perry Anderson, Charles Tilly, Emmanuel Wallerstein and others. What shocked me and still shocks me is the idea of social change. Questions such as: How does social change take place, who are the agents of social change, or how did we move from feudalism to capitalism, are some examples of my academic concerns.

All this theoretical arsenal gave birth to the idea of a process of abstraction, i.e. a theoretical model that seeks to explain a process of social transition within capitalism. Immediately after conceiving my idea, I turned to Charles University's excellent new Professor of Historical Sociology, Mr. Professor Adam Coman, and discussed my idea with him. With great willingness, he accepted my proposal to act as supervisor of my master's thesis.

His prompting to incorporate an example into the process of abstraction, cultivated the idea of dealing with social movements, as a field I had already dealt with in my bachelor thesis "*Social Movements: The case of the Yellow Vests*". So, I began to work on my idea in this light, ending up in a historical review and critical treatment of social movements from 1960 to the present day. To strengthen my arguments, regarding the theory of social movements, I relied on the analysis of Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani *"Social Movements: An Introduction "*. There I found the necessary tools to theoretically support the analysis of social movements. Additionally, for the historical overview of social movements I relied on Charles Tilly 's classic analysis *"Social Movements 1768-2004"* as the most reliable source of information on the history of social movements.

However, as my own analysis would also cover the social movements of today, I had to find another source. Paolo Gerbaudo 's analysis *"The Mask and the Flag: Populism, Citizenism, and Global Protest"* gave me the solution. Gerbaudo analyzes

the square movements that emerged as a result of the global financial crisis of 2008. His contemporary perspective (the book was published in 2017) helped me a lot in projecting the comparison of social movements of the past with today.

In the continuation of my reflection on the contents of the master thesis, the importance of social media emerged - as a wider framework of influence of technological developments (emergence of the Internet) - and their relationship with social movements. Manuel Castells 's analysis *"Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age"* meshed perfectly with Gerbaudo 's analysis and together they offered me critical reflection on the social movements of the same era and helped me in my analysis of social media. In fact, Castells 's idea of the gap between " urban space " and " cyber space " in his attempt to describe the action of social movements during the Internet era, proved decisive for my own analysis for two reasons: first, because I disagreed with the positive possibilities of this situation described by Castells and secondly, because it gave birth to the idea of studying social media per se.

While searching for literature on social media, I realized that there is no particular literature related to social movements, so I took the opportunity to list my personal views on the issue. Thus, I utilized Karl Marx 's concept of alienation to construct the modern typology of alienation that social media brings to individuals. In addition, I utilized Max Weber 's concept of the rationalization process, to describe the utilization of effective business practices by smaller firms in an effort to maximize their profits.

The next element of my analysis was neoliberalism. The analysis of neoliberalism emerged as an imperative both from the analyzes of Castells and Gerbaudo and from my own reflections. For the historical material of the emergence of neoliberalism, I turned to David Harvey 's analysis *"A Brief History of Neoliberalism "*, which despite my strong opposition to the issue provides a timeless historical material and an analysis that does not go unnoticed. Again, however, here for the analysis of neoliberalism I relied on my own thoughts to prepare the introduction of the process of abstraction.

For the process of abstraction, I needed the analysis of all of the above as evidence of my theoretical experiment and one more element that runs through all my thinking. This element is found in Max Weber 's work *"The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"*. In this monumental analysis, Weber's idea that *spirit* constituted

the historical condition of the transition from feudalism to capitalism reveals two dimensions of my own thinking: first, my emphasis is on action rather than structure, and second, the prominent importance of ideas as an element of social change. Therefore, the process of abstraction presents three levels of analysis, which use the material of analysis for social movements and social media, as evidence of change and neoliberalism, as a legitimizing element of change. Whereas the conception of the process of abstraction itself placed at the level of mental reflection.

Regarding the practical structural elements of the master thesis, it was written in Athens in June 2023 and is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, the historical review of the evolution of social movements from the 1960s to the present day and their critical overview is listed. In the second chapter, we find the analysis of social media as a means of communication that runs through all human activity, as well as its relationship with subjects and social movements. In the third chapter, we deal with the evolution of neoliberalism and its emergence as hegemonic. And in the fourth chapter, the process of abstraction is listed, in an attempt to combine all the above analyses, as well as its emergence as a political experiment that explains social change within the system of capitalism.

Our methodology is based on the historical overview of the developments of social movements, as well as the comparison between them in terms of the utilization of the technological means they have at their historical juncture. In addition, the analysis of the evolution of the technological media itself focuses on a case study of the dimensions of social media and their effects on individuals and social movements. Regarding the analysis of neoliberalism, we proceed to a historical review, so that we can observe its evolution culminating in the achievement of its hegemony. To make its hegemonic dimension clearer, we will deal with its relationship with individuals, with social movements and the state. Finally, about the process of abstraction we will utilize all of our above analyzes with the aim of constructing our theoretical experiment.

Regarding the citation system, we chose APA .

Introduction

We will start our historical wandering from the social movements of the 60s, as the most emblematic social movement of the previous century. Their dimension is so symbolic and large that it acts as a beacon for the next generations of social movements. We will continue our imaginary historical journey to the popular protests of '89, as a pivotal point, as it coincides as a historical juncture with the year of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The differences between them in this period of about 30 years are noticeable. A generation has already changed and the transformations that have taken place allow us to make comparisons. But what about the movements of the 21st century? What is their relationship with the mass media? How do they use them for their organization? We will be asked to answer all these questions by studying the movements of the beginning of the 21st century. Then, we will move to the social movements of the "squares" after the end of the first decade of the 21st century. We will ask ourselves why in the squares and begin to feel the transformation of the means of communication that are rapidly being replaced by the Internet. What role does the internet play in the lives of modern people? How does it affect their action? What leeway or limitations do they have? The continuous expansion of the Internet will concern us as an element of the daily life of the world, with the result that our attention will be directed to the in-depth analysis of the medium of social media. And because ideology works in a subconscious dimension of both individuals and the collective subject, we will analyze the neoliberalism that dominates as a system of thought almost the entire range of the planet.

After looking in depth at all these we will reflect on what is the relationship of all these factors with each other. Where are we going as a human race? What course are we on? Let us start our journey.

Chapter 1

The historical evolution of the social movements

1.1 The social movements of the 60's

The 60's are a milestone for the course of social movements. If we characterize the French Revolution as the archetype of social action, the social movements of the 1960s are genuine descendants of this rich revolutionary action. The sixties were a time of great social and cultural upheaval. There belong the years that were indelibly engraved in the "pantheon" of the 20th century. It is considered a period of liberating vitality, questioning and non-conformism with youth and the action of its various groups (from militant leftists to supporters of "new social movements") as protagonists.

The famous decade of the 60's was a period that attempted to define the concept of mass gathering through bipolar issues of consideration and treatment such as: racial exclusion, sexual subjugation, and nationalism. Rock music, radical activism, group awareness, anti-disciplinary politics as well as alternative lifestyles (Christian practices and beliefs, drug experimentation) created the so-called 'counterculture' of the 1960's. It is certainly a phenomenon that involves a variety of coexisting and often conflicting cultural and political practices, but it is quite difficult to try to interpret a period whose clear boundaries (beginning and ending) are "contingent" and relatively "open". Usually, the time reference to the decade in question is between the years 1956 to 1974.

However, before proceeding to the internal review of the movements of the 60's, we must clarify the concept of social movement, so that we can better understand its essence. According to Mario Diani, social movements are a distinct social process, consisting of the mechanisms through which different actors are mobilized in collective actions: they engage in conflictual relations with clearly defined opponents, they are connected to dense informal networks, and they share a distinct collective identity.[1] Let's stick a little on the concept of collective identity. Social movements are not the sum of protest events on certain issues, nor even organized campaigns. Conversely, a social movement is activated only when collective identities are developed that transcend special events and initiatives. Collective identity is inextricably linked to

---

[1] Diani, M. (1992): *"Analyzing Social Movement Networks".* In M. Diani and R. Eyerman (επιμ.) *Studying Collective Action.* Newbury Park/London: Sage, pp. 107-35.

recognition and the creation of synergy.[2] It brings with it a sense of community of purpose and mobilization to achieve it, which makes individual actors or even organizations able to see themselves as interconnected, not necessarily identical but certainly compatible within a broader collective mobilization.[3] In social movements the criteria for participation are highly fluid and depend, in final analysis, on the mutual recognition of the actors; the determination of boundaries - that is, the decision of who is and who is not a member of the network - indeed plays a central role in the emergence and shaping collective action.[4]

Tom Hayden (an American activist and later politician) defines the movements of the 60's as movements of questioning and protest that formed the basis from which the new social movements were born. According to Hayden, young people needed to fight for a "participatory" future, for a future where their own decision would play an important role in building it, for a future where they themselves would have the right to their own opinion.[5]

It is a fact that the changes, issues, and developments that took place in the field of politics and the arts in the turbulent 60's, through the action of social movements, constitute a huge event in the history of the previous century. The decade of the 60's condenses the processes in many regions of the planet in a unique way. It symbolizes the intervention of millions of people, mostly young people in Europe, the USA, Latin America and Japan for more than a whole decade. An intervention, which at the cultural level shows elements of a first international identity for the youth of the western Metropolises despite the existing and logical particularities from country to country. A developing international youth identity, the search for which was a consequence of the fact that youth found themselves after the war, because of the alienation and emptiness of the prevailing values and, clearly, the fear of possible individual conflict. This social, value and emotional reality pushed broad layers of young people in search of a new identity. The global decade of the 60's was an international and massive cultural action, with multiple levels, an attempt to form a new cultural community.

---

[2] Pizzorno, A. (1996): *"Decisioni o interazioni? La micro-descrizione del cambiamento sociale"*. Rassegna italiana di sociologia, 37, pp.107-32.

[3] Touraine, A. (1981): *The voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements.* Cambridge University Press

[4] Melucci, A. (1996): *Challenging Codes.* Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press, chapter 3.

[5] "*The Politics of 'The Movement'*", in Irving Howe (ed.), The Radical Papers. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1966; pp. 350–364.

Art itself and above all music expressed this community and its inner rebellious tendency. Art, after all, under the cloak of symbolism and metaphors, always conveys the historical situation, the situation of the artist, his social position, his ideology and his psychology. At the same time, the mentality of the public is transmitted, which for its part, in the way it accepts the art of the period, highlights its point of view and its relationship with it. Based on this criterion, therefore, we can diagnose that the movements of the 60's inspired and brought to the surface a new lively politicization of artists and their work, rebaptizing in the new conditions and the work of previous generations. In this pattern, America moved with the stream of " Beat Generation" (of resistance poets). We observe, therefore, that the social movements of the 1960's triggered an explosion both cultural and political within their action.

We previously mentioned the question of social identities somewhat roughly. However, we must make some further clarifications in order to understand how the inclusive and "open" culture of the "youth" managed to mobilize mass social actions in the 60's. First, the construction of an identity should not be treated simply as a condition for collective action. Action is actually triggered when the actors develop the ability to identify themselves, to identify other actors and the "stake" of the relationship between them.[6] Simultaneously, identity is not an immutable feature that precedes action. Rather, it is through action that certain tendencies come to be either strengthened or weakened. In other words, the evolution of collective action produces and encourages continuous redefinitions of identity.[7]

Let us now take a closer look at the mechanisms by which action "constitutes" identity. This is achieved, firstly, by defining the boundaries between the actors involved in the conflict. In contrast to macrostructural approaches to the analysis of social conflict, the sociology of action has drawn attention to the problematic nature of the structure-action relationship, emphasizing that conflict cannot be explained solely in light of structural relations and the adversaries that shape them. Rather, it comes from the interaction between structural tensions and the emergence of a social actor who defines himself and his opponents on the basis of certain values or interests.[8] Collective action cannot be manifested unless there is a "we" characterized by common qualities

[6] Touraine, A. (1977): "*The Self-Production of Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
[7] Fantasia, R. (1988): "*Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers.* Berkley/London: University of California Press
[8] Ibid, pp. 88

and some solidarity. Equally necessary is the identification of the "other" as responsible for the situation of the specific actor and against whom he is called to mobilize.[9]

Secondly, the production of identities corresponds to the emergence of new relationships of trust between social actors, acting in conditions of a complex social environment. These relationships provide the movements with a series of opportunities. Furthermore, identification with a movement implies feelings of solidarity towards people with whom one comes in direct contact, but with whom one can share expectations and values. Activists and social sympathizers know that they participate in realities far broader and more complex than those of their immediate experience. Activists draw motivation and encouragement from this larger community, even when the scope of concrete opportunities seems limited and there is a strong sense of isolation.

And third, collective identity connects and assigns some common meaning to experiences of collective action outside of place and time.[10] Sometimes this takes the form of linking events related to struggles in order to demonstrate the continuity of effort behind current forms of collective action. The issue of continuity over time is important, and for the additional reason that social movements go through "visible" and "latent" phases.[11] In the first case, the public dimension of the action prevails, with demonstrations, public initiatives, etc., and with a high level of cooperation and interaction between the various actors in mobilization. In the second case, internal action in organizations and cultural production dominates. In these cases, collective solidarity is not as evident as in periods of intense mobilization. Identity is fueled by the invisible action of a small number of actors. And it is precisely this ability of small groups to reproduce across time certain representations and patterns of solidarity that creates the conditions for a resurgence of collective action and allows sympathizers to trace the source of new waves of public action to past mobilizations.[12]

Having analyzed more thoroughly the issue of social identities, which plays a prominent role in the fermentation of social movements, let us now take a closer look at the historical moment in which the various identities were cultivated and mobilized

---

[9] Gamson, W. (1992):" *Talking Politics".* Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press.

[10] For example, See. Lumley Robert (1990): "*States of Emergency",* London: Verso.

[11] Melucci, A. (1996):" Challenging Codes". Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press.

[12] Mueller, C. (1994): "*Conflict Networks and the Origins of Women's Liberation.* In E. Larana, H Johnston and J. Gusfield (edit) *New Social Movements.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 234-263.

action and claims. Let's start with the American case that seemed to lead the way in exporting the student movement internationally.

