"To take the distinction between us and them away"

Political subjectivities of horizontal solidarity activists in

Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden

By

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Abstract

This dissertation is based on ethnographic research conducted with the activists who supported migrants and other marginalized groups through horizontal solidarity practices in Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden in the period 2015–2017. Employing narrative methodology, it explores the contours of political subjectivities of the activists—highly critical and socially conscious Western subjects who simultaneously pursue counter-hegemonic, equality and justice-oriented political projects and are positioned high in socio-economic and political structures of power (both locally and globally) that they criticize and oppose. The dissertation shows that activists' narratives reveal the entanglements between counter-hegemonic and hegemonic discourses, specifically a series of continuities, slippages, and dynamics of neutralization between activists' 'critical' stances and the discourses of neoliberal capitalism. This dissertation traces those continuities, slippages, and dynamics of neutralization within a conceptual framework structured around three figurations: the figure of critical consciousness; the figure of a great man and the figure of a universal transcendent subject.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Alicja Korsak.

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Introduction

1. 1. "To talk to the migrants": Introducing the research question

This dissertation is the result of a nagging feeling of discomfort. It was the end of May 2015 and I was in Denmark, traveling together with Lucy and Mark to Avnstrup, an old psychiatric hospital located in a rural landscape 20 km from Roskilde which had served in recent years as an asylum center. "How convenient for the authorities," Lucy, a recent sociology graduate, remarked sarcastically, "to have one 'unwanted population' replaced by another." Mark and I, both early-stage academics, nodded at her apt comment. I was in Denmark to conduct fieldwork on what I initially though would be my PhD dissertation topic: a study of the experiences of queer asylum seekers vis-à-vis exclusionary border regimes in European Union (hereafter: EU) countries. I was an aspiring critical IR scholar and the rationale for my project was to attend to the voices of those who were otherwise silenced in the hegemonic, state-centric, and heteronormative discourses[1] around migration. Before coming to Denmark, I contacted a group of activists who opposed state and humanitarian response to migration and who supported the migrants through what they framed as solidarity activism—counter-hegemonic, inclusionary, and justice-oriented response to migration. We seemed to share common understanding of what constitutes critical[2] political and ethical stances towards migration and thus they agreed to help me with contacting migrants and taking part in my research[3].

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[1] I understand discourse as "any practice by which individuals imbue reality with meaning" (Ruiz Ruiz 2009). As such, discourse can be "found in a wide range of forms" from institutionalized policies, to media representations, to daily practices and customs (Ruiz Ruiz 2009) .

[2] The term "critical" was often used in activist and academic circles in which I conducted my research. It often indicated one's interest in striving, on personal and structural levels, towards social justice and equality coupled with suspicion towards the power dynamics inscribed in existing socio-political and economic structures and in one's own practices. In its everyday use the term is both clear—it indicated a political and ethical orientation—and elusive—the concrete elements constituting critical stances are rarely clearly defined. Among other things, this dissertation traces and analyzes the meaning of "being critical" as transpiring from activists' narratives and as shaped by broader academic discourses. It does not aim to provide a definition of what 'being critical' means, which, as Philip R. Conway observes, is "heatedly contested, both within academia and without"(Conway 2021). Rather it traces the meanings attached to 'being critical' by subjects who position themselves as critical and who take part in creating its meaning. For the recent discussion on 'critical approaches' in critical international theory see for example: (Conway 2021)

[3] This shared understanding over what constitutes critical political and ethical stances was one of the crucial reasons for which activists agreed to take part in my research (see Chapter I). Among other things our critical stances indicated

Yet, my topic was soon to change. I switched from analyzing the experiences of migrants[4] to analyzing political subjectivities of "critical" Western subjects, such as the activists I contacted before going to Denmark, who formed horizontal solidarity with the migrants and other marginalized groups, particularly homeless people and Roma populations (hereafter: activists[5]). I trace the beginning of the change of my research topic to that particular crispy morning that I spent on the bus to Avnstrup and the feeling of discomfort that it left me with.

Lucy and Mark were Denmark-based German and Danish activists, respectively, in their 20s and 30s. They supported LGBTQ migrants through what I frame, following Annastiina Kallius, Daniel Monterescu, and Prem Kumar Rajaram (2016), as horizontal solidarity activism/projects (hereafter HSP). At the time of my research, such activism formed an important, if marginal and recent in development[6], critical voice in migration-related activism across the EU and beyond. It was often presented by the activists and migration scholars as socio-political alternative to the hegemonic, exclusion-driven responses to migration enacted by state agencies and humanitarian groups[7]. As a rather new phenomenon enacted mostly by non-formalized, grass-root initiatives HSP lacked a clear definition, both among its practitioners and those who studied it[8]. Its meaning was in the making and emerged around series of imaginaries over what constitutes a more inclusionary, equality, and justice-oriented mobilization in support for people's mobilities. The

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a shared commitment to not endanger migrants and migrant struggles, not assume authority over migrants' stories, and not reproduce violence to which migrants were subjugated in the hegemonic discourses of state-capital nexus.

[4] I use the term migrant to encompass refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, and undocumented migrants. This is not to silence crucial differences between these groups but rather to additionally highlight continuities of their experiences vis-à-vis the state-capital nexus (Rajaram 2018). This usage was common among the activists I studied as well as within critical migration scholarship. Following the terminology used by the activists, I at times refer to migrants as people with migration experience.

[5] Following the vocabulary used by my respondents, I use the term activist to refer to people who mobilized in support for the migrants and other marginalized groups according to logic of horizontal solidarity as opposed to those who engaged through logic of humanitarianisms. Likewise, I use the term to refer exclusively to the voices of those actors who hold EU passports (or as in case of two of my respondents, nationals of non-EU Western liberal democracies), and who, while mobile, were not migrants themselves. Thus, I exclude from my study voices of activists with migratory experiences.

[6] The recent development refers to the type of solidarity mobilizations in support of people's mobilities that emerged in the EU and its neighboring countries in the second decade of 2000s, and not to solidarity practices as such.

[7] As I argue further a growing number of scholars put the binary approach to HSP and humanitarianism into question.

[8] Among other things this dissertation contributes to the scholarly debate over what constitutes horizontal solidarity activism with migrants and other marginalized groups.

Activists who self-identified[9] as pursuing HSP and with whom I spoke during my fieldworks were broadly united in their critique of the vertical forms of politics inscribed in state practices and border regimes as well as humanitarian discourses of "help" and "pity"—seen by the activists as both depoliticizing migrants' struggles and reproducing their subjugation to the power of the Western Self. The activists were also invested in developing systemic critiques of social inequalities: they linked the exclusionary responses to migration with the marginalization of other populations and recognized the workings of nation states and capitalism as the primary sources of ongoing marginalization of social groups. Lucy's comment about "unwanted populations" signaled such attentiveness to the interconnectedness of various forms of marginalization and investment in global justice issues. Activists also shared an ambition to develop an alternative form of engagement with the migrants to the one offered by state and humanitarian agencies. Such an alternative was to be transnational in character and enacted through horizontal forms of mobilizations focused on coming together with the migrants, creating collaborative projects, speaking with rather than about those affected by border regimes, emphasizing migrants' agency, and politicizing their struggles. It aimed to challenge differentiations between citizens and migrants as inscribed in states' border regimes, further translated into a differentiation between those subjects who counted as political and whose life was to be protected (citizens) and those whose life, deemed "ungrievable," (Butler 2009) did not matter (migrants). As one of the activists put it, the underlying desire of HSP was to "take the distinction between us and them away" (Kate), meaning to create social structures that would no longer be based on and sustained through hierarchical, racialized, classed, and political differentiations between people. Activists also hoped to develop personal relationships with migrants and marginalized groups that, transgressive of the hegemonic discourses, would be based on equality, care, and respect. Thus, HSP project can be

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[9] These are the activists on whose narratives this dissertation focuses.

broadly characterized as striving towards an establishment of what Wanda Vrasti calls an "ethical encounter with difference" (2013, viii) on structural, political, social, and personal level.

