"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. "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

[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)

ethical stances towards migration and thus they agreed to help me with contacting migrants and taking part in my research[3].

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

[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 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.

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 Activists who self-identified[9] as pursuing HSP and with whom I spoked 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

[8] Among other things this dissertation contributes to the scholarly debate over what constitutes horizontal solidarity activism with migrants and other marginalized groups.
[9] These are the activists on whose narratives this dissertation focuses.

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 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

[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.

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 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

[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.

claimed to establish with migrants, to the immediacy with which we agreed that such closeness defined our critical stances.

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. 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"

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

(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 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

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

(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.

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

[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).

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 (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).

[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).

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' 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. 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]

[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.

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

[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

[22] 1970s and 1980s.

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

[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).

[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).

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 characterized as forming an emerging transnational middle class (Weenink 2005; Smith and Favell

[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).

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 Transnational Corporations (TNCs). The transnational character of capital and economic,

[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)

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 sustain neoliberal modes of capital accumulation, defined by "[…] superiority of the individual

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

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 majority of CMS, it focuses on liberatory struggles—into which it often incorporates solidarity

[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).

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

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

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 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

[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)

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).

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

[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.

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 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

[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

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.

Chapter I: Making sense of activists' narratives. Methodological choices

Introduction

This dissertation is based on a multi-sited ethnography. I take as its primary focus activists' narratives. I approach the narratives as intersubjective sites where people make sense of and construct themselves and the worlds around them, thus making them particularly potent sites through which to study political subjectivities. I join the rapidly growing field of narrative IR by using narrative methodology. I begin with a brief introduction of the sites and contexts in which I carried my fieldwork. I follow this with a description of narrative IR, how I position myself within the field, and my take on the narratives. I then elaborate on how I approached and constructed my fieldwork and the subjects I studied. I also introduce my take on reflexivity, indicate my positioning vis-à-vis the activists and the various structures of power that we were embedded and operating within and outline the ethical considerations of this dissertation. These discussions deepen and complexify the initial introduction of my fieldwork.

1. Short description of the fieldwork

My fieldwork with horizontal solidarity activists (non-humanitarian, non-state agents) took place between 05/2015 and 02/2017 in Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden (to read how I chose the sites see section 4).

From May–June 2015, I was in Denmark with a solidarity network for LGBTQ asylum seekers and three other pro-migrant initiatives. I did participatory observation on the workings of these initiatives, partook in various activities, meeting, and projects, and 'hung out' with the activists[36] and migrants.[37] I also conducted semi-structured interviews (which I audio recorded and/or took notes of) with activists (11), migrants (10), representatives from the Red Cross (3),

[36] In this case the term activist also encompasses activists with migratory experiences.
[37] Migrant here encompasses asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants, and undocumented migrants.

and representatives from state agencies (2). This fieldwork shaped my understanding of how complex on the ground relationships (and lack of thereof) were between migrants, various pro-migrant initiatives, and formal NGOs. While my initial interest were migratory experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers, my focus gradually shifted to the narratives of solidarity activists.[38]

I returned to Hungary, where I lived and pursued PhD at the Central European University (CEU), at the beginning of July 2015 where I soon started my second round of fieldwork (July 2015–April 2016), initiated by a significant number of migrants arriving to Hungary in July 2015. The period between the beginning of July and the 4th of September 2015— when migrants decided to walk towards the border of Austria[39] —was marked by unprecedented migrant visibility in public spaces, growing xenophobic discourses and violent exclusionary policies from the Hungarian government, and the rapid emergence of pro- and anti-migrant initiatives (both locally and transnationally).[40] During this time, I conducted participant observation with various emerging pro-migrant initiatives. After September 2015, I conducted participant observation in one concrete instance of solidarity activism and interviews (semi-structured, informal, recorded, and non-recorded) with solidarity activists (15),[41] formal NGO's workers (3), people working in homeless shelters (4), and people who came to support migrants but did not belong to any organization (6). A crucial part of my fieldwork consisted of on/offline discussions about migration. In the months following July 2015, migration became salient in media (both locally and internationally), in academic events and discussions (hosted at the Central European University (CEU) and other Hungarian universities[42]) and in the daily conversations carried out among my friends and colleagues (both Hungarian and international, mostly united around CEU). A lot of these friends