The historical moment of the beginning of the 60s is suitable for the ideological radicalization of mainly students. The assumption, in November 1960, of the Presidency of the USA by John F. Kennedy, a young politician with a democratic mindset and programmatic positions to alleviate social inequalities, purify political life and normalize relations between America and the Soviet Union, cultivates a climate of enthusiasm and optimism for the social reorganization they dream of. The liberal turn in political life that under the pressure of the impasses of capitalist development adopts, inspires and mobilizes them, transforming their ideology into activism centered on the one hand on the extension of political rights to all minority and ethnic groups, who have flocked to USA with widespread immigration (claiming their full integration into the statesystem) and on the one hand the defense of human dignity, freedom of speech and conscience and the building of a "genuine" democracy.

In addition to college campuses, demonstrations, and venues for political meetings and ferments, American '68 was performed at the Monterey and San Francisco music festivals. Challenging the moral, family, and social values of the 1950's, the generation of '68 advocated the need and right of each person to "discover" themselves beyond conformist notions of social roles and missions, elements that were bequeathed to later American culture. The sexual revolution, musical experimentation, the use of hallucinogenic substances, the adoption of communal of living practices were different versions of the central proposal to ask for new ways and paths of constructing subjectivity both at the individual and collective level. The cultural forms produced by the American '68 were quickly globalized, creating models of youth rebellion in many different corners of the globe.

Generalized freedom in all areas, the birth of the feminist movement, freedom in art and speech, freedom of love, the discovery of the contraceptive pill are the spices of an era that left history and speaks to this day, not only in American frameworks, but also global ones.

Finally, the American '68 was particularly important for two reasons, among others: On the one hand, because of the effect it exerted on the transnational imagination of the '68 generation, creating the cultural forms, sounds and images through which the movements of youth in many countries at the same time. On the other hand, the importance of the American '68 lies in the fact that it was not limited to the area of

universities and studying youth, but touched almost the entire spectrum of political action in the USA of that period.

But let us now look a little more closely at what happened at the same time in Europe.[13] During 1968 the Free University of West Berlin became a base for mass demonstrations against American involvement in Vietnam, as well as the West German government itself.[14]. In Italy in 1968, not only the communists, but also a wide spectrum of workers, students, Catholic parishioners and middle-class citizens began - sometimes independently and sometimes in concert - a cycle of formulating and asserting demands that extended into the early 1970's.[15]

Even more impressive were the events in France, where students and workers jointly attempted coordinated attacks against the regime of Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou. The explosion and militancy of the movements seemed to be able to overthrow the regime. However, history decided otherwise: Pompidou's early concessions to the organized working class shattered the temporary alliance of students and workers, and the June referendum brought de Gaulle a landslide victory. What is certain is that the movement shook the regime of France[16]

The mobilization of '68 extended far beyond Western Europe. In Canada almost every university became a seat of rebellion and forty thousand students in Quebec organized a general strike for an independent socialist state.[17] In Mexico, student demands for civil liberties led to general strikes on university campuses and massive demonstrations with 100,000 or more demonstrators[18]. These demonstrations resulted in the October 2nd rally in the Plaza de las Tres Cultures where the police killed hundreds of demonstrators and contributed over 2,000.[19] In the state socialist Poland, students and intellectuals united despite heavy repression, in a campaign of demonstrations and demands for civil rights and economic reform.[20] In Prague,

---

[13] For an excellent global analysis of the 1968 see. Suri, Jeremi, 2003, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

[14] Tilly, C. (2004), *Social Movements, 1768-2004,* Routledge, New York. pp. 164

[15] Tarrow, S., (1989): *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy 1965-1975,* Clarendon Press, Oxford.

[16] Bourges, H, (1968): *La Revolte etudiante: Les Animateurs parlent,* Seuil, Paris.

[17] Westhues, K (1975): "*Inter-generational conflict in the sixties",* in Samuel D. Clark, J. Paul Grayson and Linda M. Grayson, *Prophesy and Protest: Social Movements in Twentieth- Century Canada,* Gage, Toronto

[18] Tilly, C. (2004), *Social Movements, 1768-2004,* Routledge, New York. pp,165

[19] Ibid,pp. 165

[20] Ibid, pp.165

dissenting intellectuals spoke out against communist censorship and helped reformer Aleksandr Dubcek lead the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The Czech mobilization of '68 ushered in an era of liberalization that ended after dramatic resistance when Soviet-backed military forces and tanks invaded the country in August.[21]

We note, therefore, that although the organizers of the social movements of that year clearly fell short of their declared goals, the year 1968 marked changes in individual public policies and, most importantly, a substantial expansion of the activity of social movements. From the reactions to the conflicts of '68, the more general idea developed that the "old" social movements in favor of the power of the workers and the rest of the exploited classes had erased their cycle.[22] For this reason, it was considered by many observers that the "new" social movements, oriented towards autonomy, self-expression and criticism of post-industrial society, were taking the place of the old ones. French sociologist Alain Touraine, a veteran analyst of labor movements in Western Europe and Latin America, formulated some of the most influential ideas along these lines and taught some of the most widely read proponents of the idea. Before '68 ended, Touraine published an important report entitled The May Movement or Utopian Communism.[23] He declared that national liberation struggles had given way to the power of the world's sovereign states, and the Cold War had brought the old conflict between capitalism and socialism to a stalemate. The leveling power of business and the media had become the enemy of creativity and change.[24]

Very soon, the term new social movement was broadened to include movements for gay rights, expressive feminism, psychedelic drugs, indigenous peoples, the environment, and many other issues that would not easily find their way onto the map. of Touraine 's critique of post-industrial oppression. "Identity" was put on the table of academic debates, but also of activists as the solution, in contrast to the pretentious, instrumental goals of earlier movements.[25]

---

[21] Ibid. pp.165

[22] Ibid, pp.167

[23] Ibid, pp.171

[24] Touraine, A. (1968), *Le Mouvement de Mai ou le Commnisme Utopique,* Seuil, Paris.

[25] Cohen, J. (1985), *"Strategy or identity: New theoretical paradigms and contemporary social movements",* Social Research vol.52, pp. 663-716.

1.2. The social mobilizations of '89.

The issue of identity and its inseparable relationship with new social movements lead our study to another point in time which will be of particular concern to us. The year 1989 is a turning point in the action of social movements. It may not have the same glamor or heroism that 1968 is usually projected with, but in any case, it follows the path and practices that 1968 bequeathed to the world stage. 1989 is significant for another reason. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its symbolic representation with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, which divided Germany into West and East, took place in 1989. In the minds of ordinary people, the Cold War is coming to an end and the seemingly big winner is the USA and the liberal capitalist model that is now spreading unhindered into the bosom of the former Soviet Union. The prospects for the deepening of capitalism both at the level of markets (let's call it the practical level) and at the ideological level (let's call it iconoclastic) are enormous. But what happens inside the states and how do the subjects perceive this change? Charles Tilly gives us some historical answers to the question:

> In 1989 we observe the flourishing of the Polish Solidarity movement, the establishment of competitive elections in most of the state socialist regimes of Europe, the hypocritical declarations of loyalty to the Democracy of even the most hard-line regimes (such as, say, the state socialist Albania's version), the mobilization that led to the demolition of the Berlin Wall, the massive demonstrations in Budapest, Berlin and Prague, a combination of social movements and Civil War in Romania and - perhaps most impressively - a month during which students, workers and residents of Beijing took control of the city's central public spaces and kept the army at bay until a bloody military operation crushed the movement. Yugoslavia began to shake with demands for autonomy and separate regimes in the republics of its federation.[26]

We see, therefore, that social movements, long ostracized from the public policy of state socialism, now seemed to be breaking with the old regime. Of all the state socialist regimes, only those of Albania and Cuba managed to maintain control. The clashes in Beijing resulted in a heavy defeat for the Republic but drew the world's

---

[26] Tilly, C. (2004), *Social Movements, 1768-2004,* Routledge, New York.

attention to the Chinese popular mobilization.[27] Let us now look a little more closely at the Chinese mobilization, as it displays special characteristics and imaginative methods of action on the part of the students. Tilly comments:

> The Beijing events began in this fashion, with student memorial services for the dead Hu Yao -bang, former general secretary of the Communist Party, who when in office was unpopular among students, but gained notoriety when the 1987 because of his excessive sensitivity to student movements. The students soon turned the ceremony into a mobilization with a distinctly Chinese character, but in many ways similar to the mobilizations of social movements in other countries. When the government held a state funeral for Hu at the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen on April 22, about fifty thousand students gathered in the square for the ceremonies. […] Some of them, reviving an ancient ritual, knelt on the steps of the Great Hall to deliver a petition, they were humbly requesting a meeting with Prime Minister Li Peng. From mid-April to early June, student groups played hide-and-seek with the government's armed forces; they marched despite a ban on gatherings, shouted rhythmic slogans, staged hunger strikes, resisted orders to evacuate public spaces, and threw bottles or shoes at of the police officers. […] A million people or more took part in marches through Beijing on May 17 in support of student demonstrations and hunger strikers. Demonstrators and their supporters blocked the troops of 100,000 thousand soldiers sent to clear the square on the night of May 19 to 20. Some private entrepreneurs offered money, services, and equipment, such as battery-powered loudspeakers for the student speakers. Despite the admirable effort of the organizers to prevent the crowd (until the prospect of violent repression changed their minds) crowds of workers came to support and encourage them. In addition, a large crowd from schools outside of Beijing also gathered in the square. The mobilization was beginning to go beyond Beijing's student organizations. As martial law forces massed in and around Beijing, residents often cursed and attacked the soldiers. But when the troops began their attack on Tiananmen on the night of the 3rdJune, they unleashed overwhelming violence. On their way to the recapture of the city they killed 250 people losing

---

[27] Ibid, pp. 173

also about half a dozen soldiers. Between 4:30 and 6:30 am on June 4 the remaining students marched out of Tiananmen in phalanxes formed by the army. By the end of 1989 there was no other public mobilization of students and workers for civil liberties throughout China.[28]

We discussed the case of the Chinese student mobilization at length, as - as we have seen - in many places it resembles the traditional repertoires of action of social movements, as they acted in 1968. The time difference of about 20 years should not seem unreasonable to us. In 1968 the foundations - or if you like the standards - of social action were laid by student movements in countries with traditional elements of liberal values. These foundations took root and spread in several countries of the world - as in the case of China - and manifested when conditions allowed. At this point, however, we must be particularly careful. Because the boundaries between social movement and popular mobilization are often confused, with the result that the subtle nuances of each individual case are lost.

Social movements, basically, constitute a stable core of claims and mobilizations against power. They are resilient over time and adapt their actions to the time and historical situation. The openness of the political system, i.e., the political space granted by the system itself to the free formation and expression of opposition to it, seems to play a decisive role in cultivating and consolidating the action of a social movement. The "culture" of action, as has been observed, influences action not by providing the ultimate values toward which action is oriented, but by shaping a repertoire or "toolbox" of habits, skills, and styles, by which individuals construct "strategies of action"[29]

We see, then, that in the case of the social movements of the 60's - and as we have given emphasis on 1968- individuals acted using the culture they had. This mechanism is made up of a multitude of cultural and ideational elements, including beliefs, ceremonies, artistic forms, and informal practices such as language, conversation, stories and daily habits. We could claim that this culture was an inner element of the individuals who expressed it. What do we mean by intrinsic element? That within the framework of the values of Liberal Democracies, individuals are

---

[28] Ibid, pp. 176-78

[29] Swidler, A. (1986): *"Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies".* American Sociological Review, 51, pp.273-86.

nurtured with the values of self-expression, self-determination, and the possibility to develop their talents and predispositions. When, therefore, these elements are transferred to their social dimension, that is, on wider scales of the population (from the individual to the collective) and have the characteristics of stability and durability over time, we can speak of a "genuine" social movement. In this "genuine" social movement we join the '68 movement. We place the 1968 movement in the singular, despite its multiple versions, in order to emphasize its symbolic representation and international character.

In contrast, the popular mobilizations of 1989 - whether in the case of China or the countries of Eastern Europe - it is not clear whether they can be characterized as genuine social movements. The reason is complex, but we will try, as much as possible, to make it obvious and understandable. Initially, the regimes under which individuals were active in 1989 were mostly state socialist. It is not possible to analyze in depth the mechanisms of the entire existing socialism due to both geographical and historical peculiarities, but we can summarize the fact of the "closedness" of the kinetic action of which they projected.

Under the umbrella of the ideology of existing socialism, the possibilities for the cultivation of identities were relatively absent. Individuals were nurtured in a system of defending ideals and values based on their opposition to the capitalist tradition. Therefore, the only identities that had substance were those of workers and comrades. A clarification is necessary at this point. In outlining the political structures of state socialisms, we are not advocating the supremacy of liberal democracy. This would be naive in an attempt to understand the phenomena under the discipline of evaluative neutrality, as suggested by M. Weber.[30] Instead, we are talking about whether a political system is "open" or "closed" in its tolerance of social claims. In other words, whether the values on which a socio-political becoming is based allow the opposition of individuals per se . According to Paul Schumaker it is possible to distinguish five levels of response, or receptivity of the political system to the demands of collective action:

> The concept of access to receptivity' shows to what extent the authorities are
> willing to listen to what concerns such a group... If the request becomes an issue

---

[30] See, Weber, M, (1946), From Max Weber: *Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

and enters the agenda of the political system, the second type of response which is the 'receptivity of agenda". As the proposal becomes law, a third stage of receptivity is reached; "policy receptivity" indicates the extent to which actors within the political system legislate or act consistent with the stated demands of protesting groups. Although measures are being taken to ensure the implementation of the new legislation, we have reached a fourth stage of receptivity: "receptivity of result". Only when there is real improvement in the situation of the protestors will have achieved a fifth type of receptivity: "consequence receptivity."[31]

In this way, the question that arises is why the mobilizations of '89 "failed", while the social movements of '68 achieved some partial successes. The answer can again be given through an understanding of the political system itself. As we have seen, the movements of the 60s and especially the American one, were based within the framework of the liberal capitalist system. Although public opinion was divided as to whether to defend the movement or abhor it, the capitalist market—with its mechanism of flexibility woven into its structural features—heeded the pulse of youth, certainly not out of genuine interest, but as an aspiring team of consumers. This had a twofold effect. On the one hand, he managed to give substance to the movement through its representation (advertisements, spots, etc.) and on the other hand to breathe new life into market capitalist development. This "inclusive" culture is absent from systems. And not only that, but institutionally and ideologically-politically they oppose the whole idea of the market. Therefore, we can argue that in the case of the '89 mobilizations, the protesters had no support but themselves. Their claims were condemned by the political-ideological constitution of the system itself. And above all, because they failed to form identities (for the reasons we have presented), the popular mobilizations of '89 are not "genuine" social movements, but had as an imaginary model, the social movements of the 60s. For this reason, the protesters of '89 adopted - to a large extent - the repertoires of action of the fighters of 1968, but their socio-political context of action was completely different.