While I did not identify as an activist myself, I ethically and politically located myself close to the ideas of HSP also because they were aligned with the type of training in critical theory[10] that I received in my academic education and that informed my initial research interest—the pursuance of social justice-oriented politics with the focus on developing these politics together with those subjected to marginalization. Thus, though I didn't know Lucy and Mark well, I felt comfortable collaborating with them during my fieldwork due to our assumed alliance based on openly stated critical stands and ethical orientations.[11] Lucy and Mark were kind enough to invite me along for one of their visits to Avnstrup so that I could schedule interviews with some of the migrants they worked with. On the way, we talked about their activism and my PhD project. The rural landscape we were passing through—to which migrants were violently ostracized by the Danish government to keep them from cities and urban social and economic opportunities— was calming to me. Yet, being calmed by a landscape that made others feel trapped was distressing to me. To distract myself I asked (pro-forma, as I expected the answer) if there were a lot of Danish people interested in supporting migrants. Lucy frowned. "Danish people send money to big NGOs, donate clothes for refugees, you know, humanitarian actions," she replied, with clear condemnation of humanitarian practices. "But almost no one ever goes to the camps to talk to the migrants, like we do, there is no interaction between Danish people and migrants. Danish people just buy their good deeds." I immediately nodded with the disapproval over the described distant humanitarianism. My

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[10] Following Wanda Vrasti I define such training as one that teaches, among other things, that "that neither multiculturalism, with its apolitical celebration of cultural diversity, nor modernism, with its insistence on universal (read: European) values of progress, rationality and civility, could be satisfactory models for an ethical encounter with difference" (2013, viii). Recalling her PhD fieldwork experiences, Vrasti writes that equipped with such training she "was hoping for a transformative tourist encounter that would neither be tainted by colonial residues nor give in to lofty liberal aspirations"(2013, viii). While the activists and I were perhaps more skeptical of the transformative dimension of the encounters and wary of the problems inscribed in 'letting' subaltern speak, this articulation resonated with what formed the basis of HSP and the core of my methodological interests: we shared a desire to avoid being tainted by "colonial residues" or "[giving] in to lofty liberal aspirations."

[11] Such alliance was assured already before we met through series of emails that I exchanged with the organization they were collaborating with.

response came naturally, reflecting one of the critical stances around which the assumed alliance between Lucy, Mark, and I was based: the disagreement with the distance structuring humanitarian responses and the belief in establishing closeness and dialog with the marginalized groups.

And yet, though there was nothing unexpected for me in this exchange, there was something about Lucy' statement and my nod, enacted almost intuitively on that bus to the asylum center, that left me with a bitter taste of confusion that I was not able to shake. Danish, German, and Polish people, all of us occupying high positions in national and global social and economic structures of power[12] (having EU passports, coming from broadly defined middle-class families, having university degrees, and communicating in English, a second language for each of us) and nodding at each other with the affirmation of our critical stands over EU border regimes. Three well-off subjects, moving slowly towards an asylum center so that we could pursue what we imagined to be the most equal, inclusionary, and liberatory approach to migrants and migrant mobilizations. Several hours later we would return to our apartments. It was up to us to decide whether we would return to the center or would forget about the migrants' presence, already removed by the government from the privileged Western subjects' line of sight. While at the time we met we were all leading a rather alternative lifestyle (at least in our clear refusal to follow corporate career paths), we were also all in positions to switch from supporting migrants to pursuing pleasure and/or careers within the EU/global job market. There was something disturbing about the combination of our advanced socio-economic positions in the very structures of power we aimed to criticize and the smoothness with which we reassured each other of our critical stances. There was something unsettling in the importance we attached to the closeness we claimed to establish with migrants, to the immediacy with which we agreed that such closeness defined our critical stances.

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[12] We had access to power and resources, including socio-economic and political prerogatives, that allowed us to lead socio-economically and politically secure lives. This did not mean that we, and other activists I studied, did not experience precarious working conditions and worries about our financial security and futures. Yet, we had access to middle class job opportunities and educational structures that were often inaccessible to those occupying lower positions within the existing structures of power.

I kept on wondering, who was this assumed critical "we"? Why did we assume that our presence in the center was that much more valuable than a money transfer? For whom did our presence actually matter? What was this so-smoothly-enacted criticality made of? What was the relationship between our critical stances, our privileged socio-economic and political positioning, and the importance we attached to coming close with migrants? What kind of political imaginaries structured our critical stances and why, while positioning myself ethically and politically close with HSP, did I experience such a creeping feeling of discomfort as we were on that bus passing through the foggy Danish landscape?

These questions instigated a change in my research topic. Firstly, they made me openly acknowledge the existence of a series of imaginaries shared among Western horizontal solidarity activists (and many scholars) about what constitutes a critical (understood as liberatory, equality and justice-oriented) approach to migration. Secondly, they made me realize that I was unable to make sense of the political underpinnings of these imaginaries and was thus unable to problematize the possibilities and limitations inscribed in the resulting attitudes towards migrants framed as critical. Understanding my embeddedness in those critical imaginaries made me doubt the sufficiency of my ethical, political, and methodological apparatus vis-à-vis my initial research topic. It also created a sense of urgency around making sense of the 'we' in Western critical responses to migration that I both identified with and was becoming uncomfortable with. My dissertation thus refocused around one central question: What are the contours of political subjectivity which emerge from narratives of highly critical and socially conscious Western subjects who are, simultaneously, positioned high in local and global socio-economic and political structures of power and committed to pursuing liberatory, inclusionary, equality and justice-oriented solidarity activism with migrants? At the core of this question is an interest in the relationship between the critical counter-hegemonic political projects enacted by such Western subjects and the state-capital nexus in which these subjects are embedded.

2.   2. Description of the project

This dissertation specifically focuses on political subjectivities of activists in Hungary, Denmark, and Sweden who position themselves in horizontal solidarity with migrants and other marginalized groups (reflecting counter-hegemonic character of the activists' political project) and at the same time occupy high position within the existing socio-economic and political structures of power that they aim to criticize (reflecting the activists' embeddedness in hegemonic structures of power). Throughout the dissertation I show how the activists' political subjectivities reveal continuities and slippages between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic political projects, which in turn reveals how counter-hegemonic investments may be neutralized. The goal of this dissertation is not to evaluate activists' project as such but rather to interpret it as an example of the ways in which counter-hegemonic political projects and hegemonic discourses of the state-capital nexus converge under the political and historical conjuncture in the EU in the 2010s.

I explore the contours of activists' political subjectivities by focusing on political imaginaries inscribed in the activists' narratives (Chapter II). Following Noel B. Salazar, I understand imaginaries as "socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices" (2012, 864).[13] Imaginaries are "both a function of producing meanings and the product of this function" and thus both reflect and further construct social reality (Salazar 2012, 864). While they shape, influence, and reflect greater social structures, they are not necessarily "an acknowledged part of public discourse" but rather configure as "unspoken schemas of interpretation" (Salazar 2012, 864). Imaginaries, or rather *their operating logic* that discloses itself in "what people say and do" (Salazar 2012, 866), are sites that link the subjective and the social and reflect one's often unconscious participation in and reproduction of myths, fantasies, and social narratives that sustain

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[13] For a discussion on various takes on imaginaries and their working see for example: (Gaonkar and Lee 2002)

hegemonic as well as counter-hegemonic ways of understanding and organizing reality. Thus, imaginaries are particularly helpful in outlining the contours of political subjectivities, understood as a "relationship between subjective human experience and the political paradigm in which the individual is embedded" (Rahimi 2015, 1) (Chapter II).