[38] For a study on solidairty activism with migrants in Denmark see for example: (Siim and Meret 2021)
[39] This period is at times referred to as "Hungary's long summer of migration" (Gunesch et al. 2016). For more on the migrants' decision to walk towards Austria, see for example: (Kasparek and Speer 2015; Kallius 2016)
[40] To read more on the events of the summer of 2015 in Hungary and pro-migrant mobilization in the country, see for example: (Feischmidt and Zakariás 2016; Gunesch et al. 2016; Kallius 2016; Rajaram 2016a; Kallius 2019; Cantat and Rajaram 2019; Cantat 2020)
[41] Five of the activists I interviewed were also migrants.
[42] Due to a language barrier, I had limited access to the Hungarian academic debate, yet I partook in the events organized by Hungarian universities which were hosted in English.

and colleagues were actively involved in pro-migrant activism and/or academic knowledge production on migration-related issues and considered state humanitarian responses to migration to be of critical importance. In conducting fieldwork during a time when migrant and solidarity struggles were gaining visibility in public discourses, I had the unique possibility to witness developments both on the ground and in discourse and also allowed me to observe (dis)continuities between activist and academic discourses—particularly those produced by broadly defined critical scholarship—and interpret activists' narratives in relation to this critical scholarship.

The third round of fieldwork I conducted was in Sweden between November 2016—May 2017. In the late summer and autumn of 2015, Sweden witnessed the arrival of many migrants, although comparably fewer than in Hungary, and accompanying it the emergence of pro-migrant initiatives. The autumn of 2015 was often recalled by the activists I interviewed as an intense and difficult period (Eric, Eli). When I started my fieldwork, the memory of the migrants' arrival to Sweden was still very present in the activists' narratives. Yet the 'urgency' that characterized their solidarity struggles in the second half of 2015 was no longer present. My fieldwork in Sweden was the most immersive—I became a member of a pro-migrant solidarity initiative, and thus not only observed but also took part in the solidarity activism. I spoke with multiple members of the group (with various histories of migration) as well as with activists[43] and migrants from outside of the organization. These conversations varied from short informal exchanges to longer and more structured debates and mainly occurred over the course of day to day engagement. Alongside these daily conversations, I conducted semi-structured, recorded interviews with solidarity activists (15) as well as with people who engaged with migrants through state structures and formal NGOs (4). My fieldwork in Sweden allowed me to consider and analyze the mundane and everyday elements

[43] In this case, the term activist also encompasses activists with migratory experiences.

of solidarity activism as well as to experience the (dis)continuities between activist and non-activist life.

From the data collected throughout my fieldwork I only quote and openly analyze interviews with activists who at the time of my research were citizens of EU countries (or held citizenship in other Western countries) and who did not have migratory experience.[44] I work extensively with 15 interviews. While those interviews are the focal point of this study, my interpretation of them is informed by my broader engagement with the data that I collected, experiences that I had, and relationships that I developed throughout my fieldwork. My interpretations are also crucially linked with my positionality, the conscious and subconscious beliefs and imaginaries that I carried with me into and out of the field, as well as interactions with people in and outside of this spatially and temporarily defined field (Hamati-Ataya 2014; Neumann and Neumann 2015; Kurowska 2020b). Likewise, my research was shaped by a series of methodological decisions and considerations over what narrative is, what it means to (fail to) make sense of (what I imagine to be) someone else's story, what the relationship between individual narratives and the broadly defined international might be, and what the relationship between the stories of the people I studied and my own narrative as a researcher is (Dauphinee 2013b; Daigle 2016; Inayatullah 2010; Kušić and Záhora 2020).

2. Narrative methodology

I approach narrative as both a site to study the political and a way of problematizing one's own research, following narrative methodology advanced in narrative IR[45] (Dauphinee 2013a).