One could argue that the popular demonstrations within the countries of the Soviet Union, before its collapse, are indications of the rifts that have been created

---

[31] Schumaker, P. D. (1975): *"Policy Responsiveness to Protest Group Demands".* The Journal of Politics, 37, pp.488-521.

within the existing socialism. In addition, he could well add that these popular mobilizations are social movements with whatever peculiarities of the socio-political system. Indeed, taking the argument to its extreme, he could claim that these social movements also contributed - to the extent attributed to them - to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, meaning that society no longer provides the legitimizing basis for the existence of the system. That would be a very nice argument indeed.

To answer with due seriousness, we will refer to Barrington Moore's classic work: "*The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the making of the Modern World*"[32]. Very briefly, in this work Moore he comparatively studies the various paths followed by countries such as the USA, England, France, Japan, China and India, while making frequent references to two others (Russia and Germany) on the road to modernization. In his attempt to explain social change, he does not make simple causal explanations of the processes of structural transformation of the societies in question, but instead captures systematic moral evaluations of each of these processes. Thus, he argues that "across the entire range of cases we have examined, one can distinguish three main routes from the pre-industrial to the modern world". Below he says:

> To summarize as succinctly as we can: we want to understand the role of the upper classes and the peasantry, first, in the bourgeois revolutions that led to capitalist democracy, second, in the failed bourgeois revolutions that led to fascism, and third, in the peasant revolutions that led to communism. The ways in which the upper landed classes and the peasants reacted to the challenge of commercialized agriculture contributed decisively to the shaping of the corresponding political developments.[33]

Based on this tripartite evaluative distinction of Moore (democracy, fascism, communism) on nation-state paths to modernization, coupled with his idea of how the perceptions of those involved in major events (such as civil wars, revolutions, and in our case social movements and the popular mobilizations), are shaped by how they themselves experience the various structural limitations, we can conclude that in the case of the Soviet Union demonstrators we do not - at least immediately - demand the

---

[32] B. Moore Jr. (1966), *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Boston: Beacon Press. pp. xi-xii
[33] Ibid, pp. xiv.

overthrow of the regime. On the contrary, the demands concern reforms within the socio-political system. Therefore, we do not observe within the Soviet Union a social movement with a constant demand for the dissolution of the Union for two main reasons: first, because the system itself does not allow opposition to it (as we saw above) and secondly, because the individuals themselves (in their majority) do not perceive the system - due to its institutional nature - as problematic.

The question of the dissolution of the Soviet Union is in itself particularly complex and does not lend itself to a unilateral answer. For a more complete understanding of the issue, we should delve beyond its social dimension (i.e. civil society) and into the analysis of the global political scene. For the purposes of our analysis, however, let us maintain that there is a distinction between social movement and popular mobilization. The first refers to the social movements of the 60s and the second to the demonstrations of '89.

We studied extensively the differences that exist between the time points (of '68 and '89) for the course of change in social movements. Moore's analysis gave us a new dimension to understanding change. That is, depending on the course of the development of the states towards the various paths of political formation (democracy, fascism, communism) different structural limitations are formed for the mobilization of individuals. Furthermore, how individuals themselves perceive structural constraints is a key element in cultivating their mobilization.

1.3 The Social Movements of the 21st century.

Having in the arsenal of our analysis all these elements we will make a temporal leap and focus our magnifying glass on the social movements of the 21st century. Before proceeding, however, to the individual manifestations of social movements, we must understand the historical context of their action, as well as the changes that have taken place. For this reason, it is necessary to grasp the idea of globalization.

Of course, globalization is not a modern phenomenon. Whenever a distinct set of social connections and practices expands from a regional to a transcontinental scale,

we have a kind of globalization.[34] Whenever an existing intercontinental set of social connections and practices fragments, disintegrates, or disappears, we speak of a kind of de-globalization. Charles Tilly points out three historical waves of globalization:

> The first was around 1500. It arose from the rapid expansion of European influence, the growth of the Ottoman Empire, and the parallel expansion of Chinese and Arab traders in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. […] We can place the second major wave globalization after 1500 between 1850-1914. During that period, international trade and capital flows reached unprecedented heights, especially those across the Atlantic Ocean […] At the beginning of the 21st century, we see the third post-1500 wave of globalization advancing unabated and powerful.[35]

Regarding the relationship between globalization and the changes it brought to social movements, Tilly proceeds with the following excellent analysis:

> The function of globalization as a framework for changes in social movements can be seen more clearly by distinguishing between downward interconnection, adjustment, and the intermediate level of negotiation. From top to bottom, globalization interconnects centers of power: it creates commercial connections between financial hubs, coercive connections between military forces, cultural connections between religious or ethnic groups of people, and combinations of all of the above. From the bottom up, globalization looks different; it includes connections such as international migration flows, cross-border and transoceanic telephone calls, remittances and gifts sent by migrants to their villages, homelands, and exchange of experience and knowledge among social movement organizers. Globalization is certainly - as its critic's charge - about the spread of standardized consumer goods and services around the world. […] At the intermediate level of negotiation, people respond to opportunities and threats created under downward processes by using upward networks to create new associations with centers of power. In this intermediate zone, not only coordinated struggles take place, such as the global mobilization against the US invasion of Iraq on February 15, 2003, but also global smuggling

---

[34] Tilly, Charles (2004), *Social Movements, 1768-2004,* Routledge, New York, pp. 230.
[35] Ibid, pp.231-235.

activities, such as the trafficking of illegally obtained minerals, drugs, timber products and sexual services. What takes place in the intermediate zone depends mostly on the interconnections resulting from the action of the two versions of globalization (downward and upward).[36]

We observe, therefore, that the process of globalization runs through the entire range of social processes - from the economic modes of production to the habits and communication of countries with each other. Social movements are not unaffected by this process. On the contrary, they find fertile ground for communication and interaction with each other. Or to put it better, the process of globalization itself provides possibilities and channels of contact between people around the world. However, this condition alone does not tell us much about the action of social movements in the 21st century. The new technologies of mobile phones and the Internet are the tools through which the process of communication and dissemination of information is carried out. Howard Rheingold[37] and many other technocrats, claim that new communication technologies are completely reshaping the organization and strategy of social movements, makes it easier for us to recognize that social movement activists responded positively to mass media from the beginning. We will refer to the issue of new technologies in more detail in the next chapter as it is considered to be of key importance. For now, though, let's keep in mind that the social movements of the 21st century have a powerful weapon in their hands both for self-organization and for spreading their ideas to other social movements internationally.

So, let's see how social movements acted and how they utilized new technologies in the turn from the 20th to the 21st century. Tilly 's description of events in Manila, Philippines in 2001 is indicative of the transition:

Around midnight on Tuesday, January 16, 2001, the following short text message was sent over cell phones in and around Manila, Philippines: "Everyone on EDSA, wearing black". Within an hour tens of thousands of citizens had gathered on Avenue Epifanio de Los Santos (EDSA). The avenue is adorned by the temple of Popular Power: Our Lady of Peace. The temple was erected on the spot where in 1986 the praying nuns had victoriously faced the

---

[36] Ibid, pp.237-238
[37] Rheingold, Howard (2003), *Smart Mobs: The Next social Revolution*, Perseus, New York.

tanks of President Ferdinand Marcos and helped oust him from power. Over the next four days, more than a million people, many of them dressed in black, flocked to downtown Manila, calling on President Joseph Estrada to step down. The defeated President finally left office on January 20.[38]

We observe here, perhaps, the first concerted effort of a people to self-organize through new technologies (mobile phones) and protest against the corruption of the country's political leader. In terms of the economy of the actions of social movements, we can claim that it is a highly successful movement. Within just one hour he managed to coordinate the protesting crowd and mobilize them to gather at the central point of the protest (EDSA). The fact that in just four days of action he achieved the resignation of the President, reinforces his combativeness and effectiveness. Howard Rheingold _ he sees the adventure of the Filipinos as a harbinger of what he calls an "intelligent crowd": "citizens who are able to act in concert even if they don't know each other".[39] He highlights Filipinos' huge enthusiasm for SMS after its introduction in 1995. Since 2000, the Philippines' 84 mobile phone subscribers per thousand people have surpassed wealthier countries such as Costa Rica (52) and Belize (70), although they fall short of Iceland's amazing number (783), and Norway's equally remarkable number (751). Satellite-backed digital phones and texting emerged as serious alternatives to landline telecommunications, especially where poverty, political unrest, and prohibitive geography prevent the creation of a state-owned telecommunications infrastructure. In addition, mobile systems have a trivial but popular reputation for not being easily subject to government control.

However, Rheingold goes even further. He argues that the intelligent crowd interconnected by the exchange of texts is already occupying the space of conventional social movements of the 21st century. He gives the following examples:

- On November 30, 1999, autonomous but networked groups of protesters protesting at the World Trade Organization assembly used "flooding" tactics, cell phones, websites, laptops, and handheld computers to win the "Battle of Seattle".

---

[38] Tilly, Charles (2004), *Social Movements, 1768-2004,* Routledge, New York, pp. 222
[39] Rheingold, Howard (2003), *Smart Mobs: The Next social Revolution,* Perseus, New York, pp.xii

- In September 2000, thousands of citizens in Britain, outraged by a sudden increase in petrol prices, used mobile phones, text messages, laptop e-mail and taxi radios to coordinate scattered groups that blocked the delivery of fuel to selected stations service in a spontaneous political protest.

- A violent political demonstration in Toronto in the spring of 2000 was recorded in history by a team of roving investigative journalists who broadcast over the Internet on digital video everything they saw.

- Since 1992, thousands of bike activists have gathered each month for the Critical Mass movement's mobile demonstrations in the city of San Francisco, winding their way through the streets in large groups. The crowd of Critical Mass bicyclists is coordinated through loosely coupled networks—alerts are by cell phone and e-mail lists—and splits into smaller, tele coordinated groups when necessary.[40]

From the multitude of examples, we realize that since the very introduction of new technologies, networks of individuals adapted their actions in the direction of mobilization. At first sight, this situation seems extremely logical and almost self-evident. The question, however, as to whether these new technologies change the actions of the movements still worries us. On the one hand, it is clear that at the level of organizing a movement, new technologies provide easier channels of communication between individuals to organize and rally them. However, the ingenuity and imagination of the crowd in using these media is nothing short of astounding. Rather, it is a logical consequence of the evolution of the global telecommunications network, which is now an integral part of human activity in all its fields. On the other hand, at the level of action and activation of the social movements, we do not observe substantial differences with the social movements (of the 60s) and popular mobilizations (of the 89s). Again, the activists will organize protests in critical points of the metropolises, again they will set up barricades, again they will raise placards and so on. All these repertoires of action are already known to us from the previous activities of social movements. So where does social change lie in terms of social movements?

---

[40] Ibid, pp. 158.

At this point, let's look at an interesting study, contemporary to the period of the beginning of the 21st century, about the social impact of the technologies of the time by Caroline Haythornthwaite and Barry Wellman:

The movement from the usual, formal, and general social patterns to individual collectives of personal choice existed even before the internet. Most of the friends and relatives with whom we maintain close ties are geographically far away from us. These ties stretch over metropolitan areas, over countries and seas sustaining themselves from the post, the telephone, cars, airplanes and now e-mail and the internet. Most people do not live their lives attached to one community. They meander between multiple specialized sub-communities, with limited commitment to each. Their lives move in a universal space: they combine ties at a distance with parallel activity in households, neighborhoods, and workplaces.[41]

On these observations Tilly comments:

These observations are of course truer for rich Western countries than for the world as a whole. They clarify, however, the sense in which the integration of communication innovations into existing social relations and practices extends plans that people already have in place and highlights in a particularly striking way connections that were already active, but at high cost. The observations reinforce two critical points that emerged as with the adoption of new media, such as radio, by 20th century social movements. First, each new form of interconnection and communication facilitates a certain set of social relations by excluding strata that do not have access to that particular means of communication. Second, communication media differ radically in the homogeneity of communicators; newspapers, radio, and television offer great heterogeneity, while digital communications exhibit greater balance.[42]

Indeed, these two positions encapsulate the instrumental dimension of both traditional mass media and new technologies. In the social movements of the 20th century, television, radio, and the newspaper were the main means of producing messages as well as disseminating information in the broadest sense of the term. At this

[41] Haythornthwaite, Caroline, and Wellman, Barry (2002), "The Internet in Everyday life: An introduction», in Caroline Haythornthwaite and Barry Wellman, The Internet in Everyday Life, Blackwell, Malten, Massachusetts.
[42]Tilly, Charles (2004), *Social Movements, 1768-2004,* Routledge, New York, pp.240-41

point we must be particularly careful because, as far as the action of the individuals of the social groups of the 20th century is concerned, the media of television and radio, as well as the messages they transmit, are the cause of the movements for action. In other words, subjects form action as dissatisfaction with the messages they receive. Therefore, we observe the relative freedom of individuals to shape action on the basis of critically processing received messages. At this point we do not consider whether the mass media present the objective reality or express interests of various kinds. For the purposes of this analysis let us limit ourselves to the phenomenological broadcast of messages from the mass media to the mass of the population.

On the above finding, we realize that there is a gap between the movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. The traditional means of communication of the 20th century (television, radio) still exist and produce messages in the 21st century. However, people are now voicing their criticism and by extension organizing their action using mobile telephony, SMS and the possibilities provided by the internet, with the result that the vertical (from top to bottom) structure of traditional media is lifted. This unprecedented phenomenon enables individuals to shape both opinion and action more easily and quickly across wider swaths of the population. It seems that these possibilities are fertile ground for the easier formation of the popular base of the movements, as well as for their more effective action.

We have analyzed quite thoroughly the instrumental dimension of both traditional media and newer technologies. During the first decade of the 21st century, the appearance of mobile telephony and, above all, the internet, came to solve practical issues of organizing and activating social mobilizations, without these latter means yet contributing to the formation of new individual or collective identities. We will see how this process comes to be activated with the emergence of social media (Facebook, Twitter etc) as the new global communication platform of the subjects.

But before we move on to this great development of technology, we must recapture the thread of the course of the evolution of social movements during the 21st century.