Activists' narratives revealed a series of imaginaries about political (Chapter III), ethical (Chapter IV), solidarity, and social struggles (Chapter V). They also reflected imaginaries of difference and margins, about the Self, the Other, the individual, and the social.

I trace the "critical" imaginaries activists mobilize that are located within contemporary Western paradigms invested in the struggle for global justice (Dhawan 2013) and the "ethical encounter with difference" (Vrasti 2013, viii). I take the activists' interest in pursuing counter-hegemonic, equality, and justice-oriented politics seriously and thus I do not aim to question the intentionality behind the activists' narratives and practices. I further analyze how those imaginaries corresponded with discourses sustaining broader structures of power (in which activists operated and were embedded in). I take three entry points to the problematization of critical imaginaries structuring HSP.[14] First, the conceptualization of HSP is found in the existing scholarly work, particularly in critical migration studies scholarship (section 3.1 in this introduction). While existing scholarship does not provide a clear definition of the critical, pro-migrant trans-European activism of the 2010s and early 2020s that I characterize as HSP, it offers important insights into what type of practices and imaginaries are considered in the academia-activism nexus to be "critical" in terms of pro-migrant activism. It likewise both describes and informs solidarity practices. My second point of entry is my own political affinity with HSP as well as the ethnographic observations (Chapter II). Third are the activists' narratives which I collected throughout my fieldwork. These narratives (and, inscribed in them, imaginaries) are at the core of my analytical work.

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[14] The order of their presentation does not correspond to their importance.

I identify the relationship between nation state and capitalism—here understood as the organizing logic of economic and societal relationships, now in its global epoch, with the particular set of beliefs and values advanced under its contemporary (post-1970s[15]) neoliberal[16] spirit— as constituting hegemonic structures of power in which activists operated, and thus as fundamentally shaping activists' political subjectivities (W. I. Robinson 2004; R. H. Cox and Schilthuis 2012; Boltanski and Chiapello 2018).

At the core of the activists' project was the desire to establish more equality and justice-oriented relationship (on a structural and personal level) with those designated in the hegemonic discourses as the Other. Thus, the overarching conceptual frame of this dissertation is the relationship between Self and the Other (Chapter II, section 1). I further invoke three figures to represent how activists enacted and negotiated their embeddedness in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects. The first is Rosi Braidotti's figure of *critical consciousness*, which systematizes the imaginaries transpiring from the activists' narratives over what constituted for them critical, liberatory stances and actions and defined the ethical encounter with the designated Other and difference (Braidotti 1994; 2014b; 2014a; Vrasti 2013) (Chapter II, section 2). The second is Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's figure of the *great man*, which represents a successful subject as encouraged under neoliberal capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018) (Chapter II, section 3). The third is that of the *universal transcendent subject* (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000a). The imaginaries inherent in this figure disclose Western fantasies of the Self transgressing and undoing the

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[15] Periodization of capitalism is an analytical tool. With regard to the development of global capitalism, I follow William Robinson's proposition that in the 1970s capitalism began a profound restructuring which led to the development of fourth epoch of capitalism: global capitalism (Robinson 2004). With regard to the "spirit" of capitalism I follow Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's periodization, which distinguishes three spirits of capitalism—with the latest, new one beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). For other periodizations see for example: (Harris 2013)

[16] The term neoliberalism is widely used both in and outside of academia. Some scholars problematize the term neoliberalism as being driven by conceptual ambiguities, "controversial, incoherent and crisis-ridden" (Venugopal 2015). I use neoliberalism in order to refer to an economic paradigm and a spirit of capitalism, understood as a set of values and "patterned ways of thinking" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018) (Chapter III). As an economic paradigm, neoliberalism began as a political economic doctrine in the 1930s and from the 1970s became the dominant political and economic doctrine around the world. The doctrine opposes "all forms of active government intervention beyond that required to secure private property arrangements, market institutions, and entrepreneurial activity" and privileges a free market economy, laissez-faire, economic growth, and freedom of trade and capital (Harvey 2003, 157).

(constructed) difference between the Self and the Other and transforming itself through the process (Chapter II, section 4). Through these conceptual lenses, the activists' narratives disclose the entanglements of hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism; counter-hegemonic and left-inspired narratives regarding social justice; critical, post-colonial, anti-racist, and feminist interventions; and what Gail Ching-Liang Low calls "romances of imperialism": the series of myths and fantasies about the Self and its contact with what is constructed and imagined as different (Low 2003, 1)[17]. The narratives ultimately reveal that, while seemingly contradictory and in practice often driven by tensions, these activists' dual positioning as subjects invested in a counter-hegemonic, critical struggle and as subjects embedded and privileged in the hegemonic discourses and structures of power can be reconcilable.

In showing continuities and slippages in activists' narratives, I draw on Boltanski and Chiapello's discussion that capitalism and its critiques are co-constitutive of each other, with the critique serving as a motor of the development of capitalism (2018) (Chapter II, section 3). Not every critique inherently leads to the advancement of capitalism, but the development of capitalism is always in a crucial manner dependent on its ability to address, incorporate, and neutralize its critiques, as it did with the artistic and social critiques advanced against it in the 1960s and 1970s which gave rise to the development of the new, neoliberal spirit (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). The critical imaginaries available to and mobilized by activists in the 2010s were inherently shaped by the discourses of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, while carrying counter hegemonic potential, these imaginaries should be also read as products of capitalist history and capitalism's disarmament and incorporation of its critique for its own advancement—thus perhaps also being in compliance with the greater capitalist project (Vrasti 2011).

Taking these historical developments into account and in order to make sense of the relationship between counter-hegemonic and hegemonic imaginaries inscribed in the activists'

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[17] For the discussion on the colonial/imperial residues and the fetishization of difference, margins, and otherness in the contemporary socio-political and cultural life see for example: (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000b; Huggan 2001; Hoofd 2005; 2012; Lozanski 2010; Spivak 2012).

narratives, I further locate HSP within the broader history of capitalism, namely the development of global capitalism and transnational class formation (section 3.2 in this introduction). In doing so, I problematize the "we" that I wondered about earlier in this introduction, as being not only formed on the discursive level through shared critical imaginaries but also as result of our mutual embeddedness within global socio-economic structures.

This dissertation is based on a multi-site ethnography across three different horizontal solidarity initiatives which I conducted over the period 05/2015–05/2017 in Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden[18] (Chapter I). My primary source is fifteen recorded and transcribed interviews that I conducted with the activists during my fieldwork. My interpretation of these interviews is shaped by and embedded in the extensive participatory observations and fieldwork experiences, as well as by the post-fieldwork encounters with activists, migrants, state officials, and academics working on migration-related issues. I use narrative methodology, approaching narratives as sites that allow us to study the "intersubjective nature of experience and interpretation"(Ravecca and Dauphinee 2018, 11) and thus as sites that "articulate particular worldviews, create and enable certain political subjects and (re) produce specific understandings about facts, relations and peoples […and thus] tell us a lot about the limits and possibilities of political life"(Moulin 2016, 138).