[44] Following some of my respondents, I use the term "migratory experience" to indicate experience of mobility induced by challenging social, economic, and political circumstances. The term aims to distinguish such experiences from mobility carried out in pursuit of education/career/pleasure that is not a result of socio-economic and political necessity. The activists I studied can be characterized as mobilize subjects rather than people with migratory experiences. I use this distinction analytically, though aware of the continuities between and nuances within these two groups.

[45] Narrative IR emerged from the critique of mainstream IR's claims to objectivity and its problematization of what counts as knowledge, knowledge production, and knowledge dissemination (Daigle 2016; Moulin 2016). Following Paulo Revecca and Elizabeth Dauphinee in their recognition of the legitimization of narrative IR as a field of scholarly inquiry—and despite Dauphinee's warning that we might still end up explaining ourselves—in this methodology

Narrative IR, a relatively new but fast-growing field of inquiry, takes as its focal point the writing, telling, listening and reading of narrative (Doty 2004; Inayatullah 2010; Vrasti 2010; Dauphinee 2013b; Park-Kang 2015; Daigle 2016; Revecca and Dauphinee 2018; Kurowska 2020b; Oliveira 2020).[46] It can be broadly characterized by two overlapping trends. The first trend takes narratives as the focus of the study (D'Costa 2006; Baaz and Stern 2009; Wibben 2011; Daigle 2016), starting from the recognition that "the social world we inhabit and experience is potentially world of multiple realities, multiple interpretations" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014, 13). Narratives are sites through which such realities and interpretations transpire and are constructed. Thus, the study of narrative "illuminate[s] the complexity of relationality" and the "intersubjective nature of experience and interpretation"(Ravecca and Dauphinee 2018, 4, 11). The second trend turns academic text itself into narrative. This move calls into question the (arbitrary) authority of academic text and encourages academics to use narratives as an "expressive and an affective tool" (Inayatullah 2010; Cameron 2012, 575; Dauphinee 2013b; Jackson 2015). It also highlights the continuities between the stories of others and the stories of the self, marking the academic text as yet another voice in the multiplicity of voices constructing realities—both on the side of those researched and the researchers.

Narrative IR emphasizes the importance of taking stories seriously and reminds us that whether we construct our text as a narrative or interpret the narratives of others we are taking part in the intersubjective process of storytelling and meaning making. While my project takes the

chapter I do not defend my position against more traditional methodological choices in IR and political science. Rather I focus on highlighting the ways in which the narrative approach enriches my study. (Ravecca and Dauphinee 2018, 125).

[46] Narrative IR's fairly recent development does not mean that the question of the relationship between narratives and the political/ international has not been on the agenda of IR scholars. As Moulin rightly reminds us, feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial scholars "have long been at the forefront of employing a discursive approach, expanding and challenging the boundaries of a discipline linked to strongly oppressive, colonial and state-oriented projects and ideals. They have built on developments in the fields of anthropology, literature, philosophy and cultural studies (to name but a few) to articulate new epistemologies and methodologies suited for complex, changing and contingent political realities"(Moulin 2016, 138–39). This reminder about narrative IR's proximity with feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern interventions situates my methodological choices within the broader paradigm of critical thinking in which I also situated the activists I studied (Introduction, Chapter III).

narratives of others as its primary focus (Moulin 2016, 148), narrative IR's intervention in developing "alternative form of writing" and challenging academic authority (Daigle 2016, 26) inspired my interpretation of my own dissertation as one of the available narratives.

Following narrative methodology's generous approach to what constitutes a narrative, I follow the broad definitions of narrative as "any spoken or written presentation" (Shenhav 2015, 12), "any tracing of relations between personal experience and a broader world" (Cameron 2012, 575–76). This allows me to see the interviews that form a core of this dissertation as part of a broader body of narratives, which consists of daily conversations, text message exchanges, group conversations, and manifestos, but also jokes, stories, and comments made in passing and during long hours of hanging out (Madison 2011).