As we saw in the previous section, subjects managed with relative ease to integrate new technologies into the needs of their social action at the beginning of the 21st century. The instrumentality of the mobile phone, SMS and the internet does not surprise us, since the main reason for their intention was to facilitate the communication

of people with each other, breaking the barrier of space and time. Therefore, quite naturally, when individuals sought to rally to organize a demonstration or act of protest, they used the same technological means that they used in their daily lives. The issue was practical, and it seems to have been resolved very effectively. Thus, we notice that at the beginning of the 21st century, social movements are in harmony with technological development and even benefit, as new technological means solve one of the basic challenges of social movements, namely that of accessing the mass of the population.

At this point, in order to avoid technological determinism, we have to put aside the technological development and focus our lens on the economic factor and mainly on the global financial crisis of 2008.

The Global Financial Crisis began in the summer of 2007 with BNP Paribas suspending in August the redemption of shares of three funds that had invested in mortgage-backed securities, while a few days later American Home Investment Corp. declared bankruptcy. The financial sector's mortgage-related losses continued throughout the fall, and financial system stress indicators were unusually high, including interbank interest rates. Despite huge liquidity injections from the U.S. _ Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank, financial institutions began to hold cash and interbanking declined dramatically. Northern Rock failed to refinance its maturing debt, and in September 2007 became the first British bank to close in 100 years.[43]

The next problem arose in auction rate securities, which are normally long-term bond investments, but before the crisis short-term investors found them attractive, as issuing banks held regular auctions of them every 7, 28 or 35 days, where investors could resell to them. Thousands of such auctions came to nothing in February 2008, when the number of sellers of such securities was greater than the number of prospective buyers willing to buy them at the highest price allowed by the bond, while issuing banks, unlike in the past, did not absorb the difference between to sellers and

[43] Fox, J. (2013), *What we've learned from the Financial crisis*? Harvard Business Review, November 2013 issue.

buyers.[44] After legal battles, the major issuing banks agreed to cover many of their customers' losses. That market has since ceased.

The failure of Bear Stearns in March 2008 was perhaps the point of no return for the crisis.[45] The bank financed much of its operation with overnight debt, as this is usually the cheapest interbank money. But when she suffered significant losses in her investment vehicles in mortgage-backed securities her lenders refused to renew her debt. At the same time, many of its clients in its brokerage operation withdrew their money and portfolios, fearing losses from the bank's insolvency. On the weekend of March 15, 2008, the US Government bailed out JP Morgan with a loan of almost $30 billion from the Federal Reserve, to ensure the liquidity of the bank being acquired. Many observers and officials wrongly hoped that the crisis was over at that point.

The climax of the crisis came on Monday, September 15, 2008, when Lehman Brothers, a large brokerage-investment bank based in New York, suffered a Bear Stearns-like inability to roll over its short-term (overnight) debt, while at the same time its brokerage clients they left in droves, causing it to collapse. But while the US government had bailed out Bear Stearns six months earlier, this time it decided to let the bank go bankrupt. But what they didn't know was that Lehman was involved in the derivatives market with total values of $39 trillion (in comparison the annual US GDP is about $14 trillion).[46]

The shocks in the global financial system were so strong that just a few days later the American government took over the rescue of the insurance company American International Group (AIG). AIG had issued several hundreds of billions of dollars worth of CDS. Based on these contracts, AIG was obliged to deliver post collateral corresponding to the potential losses it would be required to cover based on current market data. Goldman Sachs was a counterparty to many of these policies, and a major factor in AIG's predicament. The cost of bailing out Bear Stearns, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and AIG to American taxpayers likely exceeded $200 billion.[47]

---

[44] Cojanu, V. (2015), *Self-interest and the modernity of homo economicus*, www.academia.edu, last access May 2023.

[45] Krugman, P. (2009), *How did economists get it so wrong*? The New York Times, September 2

[46] Kirman, A. (2011) *The crisis in economic theory*. Rivista Italiana degli Economisti, Vol. 1, April 2011, pp. 9-36.

[47] CNN Money (2011*) Famous Fed flubs*. March 24, 2011, http://money.cnn.com/. Last access May 2023

The US government a few days later voted the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) with a total value of $700 billion, to support the financial system by buying equal amounts of mortgage-backed securities, while banning short-selling of stocks for a long time. These moves came to correct, with the money of society, that is, the American taxpayers, the failure of the rulers to deal with the derivatives market in a timely and sufficient manner, so that they could regulate it with the aim of avoiding a systemic collapse from taking irrational risks.

The derivatives market, which is a necessary component of risk diversification for the stability of the global financial system[48], rose to a nominal size of $600 trillion- or ten-times world GDP (actually the money changing hands is less than 2% of that size under normal circumstances)[49]. This market still operates today without adequate and globally applicable rules of capitalization, liquidity, guarantees and central recording and disclosure of the risks undertaken by each financial institution that participates in it.

Of course, this dysfunction and near-collapse of the global financial system with its interrelated and complex interactions of investment risk diversification, initially caused the outcry for the rating agencies and their previously overly lenient ratings, while it prompted the capitalists to more closely monitor the fundamentals of these in whom they lend.[50]

We proceeded to the extensive presentation of the financial crisis of 2008 based on the analysis of the global economic status quo that it caused. In the context of the globalized economy on the one hand, and on the other hand the prevalence of capitalism as the dominant economic model internationally, the tremors of the crisis became evident in all the lengths and breadths of the world. The global networks of the financial system in order to avoid the collapse of the system made strong transformations of the relations between them. This resulted in a multifaceted and multidimensional crisis in

---

[48] Acemoglu, D. (2010) *The crisis of 2008: structural lessons for and from economics*. World Bank Group: Commission on growth and development, Globalization and Growth: Implications for a Post-Crisis World, No. 54253, p. 37-45.
[49] Stiglitz, J.E.; Greenwald, B.C. (2014) *Creating a learning society. A new approach to growth, development and social progress*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.680
[50] Toarna, A. (2014) *Review of Joseph E. Stiglitz and Bruce C. Greenwald, Creating a Learning Society: A New Approach to Growth, Development and Social Progress*. The Journal of Philosophical Economics, volume VIII, issue 1, autumn.

all areas of human activity. The even further impoverishment of the already disadvantaged was inevitable. In fact, in many cases nation-states found themselves on the verge of bankruptcy. Many governments turned to both private banks and international financial institutions (Troika, IMF) as a desperate attempt to avoid the tsunami. The price of the financial aid was draconian measures of borrowing (capital controls, hard debt repayment commitments) which in the majority of the economies of the nation states were unable to satisfy.

In its political dimension, the crisis brought to power parties that capitulated "unconditionally" with financial institutions, under the pretext of rescuing their countries from economic disaster. Neoliberal models of "development" were applied everywhere (expanding markets, lowering the minimum wage, capital controls, ATM withdrawal limits). European Union agencies acted as trustees of the banking systems, exerting great pressure on debtor nation-states to make political reforms to repay their debts.

In this context of economic and political transformations, the great underdog was the people. The social dimension of the phenomenon of the financial crisis was for the social movements of the period the biggest challenge. That is, how would individuals manage to transmute the feelings of insecurity and fear they felt into active kinematic action. The top- down imposition of economic measures gave the impression of the relatively small margin of action of individuals. In fact, the harshness of the measures for the most popular classes of the population was so unfavorable that huge issues of daily living were created, with the result that the subjects could not "afford" to mobilize. The mass media, in fact, exaggerated the developments in a dramatic and manipulating way.

All these factors made possible a huge explosion of social movements. Against the carelessness of the national governmental authority and its subservience to the dictates of the European institutions, the draining of resources from the lenders and the directed hyper-promotion of developments by the mass media, the spontaneous social movement of the "squares" was created, which on the occasion of dissatisfaction with current situations made neoliberal practices and traditional political parties the focus of its criticism.

Paolo Gerbaudo in his excellent analysis of the "squares" movements writes among other things:

From Egypt to Spain, from Greece to the US, from Turkey to Brazil and then France, the movement of the squares moved from East to West and then back in a dizzying succession of events, often described as a protest "contagion" which at its height, in the spring and summer of 2011, seemed truly unstoppable. Iconic public spaces -Tahrir Square in Cairo, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, Syntagma Square in Athens, Zuccotti Park in New York, Taksim Square in Istanbul, the Avenida Paulista in São Paulo, and Place de la République in Paris- were occupied by great protesting crowds and major protest camps, with hundreds of smaller occupations in local areas, reaching even into conservative backwaters such as Castilla y Leon in Spain and Mississippi in the United States. These mobilizations harnessed such strength that they often pushed governments to the brink of collapse. Their appearance took many by surprise, including seasoned activists from previous movements, as well as social and political scientists, who struggled to understand their nature and purpose.[51]

Gerbaudo continues:

The 2011-16 occupation movements constitute a complex historical phenomenon due to the great number of countries, political cultures, issues, and events involved, Movements such as the Arab Spring, the Indignados, the Aganaktismenoi, Occupy Wall Street, the protests in Turkey and Brazil, and Nuit Debout on the one hand displayed specifically local characteristics and on the other raised similar grievances, used common symbols, and almost invariably adopted the same organizational practices, from assemblies to protest camps. These features enable us to look at these movements as not just sharing a temporal coincidence, but being genuinely part of a historic global upheaval, with a shared vision and shared aims. The protest wave beginning in 2011 can thus be best described as a "protest mosaic", a complex structure made up of different temporal and regional clusters of events, each with their own specificity, yet only understandable as part of a larger political picture.

[51] Gerbaudo, P. (2017) *The Mask and the Flag: Populism, Citizenism, and Global Protest,* New York: Oxford University Press, pp.29

- The first cluster is the Arab Spring that saw revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria, and protest movements in Morocco and Algeria, beginning in the first three months of 2011.

- The second cluster is the Mediterranean wave of the Indignados, which first struck in mid-May 2011 in Spain and made ripples in Greece at the end of May/beginning of June.

- The third cluster is the Occupy Wall Street protests, which had resonance in the Anglophone world, from Canada to Australia, starting in September 2011 in the United States and arriving in the UK in October

- The fourth cluster comprises the 2013 protests in Turkey and Brazil, which given their simultaneity strongly inspired each other, and which share similarities due to the nations' statuses as emergent economies.

- The fifth cluster coincides with the 2016 Nuit Debout protests in France, which at the time of writing appears as a rather isolated epilogue of the movement of the squares.[52]

Let us stick on some points of Gerbaudo 's analysis that are worthy of comment. First of all, the name of the movements (movements of the squares) indicates a double existence: on the one hand, the squares are a logical point of activity for mass sections of the population, as they hold more people, and on the other hand, they function as a symbol of the power of the popular mass against the authorities. By definition, squares belong to the people as points of free expression of individuals. They are not subject to financial restrictions, that is why it is observed that many homeless people gather in the areas of the squares. In addition, - in terms of spatial structure - in the central squares of the capitals we find the parliament buildings or the royal palaces, symbolizing in this way the unbreakable relationship between power and society, with the former practicing politics for the benefit of the whole of the latter. The abrogation of this treaty, which came about due to the authoritarian economic measures towards the masses, activated this dimension of the squares in the collective subconscious. Therefore, the squares functioned as the centers of resistance of the movements to the imposed measures of the governmental powers - in the narrow sense of resistance - and their more general reaction to the socio-political becoming (i.e., neoliberalism). However,

---

[52] Ibid, pp.31

beyond the resistance, the squares per se are a stake of national assertion, against the deepening of the involvement of international actors within national issues.[53] In other words, the movements flooded the central squares of the metropolises declaring in practice that "it belongs to us", at the same time making a severe criticism of the neoliberal practices of intervention in national issues.

With this action, the social movements of the squares managed to shape a national identity within an extensive network of action worldwide. The "protest mosaic" that Gerbaudo refers to, highlights this dimension of the square movements. That is, the restoration of national identity as a constituent element of cinematic action. Gerbaudo comments again:

> This return of the national, which generated deep unease among many leftist activists due to the customary association of "the nation" with right wing politics, reflected the influence of left-wing populism, an ideological orientation that sees the nation as the necessary source of identity for the People, and so pursues a democratic and progressive patriotism, profoundly different from xenophobic nationalism. Claiming the imaginary of the nation allowed these movements to address a broader constituency than their predecessors, including moderate and conservative people that were previously seen as out of the reach of radical protest movements.[54]

Gerbaudo 's position seems correct, as under the umbrella of national identity the social subjects found the stable ground on which their kinetic action was built. However, the abstract concept of the nation itself produces contradictions as to its definition. Depending on the ideological point of view from which the issue is approached, different values are produced -on a first level- and political claims -on a second level. Therefore, for the purposes of social movement effectiveness and mass, this inclusive identity is beneficial, but at the level of political ideology and political practice it creates distortion. This issue becomes evident in the face of the challenge of the leadership of the movement during the process of its institutionalization. More simply, who will undertake the promotion of the demands of the social movement through the channels of parliamentarism?

---

[53] Ibid, pp.113
[54] Ibid, pp.114.

In the majority of cases of street movements, this mandate was given to parties from the left (Podemos, SURIZA) who managed to integrate the movement's tendencies into their political discourse, eventually winning the elections. However, as these parties proceeded to implement their political program, they ran into the structural limitations of the system itself. In other words, the governments from the space of the left could not overcome the obstacles and pressures of both the financial systems (IMF, banks), as well as the European institutions. A typical example of this treaty is the statement of the Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras, following the IMF 's proposal to sign a new package of tougher financial commitments (Mnimonia): "I call the Greek people to demonstrate against the proposal for the new signing of the memorandum". The normalization of governments from the spectrum of the left and their apparent change of course from their pre-election combativeness and militancy, it is obvious that it created discontent in large sections of the population, with the result that governments lose their credibility, and most importantly their role as bearers of the popular sentiment of the initial mobilization. The structural limiting mechanisms of national power, within a framework of a globalized economy and politics, as well as the difficulty of governments from the left to maneuver effectively in these areas, constituted the tombstone of left governments as carriers of the square movements.