3.   3. Between critical migration scholarship and transnational class formation

In analyzing the relationship between the activists' critical, counter-hegemonic imaginaries and the activists' embeddedness in the hegemonic discourses, this dissertation speaks to two main bodies of literature: critical migration scholarship and the literature on global capitalism and transnational class formation.[19]

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[18] In order to ensure the anonymity of my respondents I neither disclose the names of the initiatives nor the names of the cities in which I conducted this research.

[19] I also refer to some authors who do not immediately belong to this scholarship but whose insights are important for the conversation that I am developing.

1.1 3.1 Critical Migration Scholarship

Broadly conceived, Critical Migration Scholarship (CMS) is an emerging interdisciplinary field of study[20] that scrutinizes the power structures inscribed in discourses around migration, with often explicit liberatory and subversive investments. Taking as one of its primary interests migrant and solidarity struggles, the scholarship offers nuanced investigation into the type of initiatives that I also focus on: bottom-up, horizontal solidarities enacted by EU citizens in the 2010s with clear counter-hegemonic goals and intentions of support migrants' requests for mobility and/or settlement (Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Cantat 2016; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016; Rozakou 2016; Cantat 2018; Birey et al. 2019; Dadusc and Mudu 2020). While far from being a unified field, CMS also advances a particular understanding of what counts as critical acting/thinking—an understanding which I argue both informs and transpires from the narratives of the activists I study, and thus in an important manner shapes activists' political subjectivities.[21]

The CMS study of solidarity struggles departs from methodological nationalism and the naturalization of nation-states as primary political actors, an approach dominating mainstream migration studies as well as scholarship produced within the research-policy nexus (Wimmer and Schiller 2002; Anderson 2019; Pisarevskaya et al. 2019). CMS views as carrying counter-hegemonic potential to the management of migration at the state-capital nexus those solidarity initiatives that transgress state-centric approaches to migration and that are invested in the "struggle for liberation, that seeks to change social structures that are unjust or oppressive" (Scholz 2007, 39), aim to subvert exclusionary discourses, and "intend to materialise alternative visions of society" (Rozakou 2016, 186). CMS frames such struggles as horizontal solidarity (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016); transnational activism (Hansen 2019); autonomous solidarity; (Dadusc and Mudu

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[20] As employed here CMS encompasses scholarship from: critical borders studies, critical humanitarian studies, critical citizenship studies (CCS), and scholarship around autonomy of migration (AoM).

[21] The convergence between CMS and HSA is to a great extent a result of the fact that many activists are also academics working on migration, and many academics in CMS pursue ethnographic fieldwork and thus interact with activists and often are/become activists themselves (Kasparek and Speer 2013; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016; Hansen 2019; Spång and Lundberg 2019) .

2020); politicized radical solidarity (Joorman 2018); migrant solidarity (Cantat 2013); socialites of solidarity (Rozakou 2016); or simply activism (as opposed to volunteerism) (Kallius 2016). The initiatives that I studied fall under what CMS approaches as counter-hegemonic solidarities (and were presented as such by the activists themselves).

CMS takes seriously the evaluation of the concrete, context specific expressions of solidarity projects. It shows how they surpass state-centric understanding of politics, political actors, and political subjectivities (Andrijasevic and Anderson 2009; McNevin 2013; Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016; Karaliotas and Kapsali 2020), open up and at times entirely call into question traditional conceptualizations of citizenship (Rygiel 2011; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Turner 2016; Caraus 2018; Tazzioli and Walters 2019), challenge state-centric understandings of belonging (Cantat 2016; Hamann and Karakayali 2016; Mensink 2020), complexify hegemonic understandings of (im)mobility (Andrijasevic and Anderson 2009; Kallius 2019), and show the possibilities of building solidarities "across borders" and between different groups of people (Baban and Rygiel 2017; Tsavdaroglou 2019; Cantat 2020; Siim and Meret 2021). The field also highlights the challenges that these projects face in navigating complex articulations and reproductions of power (Ünsal 2015; Rozakou 2016; Zaman 2019).

This dissertation joins CMS' interest in the political subjectivities crystalizing around migrant and solidarity struggles and CMS' recognition that solidarity projects may reproduce hegemonic discourses of state-capital nexus (Nyers 2003; Andrijasevic and Anderson 2009; N. De Genova 2009; Rodriguez 2013; Fontanari 2019). It extends CMS's focus on migrants' political subjectivities and/or the development of counter-hegemonic subjectivities, by placing under scrutiny the political subjectivities of activists and analyzing their embeddedness in both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses *also beyond* their immediate meaning for migrants' struggles. It does so by scrutinizing the *logic* and the *imaginaries* that inform critical activism under current historical and political conjecture in which activists operated and their correspondence with the imaginaries and logic inscribed in the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism. The focus on the

convergence between the logic on which counter-hegemonic and hegemonic discourses rest has been mostly absent in CMS. Christina Hansen, for example, openly acknowledges leaving such questions aside. She recognizes that post-2000s Western expressions of solidarity struggles are often constructed around "politics of the first person," which place the individual at the forefront of political struggle (2019, 52–53) and while she recognizes the possible continuity between politics of the first person and the broader discourses of neoliberalism, she writes:

> "An interesting question […] is how, and to what extent, might neoliberalism, which emerged around that time[22], have influenced these activists and the activists of today. The degree to which the activists' political stance is affected by the 'neoliberal self' (McGuigan 2014) is, however, a topic that falls outside the aim and scope of this study." (Hansen 2019, 54)

The relationship between what often configures in the activism-academia nexus as "critical pro-migrant activism" and discourses of neoliberal capitalism often falls explicitly (as in case of Hansen) or implicitly outside of CMS. I take this relationship as my primary focus. I see it as quintessential for understanding activists' political subjectivities and tracing the ways in which hegemonic discourses might be reproduced also through the narratives that are intended as counter-hegemonic ones.

In order to analyze the relationship between counter-hegemonic and hegemonic imaginaries inscribed in the activists' interpretation and construction of what counts as counter-hegemonic liberatory mobilizations, I outline the main four closely intertwined imaginaries about migrant and solidarity struggles that configure in CMS as counter-hegemonic, and which are also transpire from the narratives of the activists I study.

3.1.1 An articulation of solidarity struggles as political and as distinct from state and humanitarian responses to migration. To emphasize the counter-hegemonic dimension of solidarity struggles, scholars and activists often frame these struggles as political (Spång and Lundberg 2019; Birey et al. 2019). Kalius, Monterescu, and Rajaram, for example, refer to solidarity activism in the context

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[22] 1970s and 1980s.

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of Hungary in 2015 as "horizontal political solidarities" (2016). Other scholars talk about "horizontal solidarity struggles as consciously "collective political actions" (Hansen 2019), "political solidarities" (Hayden and Saunders 2019), and "political activism" (Rygiel 2016). "Political" signifies liberatory politics here, in contrast to a state-centric understanding of politics located almost exclusively in the sphere of formal politics. Such state-centric understandings of politics are often problematized in CMS as constitutive of the violence inscribed in the states' securitizing discourses around migration and border regimes (Rajaram 2016a) as well as in humanitarian discourses which depoliticize the struggles emerging from structural inequalities by reframing them as a matter of generosity of the (Western) helper (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016, 3). CMS also argues that state-centric understandings of politics (re)produce hegemonic constructions of an ideal political subject as a Western white male citizen—a conception embedded in and reflecting on European colonialism (Rigo 2005; Kinnvall 2016).[23]

It is against the grain of state-centric narratives and alongside broader post-colonial, feminist, and anti-racist discourses that CMS describes as political (in its counter-hegemonic understanding) those initiatives which: a) prioritize migrants' right for mobility and settlement b) question state-centric conceptualizations of who counts as a legitimate political subject and, thus, is eligible for mobility/settlement/protection; and/or c) oppose humanitarian discourses and the depoliticization of migrants' struggle (Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Cantat 2016; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016; Birey et al. 2019).

The framing of HSP as "political" in order to indicate its counter-hegemonic stances was also visible in the narratives of the activists I studied. Counter-hegemonic politics were distinguished from state-centric politics in activists' narratives and located outside of formal politics. As a consequence, as I analyze in Chapter III, the activists distanced themselves from the

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[23] For the relationship between colonialism and modern border regimes see for example: (Mamdani 1996; Mayblin 2017; Rodríguez 2018; Carver 2019; El-Enany 2020; Sharma 2020).

state as a crucial element of their counter-hegemonic project, which I argue aligned them with the discourses of neoliberal capitalism (Chapter III). I associate this distancing from the state with the turn towards "everyday activism" (Hansen 2019) and the problematization of ones' personal, everyday life as political. I show how in HSP the location of counter-hegemonic politics outside of formal politics contributed to the narratives that located the Self as the central and often only site of political struggle (Chapters III; V), which in turn created conditions for discontinuity of HPS and for shaping the migrants into self-sustaining subjects (in line with the neoliberal discourses) (Chapter VI).

In regard to differentiation between political and humanitarian project, some scholars complexify the binary opposition between the two conceptualizing it as a continuum of practices (Cantat 2018; Rozakou 2016; Cantat and Feischmidt 2019; Birey et al. 2019). Yet, the imaginaries inscribed in what Céline Cantat calls "long-term activist and academic debate opposing 'politics' to 'humanitarianism' and 'charity' to 'solidarity'" (Cantat 2018, 9) nevertheless continue structuring scholarly and activists narratives around what counts as critical activism (Chapter IV). This dissertation shows how activists' self-differentiation from humanitarianism was often equated with a rejection of grand narratives, resonating with the discourses of neoliberal capitalism and limiting activists' ability to articulate their ethical stances (Chapter IV). The same dynamic also played a role in activists' claims to social and informational capital that come with "cosmopolitan competencies" (Igarashi and Saito 2014), an element of social stratification (Chapters IV, V).

3.1.2 Construction of horizontal, as opposed to vertical, forms of engagement with the migrants. CMS defines counter-hegemonic solidarity projects as those invested in pursuing horizontal models of politics. Horizontal politics aim to "call into question the acted–acted on dichotomy of vertical politics" as inscribed in the workings of state structures and humanitarian agencies (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016, 3). Horizontality is presented as a way of developing a sense of togetherness and equality between subjects positioned differently in the socio-economic and political structures of power, with a desire to end inequality. Horizontality is often seen as "carried

out on an everyday and 'silent' basis [… and] presupposes a mutual emotional and bodily engagement between people in unequal power relations" (Hansen 2019, 36; Hamann and Karakayali 2016). Scholars locate horizontality as speaking with (rather than for and/or about) those who are marginalized (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016), establishing horizontal decision-making processes (Karaliotas and Kapsali 2020), developing collaborations (Spång and Lundberg 2019) and friendship (Hansen 2019). While these scholars pay close attention to the shortcomings of horizontal practices and the ways in which they often (re)produce unequal structures of power (Rozakou 2016; Cantat 2018; Birey et al. 2019; Cantat and Feischmidt 2019), CMS is in general united in perceiving horizontal forms of struggle as more liberatory and critical than struggles aligned with vertical forms of politics.

Investment in pursuing horizontal forms of politics was a prominent theme in activists' narratives and was often translated into a desire to establish closeness, which I analytically translate into proximity (political, physical, and affective) (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000a), with the migrants. I show the slippages between prioritization of proximity as a counter-hegemonic practice and the discourses of neoliberal capitalism, particularly neoliberal interest in local representations and the privileging of the Self vis-à-vis collective struggles (Chapters IV, V). I also show how narratives of proximity partook in and facilitated the activists' withdrawal from HSP, by being linked with the narratives about care for the Other and care for the Self (Chapter VI).

3.1.3 Development of systemic critique. CMS makes crucial contributions to scholarly debates of migration by emphasizing the interconnectedness between migrants' struggles and the struggles of other marginalized groups such as homeless people, Roma populations, and racialized and classed communities and by highlighting the importance of developing a systemic, anti-capitalist critique of the struggles and management of marginalized groups (Apostolova 2015; Rajaram 2015; 2018; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016; Rozakou 2016; Green and Laviolette 2016; Cantat 2019). As Rajaram argues "drawing connections between groups similarly marginalised - migrants and others […] reverberates onto the dominant political architecture by pointing to the historical

contingency of their social, economic, and political marginality" (Rajaram 2019, 278). In line with such approach CMS presents as counter-hegemonic those solidarity initiatives that link different forms of marginalization and disclose their shared connection with the working of power structures inscribed in the state-capital nexus.

An important element of the HSPs I studied was their investment in linking various forms of marginalization and developing systemic critiques as a counter-narrative to the predominantly liberal and right-wing discourses in which they were operating. Yet, as I will argue, the activists operated with a rather loose definition of the "system" that their systemic critique aimed to challenge. As a result, a more comprehensive characterization of the workings of capitalism, capitalism's relationship with the state, and its consequences for processes of marginalization, exclusion, and exploitation were often absent in activists' narratives, allowing for the continuities and slippages between counter- and hegemonic discourses I have already alluded to (Chapters III; VI).

3.1.4 Transnational character of solidarity struggles. CMS often emphasizes the transnational, cross-border, and trans-categorical character of solidarity struggles (Cantat 2013; English 2014; Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016, 527; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016; Birey et al. 2019, 7; Caraus and Paris 2019). Likewise, scholars interpret the transnational character of HSP as a political alternative to the current articulation of state-capital nexus and its production of exclusionary border regimes, as well as a response to the contemporary transnational character of marginalization and disfranchisement across borders and social groups (Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Caraus and Paris 2019; Hansen 2019). Hansen, for example, describes solidarity activists as "forming a part of a larger network of leftist, extra-parliamentarian activists that strive towards urban and social equality in Malmo, other cities in Sweden, as well as abroad" (Hansen 2019, 2). This resonates with what Nikita Dhawan critically calls the "global citizens' movements [that] have taken 'justice' as [their] explicit goal" (2013, 139). CMS literature often analyzes the transnational character of migrant and solidarity struggles and their investment in global justice issues as an

expression of new forms of cosmopolitanism, describing the political positionality of these migrants and activists as "abject cosmopolitanism" (Nyers 2003), "transgressive cosmopolitanism" (Baban and Rygiel 2014), "in situ cosmopolitanism" (Frykman 2016), "cosmopolitanism from below" (Agustín and Jørgensen 2019), "cosmopolitan citizenship" (Caraus 2018), and "radical cosmopolitanism" (Caraus and Paris 2019).

Vivien Jabri's (2007) term "political cosmopolitanism" is particularly useful for articulating the main tenants of these "discourses of new cosmopolitanism" (Dhawan 2013, 146)[24]. Political cosmopolitanism is distinct from and critical of liberal cosmopolitanism rooted in Western modernity and serving as a moral justification for Western interventionism. In contrast, political cosmopolitanism is self-conscious about "its choices of affiliation" and understands "other modes of cultural articulation as being equally located in the public sphere and hence of equal political worth" (Jabri 2007, 727). It is skeptical of the modernist imaginaries underlying liberal cosmopolitanism, is attuned to the specificities of local struggles, and takes politics of mobilization as its focal point (Jabri 2007, 724). It thus recognizes "the possibility of universal location of politics," but sees this universal terrain "as a location of contestation and struggle" and interprets it in terms of "lived experiences" rather than in "totalizing terms" (2007, 727). This type of imagined cosmopolitanism is often celebrated by CMS for transgressing "self-other, non-citizen/citizen binaries […and] open[ing] oneself up to the other and to the experience of being transformed by the exchange" (Baban and Rygiel 2017, 101). In line with the critique of state-centric discourses,[25] it is seen to create the possibility to "burrow into the apparatuses and technologies of exclusion in order to disrupt the administrative routines, the day-to-day perceptions and constructions of normality" (Nyers 2003, 1089).