The ideological starting point and heterogeneity of the populations under the inclusive umbrella of national identity on the one hand, combined with the deepening discontent of individuals due to the inadequacy of governments from the space of the left to bear fruit on the other, resulted in the emergence of far-right parties that were titled as the genuine exponents of national identity. The case of Greece is again an enlightening example. The neo-Nazi far-right party Golden Dawn (XA) initially confronted the Aganaktismenoi movement (May 2011), criticizing the action "on the street" while criticizing the ideological diversity and cultural makeup of the protesters.[55] In December, when the " Aganaktismenoi " movement had already been suppressed, Golden Dawn organized its own rally "against the Memorandum" at the Syntagma.[56] While until then the electoral power of Golden Dawn was weak to zero, from February 2012 to the May elections it experienced a rapid rise, as a result in the

---

[55] Psaras, D, (2012). *The black bible of Golden Dawn: Documents for the history and action of a Nazistic group.* Polis, Athens, pp. 387-91
[56] Psaras, D, (18-02-2019). *"Aganaktismenoi is not the same with nazists".* The newspaper of the Editors. Last access: May 2023

May elections it emerged as the sixth party receiving a percentage of 6.97% and achieved entry for the first time of the Hellenic Parliament by electing 21 deputies.[57] In the repeat elections in June it maintained its percentage and won 18 seats.[58]

So, we notice that the national identity as inclusive - and quite abstract - despite its beneficial dimension for the mobilization and identification of the masses, also involves a darker side. After all, in times of crisis there is always the risk of the emergence of extreme tendencies and political formations. How much more so, when the foundations of the democratic constitution of each nation state are called into question.

The emergence of the far right in Europe is a particularly difficult and complex issue, as it does not depend only on the increase of citizens' dissatisfaction with governments of leftist origin. The refugee crisis that started in 2015[59] and describes the flow of increased numbers of refugees and migrants[60] to the European Union, traveling through the Mediterranean Sea or Southeast Europe, in order to seek asylum mainly in Central and Northern European countries, is the occasion for the emergence of racist tendencies. Faced with the challenge of managing refugee flows, the left-wing governments - on the basis of their humanitarianism and value base of solidarity - wanted to integrate the populations within national borders, which provoked a storm of reactions from the conservative space and was a divisive element section for the extreme right. Thus, we observe in France that the National Front with Marie Le Pen as its leader is gaining ground, but also in Denmark, Austria, the Netherlands, Germany that parties from the extreme right are getting stronger. Meanwhile, the Orbán government in Hungary poses the most overt threat to democratic institutions.

Let us, however, close at this point our digression regarding the rise of the far right, although it is a burning contemporary social and political issue, and let us return

---

[57] http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/v2012a/public/index.html#%7B%22cls%22:%22main%22,%22params%22:%7B%7D%7D, last access: May 2023.

[58] Ibid, last access: May 2023.

[59] «*Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts*». BBC News. 18 February 2016, Last Access: May 2023.

[60] «UNHCR viewpoint: 'Refugee' or 'migrant' – Which is right? ». UNHCR. "The majority of people arriving this year in Italy and Greece especially have been from countries mired in war or which otherwise are considered to be 'refugee-producing' and for whom international protection is needed. However, a smaller proportion is from elsewhere, and for many of these individuals, the term 'migrant' would be correct."

to the organization of the square movements and their relationship with the internet, as an agent of the formation of social action.

We saw in a previous chapter, that in the social movements of the beginning of the 21st century, new technologies were used instrumentally to solve practical issues (formation and organization). In the period where the social movements of the squares were active, we have already entered the second decade of the 21st century, during which the internet saw its greatest rise and deepening.[61] We will have the opportunity to see in the next chapter the transformation of the medium (see Chapter 2) in more detail. For now, let's focus on the ways in which members of the square mobilizations made use of the medium. Even in the period under consideration, the medium of television occupies a central position as a carrier of mass messages.[62] This is something familiar since the first appearance and spread of the medium of television. For this very reason, the funding of the mass media by governments is a permanent dominant logic. However, in the case of the square movements, the subjects oppose this condition. They consider journalists as mouthpieces of power and question the objectivity of the medium of television itself. In fact, they hold television responsible for the feelings of insecurity and fear that come from watching the news. Perhaps, older generations who are not familiar with the internet, still trust traditional media as their main source of information. And if we want to go deeper, television, due to its directed logic, plays a role in shaping opinion. Therefore, many subjects choose to be exposed to news messages in order to form opinions about what is happening or, even worse, uncritically adopt the information they receive.[63]

The harsh criticism of journalists, who listen to the people participating in the square movements, seems to create some rifts in the traditional media, without, however, shaking their position as a central medium of communication. The internet provides the digital space, in which individuals - with relative freedom - have the

---

[61] For an excellent analysis of the social movements during the Internet Age See, Castells, M. (2012), *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

[62] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/el/press-room/20220704IPR34401/eurovarometro-oi-polites-empisteuontai-pio-polu-ta-paradosiaka-mesa-enimerosis Last access: June 2023.

[63] For further reading on the topic See. Polan, D. (1990) *The Public's Fear, or Media as Monster in Habermas, Negt, and Kluge. Jürgen Habermas's The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society [Review of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, by J. Habermas]*. Social Text, 25/26, 260–266.

possibility to express their opinions, but at the same time it also gave the participants of the square movements the possibility to coordinate their actions.

Manuel Castells 's excellent analysis of social movements in the Internet age about the possibilities the Internet provides for the organization and expansion of social movements is enlightening:

> The use of Internet and mobile communication networks is essential, but the networking form is multimodal. It includes social networks online and offline, as well as pre-existing social networks and networks formed during the action of the movement. Networks are within the movement, with other movements around the world, with the Internet blogsphere, with the media and with society at large. Networking technologies are meaningful because they provide the platform for this continuing, expansive networking practice that evolves with the changing shape of the movement. Although movements are usually rooted in urban space through occupations and street demonstrations, their ongoing existence takes place in the free space of the Internet. […] Thus, they do not need a formal leadership, command and control center, or a vertical organization to distribute information or instructions. This decentered structure maximizes chances of participation in the movement, given that these are open-ended networks without defined boundaries, always reconfiguring themselves according to the level of involvement of the population at large. […] While these movements usually start on the Internet social networks, *they become a movement by occupying the urban space,* be it the standing occupation of public squares or the persistence of street demonstrations. The space of the movement is always made of an interaction between the space of the flows on the Internet and wireless communication networks, and the space of places of the occupied cities and of symbolic buildings targeted by actions. This hybrid of cyber space and urban space constitutes a third space that I call the space of autonomy.[64]

Indeed, Castells ' analysis seems to be confirmed in the case of square movements, as we have seen in our own analysis of the symbolic dimension of the central squares of metropolises. In the age of the Internet, social movements operate

---

[64] Castells, M. (2012). Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age. Cambridge, UK: Polity, pp. 249-50.

simultaneously in the digital space, as well as in the natural space. However, we must be wary of the positive side of this simultaneous activity of theirs.

The freedom of the Internet, described by Castells, does facilitate the rapid formation and expansion of a movement's network, but it does not form strong identities. Moreover, freedom when it is unlimited ends up being a concept without substance and meaning. Lest we be mistaken at this point that we are advocating authoritarianism or the imposition of rules of correct behavior, we mean that with the unlimited possibilities that the Internet provides, a very important issue through the various communication channels can lose its value.

A typical example is the Black Lives Matter movement, which started its activity as a decentralized social and political movement in 2013 in the USA. The movement returned to national headlines and gained further international attention during the global George Floyd protests in 2020 following his murder by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. This publicity was met, after a short time, with the slogan "All lives Matter ". This inclusion refers to an empty humanism, which ends up on the one hand disorienting the public from the social movement's target (i.e., racism against people of color) and on the other hand creating the illusion that there is a global community of people who share the idea of humanitarianism.

Something similar happens with the Metoo social movement, which fights for women's rights around the world. Again, here we observe a problem of inclusion, which is structural to the movement itself. In its attempt to integrate all the women of the world, the movement is far from achieving its goal. Individual cases of racial inequality or violence against women lose their competitive value, ending up - at least within the Internet - empty of meaning. Again here, we must clarify that we are not against feminism and its claims, on the contrary we are in favor of full gender equality. What we want to highlight, however, are the contradictions of the so-called "Hashtag Activism"[65] and to ask whether they achieve their purpose or not.

The fact that contemporary social movements are simultaneously active in two fields of action - Digital space and natural space - does not automatically mean that a

---

[65] For an interesting deeper analysis of the phenomenon See, Goswami, M. (2018). *Social Media and Hashtag Activism*. In: *"Liberty Dignity and Change in Journalism"*, Publisher: Kanishka, pp.252-62

third space of autonomy is created (as Castells argues). This would be a happy scenario for the imaginations of contemporary social movements. However, the reality can be very different. After all, let's not forget that modernity is drowning in contradictions. To develop our argument, we will need to analyze the evolution of the Internet itself with the embedding of social media in the daily lives of millions of people, as well as their relationship to both subjects and social movements.

Having seen the course and transformation of social movements from the 60s to the present era, we are invited in this chapter to explore the phenomenon of social media and the ways in which it affects the daily life of subjects and by extension of their social action.

Chapter 2

The social media as the new means of mass communication

2.1 The phenomenon of social media.

It is a fact that in the first two decades of the 21st century, the world revolves around the Internet. Therefore, many theorists talk about the "Internet Age"[66], trying to study how the phenomenon of the Internet ultimately affects the formation of a different way of functioning of everyday life. Before the phenomenon, however, we have other theorists who, without anticipating the discovery of the Internet, discuss the effects of technology on human lives. Such case is Marx's term of alienation.[67] By alienation Marx seeks to understand how capitalism alienates subjects from themselves, from their colleagues, and from the object of their work. The discovery of machines on the production line is crucial, being the role of intermediary in the production process. In this way the subjects become simply replaceable tools that end up doing repetitive tasks in the context of their work. Industrial work loses its special and unique character as it happened in the guilds of the Middle Ages, resulting not only in the creation of - more or less - similar products, but at the same time cultivating a culture about how a factory should operate in order to be efficient and productive. This culture, because it is efficient, is adopted by all companies as the most successful model economic production.

In this context of efficiency, it is worth mentioning Max Weber, who in his own theory of rationalization[68] refers to the fact that bureaucracy produces and reproduces these systems of efficiency through impersonal and very well thought out processes. In essence, the process of rationalization replaces values, traditions, and emotional motivations in the functioning of organizations with rational and pre-measured results. For Weber, however, this process has no positive sign. On the contrary, he considers

---

[66] Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

[67] Thompson, Lanny Ace. (1979) "*THE DEVELOPMENT OF MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION: AN INTRODUCTION.*" Mid-American Review of Sociology 4, no. 1: pp.23–38

[68] Lippmann, S., and Aldrich H. (2003) "*The Rationalization of Everything? Using Ritzer's McDonaldization Thesis to Teach Weber*." Teaching Sociology 31, no. 2: pp.134–45.

the result of rationality   is to trap modern man in an "iron cage"[69] which represents the systems of technological efficiency, rational calculation, and control.

These theoretical approaches are useful for the purposes of social media analysis in modern times. Starting from the fact that all social processes are monopolized by the Internet, we will look at the alienation of individuals through mediated networking and how this affects the formation of their own personality-identity. In addition, in a second level of symbolic analysis we will look at the distorted reality created using social media that traps subjects in an almost imaginary world. Next, we will try to connect the social media universe with the relationship of subjects to politics and we will draw some lines as to whether social media promotes democracy and social movements or not.

As the 21st century progresses, the Internet is   becoming the most widely used medium in our lives. Everyday millions of people use their personal accounts on various social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) to communicate with acquaintances and friends, to be informed or even to make new acquaintances. This, at least, is the good side of social media and perhaps the original plan presented. However, we observe that social media have succeeded in substituting the traditional human communications and contacts through this faceless interaction. In other words, the instrument (the social media) replaces human (face to face) interaction. This condition is so common that it is almost imperceptible. For a modern person, communication through messages on an online platform is something completely normal, without realizing that communication is mediated. The result of this artificial communication is a social confusion and perhaps a collapse of "behaviors" in a face-to-face context. People do not develop their communication skills, such as the movements of their hands when talking or their facial expressions that have their own semiology. In addition, on a linguistic level because internet communication has its own codes (emojis, memes, gifs), when communication is not mediated, a gap is created between the interlocutors. This gap is not bridged, especially if there is communication between people of different ages, who do not speak the same language. But as the older generations retire,

---

[69] Maley, T. (2004). *Max Weber and the Iron Cage of Technology. Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 24(1), pp. 69–86.

the language of the Internet is embedded even more deeply in the collective subject, making it a kind of global communication through symbols.

Because people socialize with the rules of the screen from a very young age, they do not realize that they, still, must behave in real intercourses. This results in social stress when face-to-face communication is unavoidable (for example family gatherings). Apart from the stress, however, there is an avoidance of real communication through the choice of people to go out on a social outing (to go to a cinema or eat in a restaurant), but at the same time to watch the update on social media. The most important element at this point is the choice of individuals to post their activity on social media, so that their friends and followers can see it (we will refer to that in detail later).

Social networking platforms offer subjects the opportunity to project themselves as they wish. That means that an individual is free to construct their identity. A typical example of this is the famous "social profile". Individuals are invited when opening a new social media account to share certain information about themselves (gender, age, political beliefs, language, sexual preferences, music taste, sports activities etc.). The social media algorithm uses this information to occasionally suggest to people other people with similar characteristics or interests. This fact seems positive at first sight, but it also conceals another dimension which is not easily understood. Social media is not a charity, nor does it have the ultimate goal of bringing people together. Instead, they are profitable businesses that aim to increase their revenue. Thus, they use the information that the subjects themselves have chosen, in order to suggest to them consumer products that suit the needs of the individuals.

Assuming, then, that individuals' personal descriptions of themselves reflect - in part or in full - the identities and personalities of individuals, we observe that the identities of individuals themselves are processed elements that aim to enhance consumption. In other words, individuals become objects in the process of generating profit. The identities of individuals - whatever they are - play a small role in terms of their substance and quality characteristics. Their main quality is to offer the necessary information to companies in order to create products and services that are liked by

individuals. In this way, the most basic personality trait of individuals is that of the consumer.[70]

Through the Internet and - in this case - through social media, the system of capitalism manages to penetrate deeper into people's lives. The apparent freedom of individuals to have the identity they choose in conjunction with their registration on the data basis, creates more space for the exercise of power over bodies.[71]

In this way a paradox is created. While there are more identities, we do not see strong claims on their part, as they rest on the freedom of declaring their identity. This paradox results in the passivity of individuals towards political demands and the cultivation of an apolitical culture.