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[24] Critical of the promises of new cosmopolitanisms, Dhawan sees them as "caught between politics that advocates the virtues of postcolonial, cosmopolitan democracy and a kind of managerial internationalism and global moral entrepreneurship wherein those who claim to have listened to and heard the subaltern speak do not even share a common language" (2013, 146).

[25] It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in a lengthier theoretical discussion on cosmopolitanism.

Political cosmopolitanism captures the imaginaries informing activists' stands: attentiveness to global justice issues, focus on localized, context specific articulations of struggles best understood through proximity, rejection of Western superiority and universalism, reluctance to engage with formal politics and "administrative routines" (Nyers 2003, 1089), and an investment in practicing reflexivity. At the same time, the activists' narratives disclose inconsistency between political cosmopolitanism and the fantasy of a Western Self as a universal transcendent subject capable of making and unmaking the border between Self and Other (Chapters II, section 5; V; VI). They likewise show contradictions between cosmopolitanism as a politically informed orientation towards global justice and cosmopolitanism as a competence under neoliberal capitalism facilitating access to mobility, information, and social capital (section 3.2 in this introduction; Chapters IV; V).

2.1 3.2 Global capitalism and transnational class formation

To analyze activists' narratives as not only critiquing but also partaking in the (re)production of existing socio-economic structures of power, I locate this dissertation within scholarship on global capitalism and transnational class formation. This scholarship emerged in the 1970s as part of a broader debate on globalization and the world economic system and is often united under the label global capitalism school / perspective (hereafter: GCS) (W. I. Robinson and Harris 2000; Sklair 2001; W. I. Robinson 2004; 2017; Carroll 2013; Struna 2013; W. I. Robinson and Sprague-Silgado 2018).[26] Specifically, this dissertation joins a newly emerging body of literature that extends GCS's focus on the capitalist elites, institutionalized spheres, and subordinated classes to those actors who are neither part of the global elite nor subordinate classes and whose practices are not institutionalized. These actors are positioned high enough in local and global hierarchies of power to partake in the competition over both local and global resources and thus can be broadly

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[26] Leslie Sklair (2001) and William Robinson (2004) are often seen as those who systematized the theory of global capitalism, introduced a comprehensive notion of Transnational Capitalist Class, and became the school's leading figures (W. I. Robinson and Sprague-Silgado 2018).

characterized as forming an emerging transnational middle class (Weenink 2005; Smith and Favell 2006; Weenink 2016; Polson 2011; 2016; Igarashi and Saito 2014). From this perspective, activists' narratives reflect their embeddedness in both national class structures *and* their participation in the formation of social class beyond and across states.[27] GCS additionally helps to bring together the evolution of neoliberal and global capitalism and systematize some of the historical socio-economic and political developments informing the imaginaries of HSP (W. I. Robinson 2004, 5; Harvey 1990).

I interpret global capitalism, as introduced by GCS, as complimentary with neoliberal capitalism (Harvey 2005; Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). The two characterizations of capitalism refer to different but strongly interconnected qualities. Global pertains to the movement of capital and indicates how capital accumulation, production processes, and class structures acquire a global, transnational character. Neoliberal pertains to the modes of production and describes economic doctrine/polices, which in turn shape subjectivities (Wrenn 2015; Boltanski and Chiapello 2018) (Chapter II, section 4). I see the two as complimentary because capitalism started to become global (1970s) in the same period that neoliberal economic policies were first implemented and, thus, they are historically embedded in one another (Harvey 2005).

One of the crucial arguments of GCS is that the 1970s marked a profound restructuring of capitalism into global (as opposed the world)[28] capitalism (Robinson 2004). Global capitalism is characterized and facilitated by the development of Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC)[29] and

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[27] While detailed study of activists' (transnational) class belonging and the dynamics of (transnational) class formation fall outside the scope of this dissertation, locating activists' subjectivities within these discussions allows me to analyze their political subjectivities as part of broader economic processes, including economic exploitation and social inequalities that exceed a purely state-centric problematization. As such, activists' narratives not only shed light on the dynamics of transnational activism for global justice but also reflect the contours of the political subjectivities of transnational subjects for whom, as Sara Ahmed writes, "the world is […] constituted as […their] home" (Ahmed 2000b, 83).

[28] GCS problematizes world capitalism as a compilation of externally linked with each other national economies (W. I. Robinson 2004, 10). Under world economy social relations, particularly class structures, were often best understood through state-centric perspective.

[29] Transnational Capitalist Class is understood as capitalist elite who act as "agents of global capitalism" (W. I. Robinson 2016, 7–8). Its access to capital is no longer defined primarily in relation to their national economies but rather has distinct transnational character (Robinson and Sprague-Silgado 2018, 309-310)

Transnational Corporations (TNCs). The transnational character of capital and economic, political, and social structures in this model means that they "cross state borders but do not originate with state agencies and actors" (Sklair 2001, 4). This does not mean that GCS announces the death of nation-state as a crucial socio-economic and political player (W. I. Robinson 2017, 171).[30] Rather, it argues that the "relationship between nation-states and [….] larger global system [is] being transformed" and thus that purely state-centric lenses are not satisfactory in explaining economic, social, and political structures.

Under this restructuring, labor relations and accumulation of capital become more flexible and networks (often horizontal) became the dominant form of economic organization. The world economy witnessed the emergence of subcontracting, outsourcing, subdivisions, and specializations in production (on the national and global scales) as well as the creation of transnational production chains (W. I. Robinson 2004, 17). Following David Harvey, Mary W. Wrenn and William Waller argue that "neoliberalism embodies the ideological shift in the purpose of the state from a responsibility to protect its citizens against the exigencies of the market to insuring protection of the market itself" (2017, 499). This shift meant "(i) privatization of state-provided goods and services; (ii) deregulation of industry; and (iii) retrenchment of the welfare state", which, among other things, was connected with the decline of labor unions and class framework (Wrenn and Waller 2017, 499; Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). All these elements "reinforce a central premise: that the locus of control is the individual exercising agency through market operations"(Wrenn and Waller 2017, 499). Neoliberalism is also characterized by the enlargement of economic sphere, incorporating into the logic of market various spheres of life, including affect, and blurring the distinction between personal and professional life (Illouz 2007; Ahmed 2012; Boltanski and Chiapello 2018) (Chapters V; VI). It entails a particular construction of the relationship between individuals and the broader socio-economic structures which aims to

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[30] The discussion over the role of the state in capital accumulation under global capitalism falls beyond the scope of this dissertation.

sustain neoliberal modes of capital accumulation, defined by "[…] superiority of the individual over the collective " (Wrenn and Waller 2017, 499). The individual is expected to "independently and spontaneously assess the costs and benefits of their choices, assume responsibility for their actions, and apply economic criteria to every aspect of their life" (Vrasti 2011, 3–4). Yet, as Wanda Vrasti rightly points out, this principle does not mean that "neoliberalism produces nothing but a series of Patrick Bateman-like figures obsessed with assessing their bank accounts (…) to the exclusion of all social, moral, and affective, considerations" (2011, 4). This dissertation shows how, on the contrary, this shapes subjectivities and can disclose itself also in projects that focus primarily on collective struggles for justice and anti-systemic demands.