The success of social apps lies in the fact that in almost twenty years (founded Facebook on February 4, 2004) they have succeeded in convincing millions of people to participate in their world. Facebook is the king of social apps and when it appeared it created an innovation in the field of communication. People from one end of the earth could chat, exchange photos and interests with people from the other side. Facebook, however, was only the beginning. Other apps with similar content followed which in turn became very popular (Instagram, Tik Tok, What ' s up). The main argument of the apps was common: the breaking of time and space between people to make possible the global communication of people.

Today in 2022 the majority of the earth's population is part of this online universe. People post content daily with their daily activities, outings, food and even thoughts. For schematic reasons we can distinguish two types of users: those who publish and those who follow. The first category covers a wide range of users, as most of them publish some content on their accounts. This category includes so-called influencers, who are considered professionals of social apps and more often than other users create material. The influencers often have thousands or even millions of people

---

[70] For a deeper understanding of this identity See. Saint Clair, J. (2023). *Consumer Identity: A Comprehensive Review and Integration of Contemporary Research*. In C. Lamberton, D. Rucker, & S. Spiller (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Consumer Psychology* (Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology, pp. 179-227). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[71] We use this terminology in the fashion of *Michael Foucault's "Biopolitical power"* See. Foucault, M. (2008), *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Edited by Michel Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

who follow them, even earning some income from this whole process. But it is precisely from the fact of the production of profit from their activity that we must dwell a little on this element. The influence they have on large sections of the population, makes them ideal partners of companies for the purposes of promoting their products. At the same time, they transform themselves into role models for their followers by creating the fantasy of easy profit through social media activity. Who wouldn't want to be an influencer and make money from social media instead of working in an office eight hours a day, five days a week? So, we observe influencers to advertise clothing, footwear, cosmetics and many more in their daily material. At the same time, they promote a lifestyle. Their lives in the eyes of the average user seems attractive, appealing, and full of adventure (travel, expensive restaurants, expensive activities). In this way, for the category of followers, this lifestyle is idealized and the users who receive the messages try to adopt it. The spontaneity of life is lost. Users attempt the same activities, resulting in a standardization of the actions of the individuals. In addition, on a psychological level if people fail to achieve this lifestyle, they feel frustrated and depressed. They do not spend time elaborating on their own goals and dreams, but they indiscriminately accept the projected lifestyles as the ideal ways to be happy.

The price of this happiness is neither small nor negligible. Subjects are trapped in watching everyday social media "stories". Addiction to social apps combined with the fact that every time someone refreshes something new appears as material, it creates a vicious circle from which it is not at all easy to escape. Real life, on the other hand, seems less attractive and slower. The subjects find no reason to observe the environment around them, because firstly it requires time and secondly it has no explanations. In other words, they move away from the real world because they do not find it interesting. We would say that the real world is the "necessary evil" to be able to become as "happy" as those people who see in the stories. The distortion between real and digital world creates confusion, as the subjects find it difficult to perceive the boundaries between the two. The reference object of their action becomes the digital world, as a result of which we observe the relative retreat of the real world.

For these reasons, we can distinguish three types of alienation: 1) the alienation of individuals from themselves, 2) the alienation of individuals from the physical-real world and 3) the alienation of the spontaneity of action. The capitalist practices behind

popular stories create a fantasy world that is not entirely false. Instead, it touches on the real, but in such a way as to shape it on the basis of consumption. The limits of this consumption are unlimited and seem to remove any structural limitations of the classes, the gender, the colour, the culture or the religion. So, the "good life" is demonstrated as if without boundaries and without limitations, as a goal whose basis lies in the free choice of the individual, regardless of his particular characteristics (gender, nationality, colour, etc.) or his identity, making individuals solely responsible for their personal happiness. But here, we must be quite careful. The class structure society is not abolished, at all. We understand that by the fact that it imposes restrictions on the attainment of this life. No matter how much a waiter works -paid with the minimum wage-, he cannot travel every weekend or eat at the most expensive restaurants. The cultivation of the feeling, however - even of the deep faith - that he can achieve it at some point pushes the subject to try harder. In other words, the social media lifestyle presents an inherent impetus to the most arduous work of the subjects, with the inevitable result of the accumulation of capital in the hands of the employers. The communication of the classes through social media softens their rivalry, cultivating an admiration and an effort for the adoption of the practices of the bourgeoisie by the working class. The social media manage to present the dream world of the bourgeoisie as something tangible and achievable through the hard and continuous work of the subjects giving deeper impulses to the capitalist system. This drive of capitalism is an inherent feature of the system's ingenuity to incorporate new developments and is not presented as an intended consequence of action. Rather, it exhibits characteristics of subconscious rational adaptation to developments.

2.2 How democratic are the social media?

Having made the above comments and analyses, we saw thatthe social media are projected as a means of promoting the absolute freedom of subjects to adopt whatever identity they want without discrimination and at the same time to advocate whatever point of view they wish. This world of social media looks at first glance as the paradise of Democracy and equality. But to what extent is such a statement true?

Let's start with the positive elements. Indeed, social media provides some convenience in expressing opinions and ideas compared to earlier times. A few decades ago, to express an opinion that would have some public repercussions, he should either be

registered in a party or a union or write an article in a newspaper or have access to television. Social media paves the way for seamless dialogue between those subject to all kinds of issues. In addition, the subjects have the opportunity to comment on the news - even in the harshest way - without being reprimanded. In addition, with regard to social movements (see previous chapter) an interconnected relationship is created between natural - real space and digital space, which creates a relative freedom and autonomy for the actors to develop their networks and actions. The positives, however, end here.

The freedom of the users is subject to some restrictions as to its relation to the medium itself. In the case of Facebook, an account consists of the subject and his "friends". The process of accepting or cancelling a friendship request is a complex process, although it may seem simple. The subjects process the profiles of their prospective friends and end up a little rough either in acceptance or cancellation. The annulment dimension of a personality is a distorted practice that mimics fascist logics in creating a community. The respective community shares more or less the same logics and the same beliefs, because if someone expresses an opposite opinion, he is always in danger of being removed from the list of friends. At this point, let us emphasize that not all accounts are the same nor do they have the same relation to the political position in the publications. Many accounts do not express open political comments and consist of a mosaic of diverse personalities and identities. But it is this fact that allows us to assume that as long as an account is not placed politically it does not create disputes, so it does not disturb the community. The harmony of the community is projected as the highest principle, so we realize that the medium itself de facto urges to avoid tensions, and therefore not to engage in political or political commentary on events.

At this point, we realize that social movements operating within social media are confronted with these structural limitations. In other words, the medium itself evaluates the positions of the movements on political or social developments, as a result of which it does not allow it to gain publicity or to be limited to its already existing communication networks. Hiding comments, or even entire posts, is a permanent authoritative practice of Facebook , under the guise of violating community rules.

The case of Twitter is a bit more complex. Basically, the inherent difficulties of the community are not presented, but here the communication is based on hashtags.

Hashtags[72] create a Discourse on any discussion that is accessible to everyone. This fact does not preclude controversy, but it does not in fact produce results. Disputes are created per se and not in a direction of critical thinking and opinion formation. Opinions are consolidated. In addition, a culture of rewarding the likes of the subjects of the statements is cultivated through the possibility of "Like". So, again here we observe an exclusion of opposing views through ignoring them or if someone decides to come to a rift with the statement it is done for the purpose of quarreling and not for descent democratic dialogue. In fact, the recent acquisition of Twitter by the billionaire Elon Musk, puts another, particularly important, dimension on the discussion table. If we assume with a logic of avoiding economic determinism that Elon Musk is an owner who is not interested in deriving profits from Twitter, since he is already among the richest people in the world, his addition to make improving changes and strengthen " free speech"[73] raises big questions for us. To what extent, indeed, can a user of the Twitter application enjoy freedom of speech, without violating the terms and conditions required for the use of the application itself? The apparent free speech cultivates in users the illusion that the medium is a space for free and unhindered speech. In reality, however, the community itself is built on a set of compliance rules, which if violated will result in a ban. At the collective level, social movements come up against community principles, which is extremely dangerous for the expansion of their network and the spread of their reaction. Moreover, the fear of exclusion from the community, reasonably, discourages any expression of dissent from the conforming norms.

Maybe, the most important element of the social media placement policy is its ineffectiveness. The subjects, even if they refer to serious political issues, suffice to publish a harsh position, which, however, is based on mere commentary. In other words, the subjects use the political space of social media to say, but not to act. Therefore, we observe the cultivation of an apolitical culture, which lies not only in the apathy of the subjects for what is happening, but mainly in the removal of the subjects from the political action. The freedom of social media, instead of pushing the subjects to more active demands, it passivates them and traps them in the speeches on political issues.

---

[72] We discussed in previous chapter how the *Hashtag Activism* functions and the possibilities or the boundaries that offers. (See, chapter 1)
[73] https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/27/tech/elon-musk-twitter-six-months/index.html, last access: May 2023.

At the same time, the decision-making centers (State, governments) take advantage of this gap of resistance and promote their policies without hindrance.

In order not to be one sided in the context of social media, social movements have been created in the near past (yellow vests, milk-tea alliance) which have resisted the government and put their claims on the streets. Their organization was facilitated by the immediacy of the medium and its ability to address in a very short time to large portions of the population. Although, these movements started as a reaction to political decisions (increase in gasoline prices) or as a more general reaction to the system, very quickly they lost their dynamism. They failed to be a solid mechanism for reacting to power and consolidating themselves on the political scene. We observe, therefore, that social media facilitate the mobilization of short-term movements rather than long-term ones.

That, of course, regards not only the nature of the medium, but the general rhythm of the modern world. Developments are lightning fast, and the subjects do not have the necessary time to process the situations, so as to form a core of logic contrary to the projected logic of political power. Moreover, on an ideological level, the prevalence of neoliberalism does not favor the culture of organizations. Subjects perceive themselves as separate units that strive to cope and not as units of a wider social environment. We will discuss this issue in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Neoliberalism under the scope

Having dealt with the evolution of social movements from the 1960s to today, the consolidation and transformation of the means of communication, culminating in the function of social media in the everyday life of subjects and their wider social dimension, we are invited to this chapter to explore the broader ideological-political system of neoliberalism. The ideology and practices of neoliberalism form the piece of the puzzle that completes the picture of the process of abstraction that we attempt to synthesize through this study.

The legacy of the great sociologist Max Weber and especially his work "*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*" (from now on: The Protestant Ethic) offers us the solid ground on which to build our thinking. In Protestant Ethic, Weber attempting to answer the question why capitalism, as a world-historical production system that replaced feudalism, appeared in the West and not elsewhere, proceeds to establish the prominent importance of Spirit as a formative element of change. Thus, he concludes that Protestantism - and indeed the offshoot of Calvinism - which arose as a reaction to the authority and authoritarianism of the Catholic church, formed the ideological basis that shaped the human actions that ultimately cultivated capitalism.[74]

This important argument still arouses the interest of researchers and has been studied many times and in various ways. Its relevance to the purposes of our own analysis lies in the emphasis on the *spirit*, as a decisive element in the production of actions. The spirit, in our case, is neoliberalism, which as a system of thought and values ends up shaping actions. The concept of spirit and the concept of neoliberalism are not identical, nor do we have any claim here to be. After all, Weber uses spirit as a worldview of theological-metaphysical origin, while neoliberalism is a living system of purely political targeting. Moreover, it would be completely anachronistic and impractical to identify the terms, as they refer to different situations. The element, however, that converges the concepts between them, constitutes Weber's own

---

[74] Weber, M. (2001). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Routledge Classics. London, England: Routledge.

conception that deals with change as a result of the transformation of the worldview pattern of the subjects. Having made these necessary theoretical clarifications, let's take a closer look at the historical development of neoliberalism itself, feeling its texture in this way.

3.1 The history of neoliberalism

Neoliberalism emerged historically, as a system of thought, after the Second World War (1947) by a small group of academics, economists, historians and philosophers, who gathered around the Austrian philosopher Friedrich Von Hayek, creating the so-called Mont Pelerin Society.[75] Among the participants we find Ludvig Von Mises, the economist Milton Friedman and the philosopher Karl Popper. The founding statement of the society reads as follows:

> The central values of civilization are in danger. Over large stretches of the earth's surface the essential conditions of human dignity and freedom have already disappeared. In others they are under constant menace from the development of current tendencies of policy. The position of the individual and the voluntary group are progressively undermined by extensions of arbitrary power. Even that most precious possession of Western Man, freedom of thought and expression, is threatened by the spread of creeds which, claiming the privilege of tolerance when in the position of a minority, seek only to establish a position of power in which they can suppress and obliterate all views but their own. The group holds that these developments have been fostered by the growth of a view of history which denies all absolute moral standards and by the growth of theories which question the desirability of the rule of law. It holds further that they have been fostered by a decline of belief in private property and the competitive market; for without the diffused power and initiative associated with these institutions it is difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved.[76]

From the constituent declaration of the members of the Mont Pelerin Society, we observe the attempt to redefine the values and principles of the liberalism of the

---

previous century. In fact, their emphasis is on the decline of belief in the principles of private property and the freedom of the market and the need to restore these values. Implicitly, the statement works against the classical economic theories of Adam Smith, Ricardo and of course, Karl Marx.[77] It is worth mentioning at this point that the members' attempt to redefine the values of classical liberalism is not a conservative turn. On the contrary, it refers to a radical - let us be allowed the characterization - construction of a new model of economic development. The fact that they use materials of classical liberalism does not invalidate our position. Their vision is aimed at the future and not the past.

This academic experiment of redefining the values of classical liberalism began to become particularly popular when it was introduced to major American universities (particularly at the University of Chicago, where Milton Friedman dominated) and culminated in the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Economics to Hayek in 1974 and Friedman in 1976.[78]

A turning point in the history of neoliberalism is its transition from the realm of ideas to the realm of politics. It is then that the term neoliberalism acquires an essential meaning and differs radically from classical liberalism. The ideas of the Mont Pelerin Society have been disseminated through the action of their supporters and have been firmly planted in the minds of the executive authorities.

It is no coincidence that neoliberalism appeared as a political experiment in the two biggest economic and political metropolises of the time, the USA and the UK. Let's see the reasons why this development took place in the specific geographical areas.

In the USA, the economic crisis of 1929 was managed by the implementation of the political program of the "New Deal"[79] during the Presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. A major component of New Deal policy was government intervention and demand stimulation. The new system of fixed exchange rates provided for full employment, zero unemployment, rapid rates of economic growth, low inflation rates, stability of energy sources, mass consumption, as well as mass production based on the

---

[77] Harvey, D. (2007), "*A Brief History of Neoliberalism*," OUP Catalogue, Oxford University Press, pp.20
[78] Ibid, pp.22
[79] https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/new-deal , last access: May 2023.