By the late 1990s, the global and neoliberal dimensions of capitalism became consolidated across the world. These transformations meant a new series of imaginaries about what constitutes a successful capitalist subject, including transnational and social mobility, flexibility, and ability to form personal relationships with others (Chapter II). The activists I studied were born in the (broadly defined) Western countries in the late 1980s and 1990s. Thus, their political subjectivities and political activism developed in and were shaped under consolidated neoliberal and global capitalism.[31]

A growing body of scholarship problematizes the ways in which the emergence of global capitalism influences actors, practices, and structures beyond TCC and the "'commanding heights' of global social structures" (Struna 2013, 652) and across economic, political, social, cultural, and ideological spheres (Watson 2001; Robinson 2006; Carroll 2013). The first strand of this literature focuses on globalization and class formation "from below," particularly the formation of counter-hegemonic projects developed by "popular and subordinate classes" and the novel articulations of global civil society (Struna 2013, 654; W. I. Robinson 2001; 2006; Carroll 2013). Like the

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[31] As. Mary W. Wrenn and William Waller argue: "The institutionalization of the market changes the institutional structures through which individuals are socialized. The expanding economic sphere pervades the lives and thinking of individuals. As such, the socialization process becomes accommodating to the intensifying market place, and the transference of culture becomes tinged by the values of the market" (Wrenn and Waller 2017, 499).

majority of CMS, it focuses on liberatory struggles—into which it often incorporates solidarity initiatives. Problematizing activists as part of emerging global civil society is helpful in locating HSP within broader global, counter-hegemonic mobilization. Yet the focus on "global rebellion" (W. I. Robinson 2017, 171), like that on the "commanding heights" (Struna 2013, 652), overlooks the complexities of those political subjectivities located in between the elites and those most exploited. This dissertation extends its focus by analyzing ways in which those participating in counter-hegemonic struggles are both shaped by/partake in/ and benefit from capitalist structures.

The second strand problematizes transnational class formation of actors "for whom elitness as an empirical category is questionable" (Polson 2011, 146) but who nevertheless partake in the competition over both national and global resources through "professional employment, lifestyle choices, educational opportunities, or other forms of mobility that are of relative privilege" (Polson 2011, 146): broadly defined as transnational middle class. This scholarship tends to focus on the formation of transnational middle class in relation to professional careers (Moore 2005; Amit 2007; Polson 2011; 2016) and education (Weenink 2005; 2016; Igarashi and Saito 2014; Forsberg 2017; Jürgen, Silke, and Sören 2017) and connected with them consumption patterns. This dissertation joins and extends the focus of this scholarship by scrutinizing counter-hegemonic struggles and alternative practices as sites of both (re)production and contestation of the hegemonic discourses of global and neoliberal capitalism and the newly emerging transnational class structures.

Scholarship on the transnational middle class is helpful for my work in that it analyzes the development of the "new mode of belonging, centered around the 'global'" (Polson 2011, 145), without losing sight of one's relationship and often embeddedness in national economic structures. Erica Polson argues for example that the "production of a global middle class is fundamental, economically and culturally, to expanding processes of neoliberal globalization" (2011, 145). The global middle class emerges from and is in relation with national class structures, yet transgresses

them.[32] For example, the professional workforce of the newly emerging transnational middle class is often comprised of lower-middle and middle classes from industrialized countries and upper-middle, or even upper classes, from developing countries (Smith and Favell 2006).[33]

The problematization of a transnational middle class as transgressing, rather than simply reproducing, national class structures helps me to make sense of activists sharing common political imaginaries despite different national class belongings. They can be understood within a framework of globally mobile subjects (rather than as national subjects who partake in international mobility). This is not to disregard the importance of national class structures and state infrastructure in informing activists' political subjectivities and facilitating their activism and mobility (Chapters III, VI). These activists were positioned at the intersection of national and global economies: their socio-economic statuses, including their access to transnational mobility and activism, were dependent on the access they hold within national economies and class structures. Such positioning is tension driven: while dependent on class belonging and access, their socio-economic status and political subjectivities were shaped by aversion towards state and other institutions hampering mobility of capital and labor, as inscribed in both global and neoliberal capitalism (Chapter III).

Literature on the transnational middle class also highlights the relationship between access to the transnational labor market, transnational class formation, and cosmopolitanism (Mitchell 2003; Forsberg 2017; Jürgen, Silke, and Sören 2017). Focusing primarily on the educational sector, scholars define cosmopolitanism as an "openness to foreign others and cultures" and problematize it, following Pierre Bourdieu, as a form of (transnational) social capital (Igarashi and Saito 2014, 223; Weenink 2005; Forsberg 2017). Such cosmopolitanism plays an important role in the "processes of stratification and struggles for dominant class positions" often by "taking

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[32] For a study of the emergence of national middle classes across the globe, see for example: (Koo 2016; López and Weinstein 2012)

[33] Mobile careers are undertaken to pursue opportunities that are hard to find in the home country. Thus, professional migration becomes a tool for improving one's lot in life rather than a chosen lifestyle as it is in case of the established global elite (Polson 2016)

institutionalized forms of academic qualification" (Igarashi and Saito 2014, 223). For example, new middle-upper class parents in the Netherlands prepare their kids for participation in the global market by choosing an educational path that allows their kids to acquire cosmopolitan qualities: involvement in "different local and national cultures" as well as participation in "culture that is carried by transnational networks rather than by territory" (Weenink 2016, 494–95).[34] These cosmopolitan competencies allow a person to secure and further advance her social positioning. In the case of the activists I studied, this type of advancement was visible in the ways in which activists' abilities to navigate different cultures and form a sense of togetherness with migrants was translated into social capital, which in turn was used to advance the activists' employment opportunities (Chapter V). At the same time, to acquire such competencies one needs "extensive international travel and experiences of studying or living abroad," as many of the activists I studied had. To have such experiences requires access to a "sufficient amount of economic resources" often connected with one's national class belonging as well as access to state provisions (Igarashi and Saito 2014, 225) (Chapter III). While studies on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and stratification are still new, Igarashi and Saito argue that:

> "available evidence indicate that […] almost all types of stakeholders–students, parents, administrators, and employers–*believe* that academic qualifications that signal cosmopolitanism lead to better jobs opportunities in the increasingly global economy" (Igarashi and Saito 2014, 232, emphasis in original).

Thus, "cosmopolitanism […] can be seen as *'a new kind of distinction'* (Lizardo, 2005: 106, emphasis in original) that is, as a new basis of exclusion" (Igarashi and Saito 2014, 225). This distinction transpires from the ways in which activists claimed their advanced positioning in opposition to humanitarians, which they framed as lacking knowledge about cultural differences and thus lacking cosmopolitan competencies (Chapters IV, V).

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[34] Don Weanink' study offers important insight into the ways in which national class positioning, particularly belonging to new or old middle classes, translates into participation in transnational class formation.

Understanding cosmopolitan competencies as part of class formation is also crucial in problematizing activists' cosmopolitan stances (as described in section 3.1.4) as part of their cosmopolitan competencies and participation in the transnational class formation (Igarashi and Saito 2014, 223). Hiroki Igarashi and Hiro Saito (2014) distinguish three types of cosmopolitans, which roughly correspond with class belonging: elite cosmopolitans (mostly members of TCC); rooted cosmopolitans (often middle classes, transnationally connected through languages and travel); and banal cosmopolitans (those who "consume foreign cultural products and media representations of others but lack regular and direct contact with foreigners," often belonging to lower classes or lacking transnational social capital middle classes) (Igarashi and Saito 2014, 231). I problematize the activist' I studied as rooted cosmopolitans, who often openly differentiated themselves from 'banal' engagements with foreign cultures (Chapter IV).