Fordist model.[80] The Golden Age (1945-1975) ushered in by the New Deal had reached its brink and finally collapsed when in 1980 Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency of the USA. In the interim, the ideas of the Mont Pelerin Society circulated in the academic circles of American universities and were presented as an antidote to the dysfunctions of state interventionism. In addition, the upper bourgeoisie of the USA has been the great loser of state interventionism, so it looks with particular sympathy on the ideas of market freedom and the reduction of the state factor, as elements of its revival.

The case of Great Britain does not present large discrepancies. After all, the emergence of the welfare state in the countries of Western Europe goes hand in hand with the New Deal of the USA. In this way, we see the power of trade unions and the Labor party rise dramatically in Great Britain after the end of the Second World War. The Beveridge system (1942) in England, which provided for the insurance of all citizens regardless of participation in the production process, was the result of the struggles of the workers and the willingness of the governments of Great Britain to exercise social policy.[81] The culture of social policy ended in Great Britain - perhaps in the most emphatic way - with the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of Britain in May 1979.

The great winners of the Second World War (the USA and Great Britain) did not emerge unscathed from the heat of war. Both their economies and their human resources had suffered enormous damage. To deal with this issue, the US turned to state interventionism, and Great Britain adopted a corporatist model implementing social policy. These logical developments in an attempt to rebuild after an unprecedented war had the effect of cultivating a sense of isolation in the upper bourgeois classes, but also directly affected their interests. The liberal bourgeois circle of the Mont Pelerin Society - because of its relative autonomy from the problems of large populations - was quick to project its reflections on developments in public policy, attempting to construct the ideological base on which to build the restoration of the upper bourgeoisie class.

---

[80] For a deeper analysis See, Cole, H. L., & Ohanian, L. E. (2004). *New Deal Policies and the Persistence of the Great Depression: A General Equilibrium Analysis*. Journal of Political Economy, 112(4), 779–816.
[81] https://socialpolicy.gr/2016/04/%CE%B7-%CE%BC%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%AC%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%BE%CE%B7-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BD%CF%89%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%BF%CF%8D-%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%AC%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%CF%82.html. Last access: May 2023

Neoliberalism was the political formation of the mature ideological fermentation of the values of the Mont Pelerin Society.

3.2 The ideological hegemony of neoliberalism

As we have seen, neoliberalism is the ideological-political formation that emerged in the early 1980s, as the system of ideas and practices that breathed new life into the capitalist system. We could claim that in the first decades of the 21st century, neoliberalism constitutes the ideological legitimizing basis of capitalism. It advocates the complete intersection between the state and the economy, with the parliamentary power performing the role of the night watchman who defends the perpetuation, but also the deepening of this rupture. The state abandons its traditional role as the guardian of the principles of democracy and is transformed into a tool of further autonomy and market dominance. Any opposition to the smooth operation of the market, requires the state to immediately and harshly impose violence, through the police forces. After all, as we know from Weber, the state has in its hands the monopoly of the exercise of legal violence.[82]

The ideological hegemony of neoliberalism lies in the element of its full penetration into all areas of human activity. In other words, it does not simply describe a sterile economic determinism. On the contrary, it runs the whole ideological political spectrum of thought. These claims of hegemony are made evident by its intention to eliminate any collectivity within society. Margaret Thatcher 's famous statements: "There *is no alternative*" and "*no such thing, as society , only individual men and women*" , *and their families*"[83] they are indicative of neoliberalism's understanding that society does not exist within its worldview. The deconstruction of society into individuals allows for the easier manipulation of subjects and serves a dual function: first, it destroys the relational bonds of individuals to each other in a context of social interaction, and second, it provides the system with the necessary political space to act unhindered. In the context of the deconstruction of society into individuals, neoliberalism promotes as the highest ideal the freedom of individuals to define themselves. Freedom as an abstract concept without any clear definition or claim ends

---

[82] Weber, M. (2019) " *Basic Sociological Concepts". Economy and Society*: A New Translation, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, pp. 77-138.
[83] Harvey, D. (2007). "*A Brief History of Neoliberalism*," OUP Catalogue, Oxford University Press, pp.23.

up empty of meaning. Although it creates a sense of the absence of structural constraints, it does not - in the final analysis - lead to action, as it succeeds in disorienting individuals from existing social problems by discouraging critical reflection. ("there *is no alternative*").

The success of spreading the values of neoliberalism and deepening its hegemony is aided by globalization.[84] The economic dependence of nation states through the global network of markets also requires the corresponding ideological-political edifice. In other words, in order to keep international market channels functioning smoothly, neoliberal governments are emerging all over the world. The economic and military power of the nation-state governments of the " Center " promote this process in the countries of the " Periphery " as well.[85] The institutions of the European Union, NATO and the IMF fulfill exactly this role. That is, they support the ways in which neoliberalism is practically consolidated and expanded. A kind of control and enforcement mechanism exercised by the great powers within these institutions, which essentially listen to control and power. NATO and the EU are built on the basis that they are made up of nation-states that share the same values and foster the idea of equality among their members. In reality, the particular circumstances of individual Member States are leveled and end up being subservient to the promotional actions of Member States who exercise substantial power and influence.

The nation-state is in this condition the necessary evil, as the basic unit of the world. With this macroscopic dimension, the nation-state only typically holds sovereignty, as the substantive sovereignty is assigned to participate in the institutions. At their domestic level, the respective governments of nation-states promote the idea of the nation, as its inclusiveness allows for the easier legitimization of their practices. In this way, power moves to a latent level and is exercised in the name of the "national good".

However, the restoration of the nation-state as a unit of reference has another consequence. Because of its great inclusion it merges elements within its framework of action very heterogeneously with each other. Nationalist tendencies are contrasted with the dimension of the nation as used by neoliberalism. Their reaction is so intense that

---

[84] See. Wallerstein, I. (2004). *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Duke University Press
[85] See, Wallerstein, Immanuel. (1983). *Historical capitalism*. London: Verso

in their political discourses they oppose the "misuse" of the nation by some neoliberal practices. This has the effect of creating a stable electoral base of far-right origin. Far-right parties are emerging in many democratic systems around the world. Characteristically, we should mention the recent development in the Greek elections of June 2023. From the election result - in the second election in a row within a month - three far-right parties were elected to the Parliament in a Parliament of eight parties.[86] In fact, one of them (SPARTIATES) did not participate in the first elections (May 21st) and in less than a month, in the second elections, it managed to win a percentage of 4.63%, which is equivalent to 12 seats in the Parliament. This phenomenon should not go unnoticed, as we observe that the inability of the populist parties of left origin to exploit the cracks of neoliberalism, on the one hand, reduced the credibility of the left discourse and on the other hand strengthened the base of far-right parties even more deeply, highlighting them as " genuine" defenders of national identity.

In no way can we exhaust here the question of the emergence of nationalism in the 21st century, but what interests us is that the use of the nation by neoliberalism does not always have the consequences it seeks.

3.3 Digital markets in neoliberalism

As we have seen, neoliberalism treats society as individual units whose well-being depends on the individuals themselves. The identities of individuals do not seem to be of much interest to liberalism. The only identity that matters is that of the citizen-consumer. This fact arises from the very values of neoliberalism which are condensed into the absolute freedom of the market. Businesses are the big beneficiaries of this system whose constituent base is based on these ideas. Therefore, their actions are built on the neoliberal model of practice. In other words, in their effort to grow and increase their profits, businesses treat each consumer individually. The so-called " cookies " are the key element to understand the way in which the approach to potential consumers is carried out. As we have mentioned again, social media are the basic core of organizing international communication. That social media itself is a business is something we discussed at length in a previous chapter (See chapter 2). So, what happens with cookies?

---

[86] https://ekloges.ypes.gr/current/v/home/ Last access: June 2023

Whenever a web user searches in a search page for anything, a window appears at the bottom of the page that requires the user to accept cookies. Cookies are the condition that for browsing the page and the user must agree to the use of his search itself as an element of shaping his interests. To be objective, there is the possibility of not selecting cookies, which however has some effects. The acceptance of cookies creates a database with the interests of each user. Search engine companies sell this data to businesses in order to display products or services to users in the form of digital advertisements. These digital advertisements are very liked by the users, as they are based on their own searches, and thus on their personal interests. The par excellent space of these digital advertisements are social media. In order to display digital advertisements to the various users, social media sell businesses digital space on their pages. People have already accepted this condition and since these are products, they like they don't seem to react.

What we observe, is that within the Internet and social media, economic networks have developed which allow businesses to personalize their advertisements with minimal effort. We'll call this situation *algorithmic advertising*.

Algorithmic advertising combined with the continuous improvement of e-commerce are creating an entire online financial market. Users-consumers do not need to leave their home to see the available product options in their neighborhood, but with the push of a few buttons they can order a garment from the other side of the planet and in a few days, it will be at the door of their house.

The competitive prices of online products stem from the fact that they do not require -many times- physical stores, so neither do their maintenance costs. The development, in fact, of transport communications facilitates this process even more. Consumers obviously choose the most advantageous price for them. This results in the traditional market atrophying, at least in terms of clothing, footwear and gadgets.

Economic markets for services follow a more complex path, as the physical existence of individuals is required. However, this does not mean that brick-and-mortar stores cannot leverage algorithmic advertising on a much smaller scale. In order for services to respond to the Internet market and to increase their geographic reach, they are transforming their services themselves. The motto "do it yourself" is indicative. What is happening here; Service companies create platforms to provide partial

knowledge so that the user-consumer can leverage this knowledge to achieve the desired outcome. So, one no longer has to go to their favorite chef's restaurant to eat their favorite dish, but pay a monetary fee to access the video tutorial of making their favorite food with the chef himself. User-consumers take advantage of this knowledge and prepare their desired food themselves. This trend was significantly strengthened by the coronavirus pandemic, during which the entire planet was forced to stay indoors. This treaty, although at an early stage, will gradually be extended to other service sectors. What we keep, is the ingenuity of markets to adapt and capitalize on communications transformations, but also the fact that smaller businesses are imitating the practices of successful businesses. It is important to clarify that we follow this process not with evaluative criteria, that is, we do not judge whether these transformations are positive or negative. What we seek is to highlight the rationality of these consequences in the direction of the rationalization process proposed by Weber.

This rationality extends even to the bureaucracy. The state is attempting to replace its burdensome bureaucratic system with huge public buildings and countless files, in a digital state, imitating market practices.[87] Certainly, in terms of efficiency, this is a development moving in that direction. The issue, however, that arises is in what ways does the state itself change by imitating the practices of the efficient market.[88] Although it is a burning issue and will not concern us here, we must emphasize the importance of this transformation and reflect on possible future research.

3.4 Social movements in neoliberalism?

We have seen the relationship of social media with the digital market in the context of the freedom provided by ideological neoliberalism. It remains now to reflect on the actions, but also the perspectives of social movements within neoliberalism.

As we commented in a previous chapter (see chapter 2) social media with the apparent provision of the possibility of adopting any social identity by the users, results in non-action. The freedom of the subjects subconsciously removes the structural constraints, with the result that the subjects are not aware of the problems that exist. Moreover, the fragmentation of society into individuals, as promoted by neoliberalism,

---

[87] For a deeper analysis See, Crouch C. (2004). *Post-democracy*. Polity.
[88] See. Fligstein, N. (1996). *Markets as Politics: A Political-Cultural Approach to Market Institutions*. American Sociological Review, 61(4), 656–673

has managed to nurture the mentality of the new generations. These elements make up the so-called apolitical culture.[89] The apolitical culture seeks to explain the apathy of the subjects for the happenings of the political reality. The feeling of the subjects' inability to cause changes is expressed with the slogan "everyone is the same". This suggests the perception of the political spectrum as a single entity, ignoring any differences between them. Traditional parties fail to create party identifications, resulting in a representation void.

This situation is certainly aided by social media, which, as we have seen, isolates individuals within a narrow circle of subjects' personal networks and interests. The new apolitical generation, due to its peculiarities, treats the traditional actors of social claims as obsolete and avoids its activity within their circles. We could claim more generally that traditional social organizations (unions, parties, NGOs) have lost their glamor and have not managed to adapt to the demands of modern needs. In fact, the orientation of social institutions seems to follow the neoliberal-market logics of profit maximization. So, we are witnessing the transformation of traditional institutions into hybrid capitalist enterprises.

Social movements are coordinated around the reaction to political measures of governments, with the result that their militancy is reduced quite quickly (either by the satisfaction of their demands or not). The yellow vests[90] in France (2018) are a typical example. Their mobilization began as a thunderbolt after the announcement of the measure of the increase in the price of gasoline by the Macron government. The organization of the mobilization started from the internet. Citizens across France were gathering to the streets every Saturday to protest. Clashes with the police took on massive proportions, but their visibility on social media did not achieve the corresponding dimensions. The interest of the yellow vest case is concentrated in the sociology of the movement. The movement was made up of people from all over the political spectrum; from left-wing organizations to far-right nationalist formations. This happened for two reasons: firstly, because of the organization of the movement by the internet which allowed disparate groups to come together without being aware of their particularities and secondly, because of the headless nature of the movement. The

---

[89] See, Chilton, S. (1988). *Defining Political Culture. The Western Political Quarterly, 41*(3), 419–445.
[90] https://fhi.duke.edu/events/yellow-vests-movement-gilets-jaunes, last access: June 2023.

yellow vests had no leader, instead they were a colorful political mix that took to the streets.[91]

From the example of the yellow vests, we observe the mobilization of social movements due to the reaction to individual manifestations of the neoliberal logic and not to neoliberalism as a whole. This can mean two things: first, either that individuals have fully accepted the system of neoliberalism, or second, that they do not fully understand the mechanisms of the system. These reasons combined with the apolitical culture of the new generation - which is unable to produce identities and claim access to the traditional institutions of democracy - leave social movements with the nation as their only basis of formation.

However, we have already seen and analyzed the dimension of the nation in neoliberalism, there is no need to repeat ourselves. The question that remains open is what will be the course of social movements and how they will manage to present their demands and claims within neoliberalism during the process of its deepening. If we were soothsayers the answer would be easy, but since we have the ambition of the political scientist, we will proceed to the last chapter of this analysis in which we will attempt to condense all our study into the theory about the *Process of Abstraction*.

---

[91] See, Negri, T. (2019). *The Yellow Vests: The hot winter of '18-19.* Eleutheriaki Koultoura: Athens.

Chapter 4

The Process of Abstraction

The Process of Abstraction is a theoretical experiment. A model, that is trying to understand the changes that take place in modernity. At a first level of analysis (we will call it philosophical), the process of abstraction describes *the shift of society from the specific and concrete to the general and abstract.* Society is viewed as a whole, encompassing all fields of human activity. To make clear the understanding of the *totality of society*, we can contrast it with the image of a shepherd who lives on a mountain and has no interaction with other people, is not subject to legal or state restrictions or is involved in financial transactions. Moreover, the shepherd has no history - in the sense of traditions, customs and culture - but relies on his own powers for his survival. This image may raise questions for careful readers. For example, didn't the shepherd have a family? Where did he find the sheep? Where did he learn to milk them and make milk? All these questions are very reasonable, but our image only is supposed to give to the concept of the totality of society the dimension of a whole system that includes economic transactions, morals, customs, traditions, history, political and social institutions, identities, networks, dynamics etc. Moreover, the totality of society should not be treated as an oversimplified generalization, as its operation does not negate the particularities of the sub-cases it covers. Therefore, we can grasp the concept of the totality of society as if we see it with the eagle's eyes macroscopically. Having made the above clarifications, let's see what the movement from the specific to the abstract means.

Modernity is a difficult concept for which there is much disagreement about where it begins and where it ends. Our analysis places modernity in the transition from feudalism to the capitalist system. This transition is not limited to its economic dimension, but treats both feudalism and capitalism as systems that produce ideas, ways of organization, practices, networks, politics (in the broadest sense of the term) etc. In other words, feudalism and capitalism are *worldview systems*. This worldview contains the element of spontaneity, that is, it is not a rigid structural element, as it starts from the reflection of individuals about the interaction with each other and with nature. The original thought through its expansion - expansion that takes place through economic

and trade networks, wars, religion, etc. - succeeds in becoming the *dominant worldview.* Therefore, when we talk about transition, we mean changing the dominant worldview.

The transition, therefore, from the specific to the abstract, is referred within the dominant worldview of capitalism. Transition as a concept describes a process of movement or change; from point A we move towards point B. If we now, consider point A as the beginning of capitalism we are currently traveling the distance from A to B. Point B we can neither know nor imagine what it will really be like. But what we can do is watch the ways we move. There lies perhaps the whole essence of Social and Political Science. When we reach point X, we are not aware of where we are, because as we have seen it is a spontaneous course without a predetermined end. At some point, as we travel the distance from X to Y, we look back at how far we've come and wonder where we started. Then, conventionally we give the name A to the point X. In other words, the point A acquires real substance when the human mind reflects on the path it has traced. Point A becomes a symbol that seeks to understand our path of movement. It becomes the special and specific that functions as a point of reference. As we move forward, however, we are not aware of where we will arrive unless we first place a point B as a destination, which consequently will determine our actions. In this case we would talk about a *defined path*. But since we have not determined - at least for the moment – a specific point B, the movement we make proceeds towards abstraction, that is, to the unknown and unpredictable point B. It would be unwise to describe the movements from A to B and from B to C as repeating cycles, as human history traces a linear course. When we say linear, we mean the uniqueness of each historic time.

At a second level of analysis (we will call it analytical), the process of abstraction attempts to understand in what ways the movement from the specific to the abstract takes place. In other words, how we have moved since we conventionally defined capitalism to be point A, but we have not clearly defined point B. For this reason, we did this study of the historical retrospection of social movements since the 60s until today. We chose this historical period of about 80 years, -as we could not exhaust the period of modernity, at least not in the context of a diplomatic work-, because the developments in technological media are rapid and evident. Furthermore, we chose social movements and not for example an institution, as social movements de facto denote movements of opposition or protest. That is, critical positions on the happenings that have the purpose of change.

So, we observed, that in the time frame under consideration (80 years), the social movements did not particularly change their actions. When they wanted to mobilize, they went to the streets, attempted to occupy central points of symbolic importance (parliament squares), set up barricades, fought with the police forces, etc. What changed, even drastically, were the technological developments. We focused on the mass media and put special emphasis on modern social media, as they are the main means of shaping the subjects, beyond their obvious communicative function. Social media provides individuals with the possibility of multiple identities, with the result that individuals are encouraged to shape their personalities as they see fit. This possibility, however, ends up without value for two reasons: firstly, because the various identities seem to play no essential role and secondly, the only identity that has value is that of the consumer. In other words, any identity or identities adopted by individuals remain on a digital space level and do not seem to have a social dimension in the real world. In addition, social media are businesses themselves, which as such, attempt to maximize their profits. Therefore, any user of social media is treated primarily, or even exclusively, as a consumer. An unintended consequence of the action of social media is the fact that the communication space it provides is often used for the organization and mobilization of social movements. However, the heterogeneity and multiple identities of users allow for the temporary rallying of individuals among themselves rather than the cultivation of a primary identity. Therefore, at the analytical level of the process of abstraction, abstraction is located in the transition of social movements from their very specific identities (as in the 60s) to the multiple identities of the 21st century that coexist in the digital environment.

At the third and last level of analysis (we will call it ideological), the process of abstraction understands neoliberalism as the ideological-legitimizing basis of the capitalist worldview. For this reason, we proceeded to analyze neoliberalism itself. We started from its appearance (1947) and reached its modern version in the 21st century. Its original idea emerged from academic salons and reached the entire ideological-political spectrum. The idea of neoliberalism is not a novelty, the fact that it was built with the materials of classical 19th century liberalism confirms this position. The interest, however, is concentrated in his radicalism, as he managed to redefine the idea of the free market, reducing it to the highest principle of political practice. Thus, we observe supranational organizations (NATO, EU) performing the role of guardian of

the value of the free market and carrying out policies to defend and deepen it. Nation-state governments are simply the pawns on the chessboard, neoliberalism is the Queen and capitalism is the King. Therefore, the abstraction at our ideological level of analysis is accomplished through the deepening of capitalism as the only worldview, accomplished by the hegemony of neoliberalism in all areas of human activity.

A clarification is important before we conclude our analysis. The process of abstraction as a theoretical experiment is not amenable to determinism of any nature. Even more, he abhors deterministic reductions. What he aspires to achieve is to understand and describe the symbolic linear movement of society. In other words, how does a transition from point X to Y take place. Nothing is predetermined in this movement or in any movement of society. Our duty as scholars of Sociology and Political Science is to observe and think on human action and intellection.

Conclusion

In our study we dealt with the historical development of social movements from the 1960s to the first two decades of the 21st century. With a critical attitude, we proceeded to compare the social movements during this period of 80 years. From the social movement of the new generation to the yellow vests, we found that their practical actions are not particularly different, but their way of organization showed changes. This is due to the development of technological media and especially mass media. From the emergence of television, radio and the newspaper, to the global expansion of the Internet as the primary means of communication, social movements have utilized these means to produce and organize their action. By presenting economic and historical changes we have attempted to understand more deeply and more fully the transformation of social action. Furthermore, we have seen how globalization has affected social movements. We particularly dealt with the issue of identities and their limitations from the Internet, emphasizing social media which are the space for shaping the personality of the modern person. Because of this important function of social media, we have dedicated an entire chapter to analyzing the medium, as well as its relationship with individuals. We have observed that the freedom provided by social media is phenomenal and ends up disorienting people from social action. Individuals' multiple identities end up fueled by consumer identity. In order to better understand this dimension of social media, we related it to neoliberalism. Towards this direction of understanding, we analyzed the system of neoliberalism itself from its appearance to its action during the time we are going through. The ideological hegemony of neoliberalism - which describes its modern version - covers the whole range of human activity by fragmenting society into individuals. Through this condition we questioned the future of social movements.

Finally, we presented the conception of the theoretical experiment of the process of abstraction as a tool for understanding social transformations from the time of the emergence of capitalism until today, combining all the above findings. By briefly presenting our theoretical experiment in the last chapter of this thesis; we seek to transform into a robust political theory during the next stage of our academic career.

Bibliography

Diani, M. (1992), *"Analyzing Social Movement Networks".* In M. Diani and R. Eyerman (επιμ.) *Studying Collective Action.* Newbury Park/London: Sage

Pizzorno, A. (1996), "Decisioni o interazioni? La micro-descrizione del cambiamento sociale". Rassegna italiana di sociologia, 37

Touraine, A. (1981), The voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements. Cambridge University Press

Melucci, A. (1996), Challenging Codes. Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press

The Politics of 'The Movement'", in Irving Howe (ed.), The Radical Papers. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1966

Touraine, A. (1977), The Self-Production of Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fantasia, R. (1988), Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers. Berkley/London: University of California Press.

Gamson, W. (1992)," Talking Politics". Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lumley Robert (1990), States of Emergency, London: Verso.

Melucci, A. (1996), Challenging Codes. Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press.

 Mueller, C. (1994), "Conflict Networks and the Origins of Women's Liberation. In E. Larana, H Johnston and J. Gusfield (edit) New Social Movements. Philadelphia: Temple University Press

Suri, Jeremi, (2003), Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Tilly, C. (2004): Social Movements, 1768-2004, Routledge, New York.

Tarrow, S., (1989), Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy 1965-1975, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Bourges, H, (1968): La Revolte etudiante: Les Animateurs parlent, Seuil, Paris.

Westhues, K (1975), "Inter-generational conflict in the sixties", in Samuel D. Clark, J. Paul Grayson and Linda M. Grayson, Prophesy and Protest: Social Movements in Twentieth- Century Canada, Gage, Toronto.

Touraine, A. (1968), Le Mouvement de Mai ou le Commnisme Utopique, Seuil, Paris.

Cohen, J. (1985), "Strategy or identity: New theoretical paradigms and contemporary social movements", Social Research vol.52, pp. 663-716.

Swidler, A. (1986), "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies". American Sociological Review, 51, pp.273-86.

Weber, M, (1946), From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology. New York: Oxford University press.

Schumaker, P. D. (1975), "Policy Responsiveness to Protest Group Demands". The Journal of Politics, 37, pp.488-521.

Moore B. Jr. (1966), Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, Boston: Beacon Press.

Rheingold, Howard (2003), Smart Mobs: The Next social Revolution, Perseus, New York.

Rheingold, Howard (2003), Smart Mobs: The Next social Revolution, Perseus, New York.

Haythornthwaite, Caroline, and Wellman, Barry (2002), "The Internet in Everyday life: An introduction», in Caroline Haythornthwaite and Barry Wellman, The Internet in Everyday Life, Blackwell, Malten, Massachusetts.

Fox, J. (2013), What we've learned from the Financial crisis? Harvard Business Review, November 2013 issue.

Cojanu, V. (2015), Self-interest and the modernity of homo economicus, www.academia.edu, last access May 2023.

Krugman, P. (2009), How did economists get it so wrong? The New York Times, September 2.

Kirman, A. (2011), The crisis in economic theory. Rivista Italiana degli Economisti, Vol. 1, April 2011, pp. 9-36.

CNN Money (2011), Famous Fed flubs. March 24, 2011, http://money.cnn.com/.

Acemoglu, D. (2010), The crisis of 2008: structural lessons for and from economics. World Bank Group: Commission on growth and development, Globalization and Growth: Implications for a Post-Crisis World, No. 54253, p. 37-45.

Stiglitz, J.E.; Greenwald, B.C. (2014), Creating a learning society. A new approach to growth, development and social progress. New York: Columbia University Press.

Toarna, A. (2014), Review of Joseph E. Stiglitz and Bruce C. Greenwald, Creating a Learning Society: A New Approach to Growth, Development and Social Progress. The Journal of Philosophical Economics, volume VIII, issue 1, autumn.

Gerbaudo, P. (2017), The Mask and the Flag: Populism, Citizenism, and Global Protest, New York: Oxford University Press.

Psaras, D, (2012), The black bible of Golden Dawn: Documents for the history and action of a Nazistic group. Polis, Athens.

Psaras, D, (18-02-2019), "Aganaktismenoi is not the same with nazists". The newspaper of the Editors.

Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts». BBC News. 18 February 2016.

Castells, M. (2012), Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet.

Polan, D. (1990), The Public's Fear, or Media as Monster in Habermas, Negt, and Kluge. Jürgen Habermas's The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society [Review of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, by J. Habermas]. Social Text, 25/26, 260–266.

Goswami, M. (2018), Social Media and Hashtag Activism. In: "Liberty Dignity and Change in Journalism", Publisher: Kanishka.

Thompson, Lanny Ace. (1979), "THE DEVELOPMENT OF MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION: AN INTRODUCTION." Mid-American Review of Sociology 4, no. 1: pp.23–38.

Lippmann, S., and Aldrich H. (2003), "The Rationalization of Everything? Using Ritzer's McDonaldization Thesis to Teach Weber." Teaching Sociology 31, no. 2: pp.134–45.

Maley, T. (2004), Max Weber and the Iron Cage of Technology. Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society, 24(1), pp. 69–86.

Saint Clair, J. (2023), Consumer Identity: A Comprehensive Review and Integration of Contemporary Research. In C. Lamberton, D. Rucker, & S. Spiller (Eds.), The Cambridge Handbook of Consumer Psychology (Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology, pp. 179-227). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Foucault, M. (2008), The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979. Edited by Michel Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Weber, M. (2001), The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Routledge Classics. London, England: Routledge.

Harvey, D. (2007), "A Brief History of Neoliberalism," OUP Catalogue, Oxford University Press.

Cole, H. L., & Ohanian, L. E. (2004), New Deal Policies and the Persistence of the Great Depression: A General Equilibrium Analysis. Journal of Political Economy, 112(4), 779–816.

Weber, M. (2019), " Basic Sociological Concepts". Economy and Society: A New Translation, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press.

Wallerstein, I. (2004), World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction. Duke University Press.

Wallerstein, I. (1983), Historical capitalism. London: Verso.

Crouch C. (2004), *Post-democracy*. Polity.

Fligstein, N. (1996), Markets as Politics: A Political-Cultural Approach to Market Institutions. American Sociological Review, 61(4), 656–673.

Chilton, S. (1988). Defining Political Culture. The Western Political Quarterly, 41(3), 419–445.

Negri, T. (2019). The Yellow Vests: The hot winter of '18-19. Eleutheriaki Koultoura: Athens.