Activists' rooted cosmopolitanism was defined not only through their contact with foreign cultures due to living, studying, and traveling abroad but also through their ability to feel themselves in those foreign cultures naturally—to establish friendships with local people, to take part in everyday life of the people and places, and to be part of, rather than an observant/consumer, the foreign context in which they found themselves. Thus, activists' rooted cosmopolitanism was defined through their adherence to the series of imaginaries over what counts as an "ethical encounter with difference" which were in line with the "brand of critical theory" (Vrasti 2013, viii) that I was educated In which at the time of my research dominated Western academia and was constructed around, among other things, the rejection of multiculturalism and modernism (see footnote 9). I locate those imaginaries within broader intellectual developments that took place since 1970s. Our imaginaries over what constitutes an ethical encounter with difference were connected with the imaginaries inscribed in postcolonial and feminist theories (often openly liberatory and emancipatory), which started to develop in the 1970s and took as their focal point the relationship between gendered and racialized difference and broader questions of socio-economic and political inequalities. While postcolonial theory was

originally strongly connected with Marxist thought, through its relationship with poststructuralism and postmodernism it "start[ed] to distil its particular provenance […and] gain[ed] a privileged foothold within the metropolitan academic mainstream" (Gandhi 1998, 25). Following Dipesh Chakrabarty, Leela Gandhi argues that the postcolonial shift from Marxism to poststructuralism meant that postcolonial theory started to "diagnose the material effects and implications of colonialism as an epistemological malaise at the heart of Western rationality," becoming critical of the grand narratives, universalism, and Eurocentrism which it saw as inherent in Marxism (1998, 25). The legacy of this shift is visible in activists' aversion towards grand narratives and universalizing discourses and insistence on "shift[ing] away from hegemony no matter how small and local it might be" (Braidotti 1994, 5) (Chapter IV).

This understanding over what counts as ethical encounter with difference was also shaped by changing approach towards social inequalities. In the 1970s and 1980s and the decades to follow, social critiques of inequalities developed in capitalist countries witnessed the decline of Marxist and left-socialist thought, alongside the decline of labor unions and class frameworks and the replacement of language of exploitation with that of exclusion (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 346). This decline cemented itself in the 1990s with the end of the cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the victory of capitalism, and the neoliberal restructuring across most of the countries in the world. My dissertation shows that language of exclusion and marginalization continues to form the dominant framework through which those critical of the state-capital nexus address socio-economic injustice (Chapters IV, V). While the activists I studied were able to progress from identifying marginalization to placing blame on what they identified as the state-capital nexus, their problematization of capitalism and its relationship with the state was loose and focused on critiques of state and state's structures and an accompanying withdrawal from formal politics and institutions (Chapter III).

Regarding broader questions of global social inequalities, Robinson (2002, 1053) argues that the decline of left-socialist critique was coupled with the "post-structural turn in European

philosophy" which he locates as starting in the 1970s. In his analysis of developmental theory, he argues that by the 1990s this turn influenced "development theory and research in a major way, under various appellations of post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-developmentalism and post-colonialism" (W. I. Robinson 2002, 1053).[35] While he recognizes the crucial contribution that the post-structural turn had in deconstructing the discourses of development, he also argues that it marked a general reluctance towards totalizing discourses, and in that, from 1990s onwards:

> "The critique of capitalism – as the actual social system that the Western development discourses promoted and defended – is replaced by the critique of modernity, whether the modernity associated with modernization theory and neoliberalism, or that identified with neo-Marxist and other radical political economy approaches" (W. I. Robinson 2002, 1054).

As my analysis of activists' narratives will show, this critique of modernity, embodied in turning away from institutions (Chapter III) and authority (Chapter VI) and rejecting grand narratives (Chapter IV) was important in structuring the critical imaginary of activists' counter-hegemonic projects. Consequently, activists were often able to clearly articulate their disagreement with neoliberal capitalism but were at the same time reluctant to frame their project as pursuing left-socialist politics (Chapter III).

Indeed, the decline of left-socialist critique coupled with the post-structural turn had consequences for the practices of activism. Against the backdrop of rapid globalization in the 1990s, a new generation of activists united across the borders in the global justice movements against neoliberal globalization (Tarrow 2005). Those newly emerged alter-globalists faced severe state and police repression in the years 1999–2000 and growing critique from those activists who saw their practices as elitist, unable inclusive of excluded and marginalized voices, and (re)producing universalizing discourses. Thus, the early 2000s were marked in activist scenes by withdrawal from representative struggles to the "politics of the first person" and 'the turn to the

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[35] The discussion over the periodization of post-structural turn as well the differentiation between various strands of post-colonial thinking lies outside of the scope of this dissertation

everyday' which narrated activism as an everyday practice that everyone can do, rather than a practice restricted to those who are militant, radical, and able to afford "summits hopping" (Hansen 2019, 52). Individuals became the primary site of political struggle and were encouraged to "fight based on their own conditions and […] not have representatives do it for them" (Hansen 2019, 52). This turn was a fundamental element of the HSPs I studied and was visible in how the activists located counter-hegemonic politics in their personal lives (Chapter III) and in the proximity with the Other (Chapter V). Though driven by counter-hegemonic stances, the turn to individual must be read alongside the previously mentioned "superiority of the individual" and the decline of representative struggles under neoliberal capitalism (Wrenn 2015, 499). Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate how politics of the first person and centering the political struggle on the Self set the limits of HSP. Particularly, I show how the centrality of the Self in political struggle was intertwined in the narratives with the invocation of what one of the activists called "selfish-reasons" (Kate) as a means of authorizing activism, neoliberal discourses of self-development, the language of privileges, and narratives of self-care, all of which formed the site of activists' negotiations between their counter-hegemonic investments and their positioning in global and local hierarchies of power (Chapters V, VI).

The retreat from universalizing discourses and the shift towards the individual as the primary site of the political is also visible in the humanitarian discourses around solidarity. Studying changes in humanitarian discourses from the 1970s until the late 2000s, Lillie Chouliaraki (2013) distinguishes two main logics of solidarity: solidarity as salvation (which predominantly structured humanitarian discourses in the second half of the 20th century) and solidarity as revolution (expressed through the establishment of Marxist parties and anti-colonial movements across Global South). While both relied on universal norms of morality, the latter lost its hold as the 20th century progressed and the critique and Marxist inability to address "particularities of the non-Western contexts" was coupled with the general aversion towards totalizing narratives and the growing victory of capitalism (Chouliaraki 2013, 86). Thus, "solidarity as salvation" informs much

of the contemporary expressions of solidarity and humanitarianism. Chouliaraki argues that the moral universalism of the early humanitarianism of 1970s–1990s was replaced in the late 1990s and 2000s by what she calls "reflexive particularism" (2013, 73-74) which established the ironic Self as the primary site of action and its authorization. While HSP positioned itself as critical of humanitarianism and invested with different political imaginaries than those informing humanitarian responses, Chouliaraki's study shows that the solidarity discourses that inform current humanitarian practices are in fact in many regards driven by similar imaginaries about the individual and her relationship with the "suffering" Other as those that structure the narratives of the activists I studied (Chapter IV). Drawing this continuity again shows the embeddedness and resonance of activists' imaginaries with the broader discourses of neoliberal capitalism, as also reflected in humanitarian discourses.