Narratives are spaces that open the study of socio-political life to perspectives, questions, and contradictions that had otherwise been invisible[47] in the mainstream IR. They expand and complicate our understandings of the political and the workings of power in the broadly defined 'international.' As Carolina Moulin argues,

> "[Narratives] tell us a lot about the limits and possibilities of political life, since they articulate particular worldviews, create and enable certain political subjects and (re) produce specific understandings about facts, relations and peoples. Narratives can be understood as discursive formations that put in motion a series of political claims about international relations, such as who can act in the international system, in what conditions and under what circumstances" (2016, 138).

These understandings enable me think of the activists' stories[48] as reflecting and producing particular articulations of a series of imaginaries about the Self, the Other, the political, the social, the economic, the personal, and the ethical. These articulations are an expression of the activists' political subjectivities and contribute to the inter-subjective construction of political subjectivities of others (Wibben 2011; Ravecca and Dauphinee 2018).

[47] This is not to simply say that narrative IR brings to light voices of those whose experiences have been silenced within hegemonic discourses, although it also does that. Rather, it encourages us to see narratives as offering access to the nuanced, complex, and contradictory ways of experiencing and understanding realities.
[48] I use the term "story" and "narrative" interchangeably.

Narratives are fruitful sites to study political subjectivity, as they reflect the complex "relationship between personal experiences and expression, and the broader context within which such experiences are ordered, performed, interpreted, and disciplined" (Cameron 2012, 573). As Shaul Shenav argues, it is "through stories and their telling [that] we use our imagination to make place for ourselves" (2015, 3) and, as Nira Yuval-Davis articulates, "identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)" (2006, 202). Thus narratives are sites of individual sense making and should be studied "without immediately and unproblematically tethering them to concepts of power, discourse, or ideology" (Cameron 2012, 575). At the same time scholars point out that "stories do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives" as well as broader structures of power (Bell 2002, 208). As Emile Cameron argues, summarizing Francesca Polleta's approach, stories are inherently tension driven and "embody a series of contradictions: they are understood as both authentic and subject to manipulation, idiosyncratic and signs of more general processes, disciplined by and exemplary of dominant narratives and yet capable of transgressing and transforming dominant narratives" (Cameron 2012, 574). Narratives (of both scholars and the people they study) should thus not be seen as expressions of 'authentic' voices or as Revecca and Dauphine argue "unmediated truth" (2018, 4). They are also not, Himmadeep Muppidi reminds, less "authoritarian" and violent (Muppidi 2013b). As Muppidi rightly points out narratives have been essential elements of colonial and imperial projects which have framed only some subjects as "capable of thinking, writing, and answering back" (Muppidi 2013a, 300; 2013b; Daigle 2016, 29; Revecca and Dauphinee 2018, 11). Narratives are also not by default self-reflexive (Ravecca and Dauphinee 2018, 7; Hamati-Ataya 2014; Naumes 2015). While serving as sites that disclose individual and collective experiences of the political which are often unseen in dominant discourses—thus carrying potential for the articulation of a counter-hegemonic project—narratives are also embedded in and thus reflect and (re)produce broader structures of power in which they operate. I interpret activists' narratives as reflecting the discursive, sociopolitical,

ideological, and economic structures of power that shaped activists' political subjectivities (Cameron 2012, 575) and as spaces that disclose particular (reproducing and challenging) expressions of those structures of power (Daigle 2016, 26; Revecca and Dauphinee 2018).

While recognizing the importance of narrative as the focus of academic study (as well as academic practice), narrative IR is careful about the way in which it approaches narratives. Rather than treating narratives as so-far silenced voices that are to be 'added' to hegemonic discourses in order to expand existing knowledge, narrative IR problematizes narratives as spaces that confront us with the unintelligible, with our epistemic limitations, and with the complexities of experiencing and expressing the world. As Revecca and Dauphine argue:

> "Many of the published narratives in IR highlight our contradictions and the precarity of our knowledge without providing definitive solutions. […] to read narratively is an opportunity to be confronted with the undoing that accompanies what cannot be anticipated or guarded against"(Ravecca and Dauphinee 2018, 8).

Narrative IR requests that we see the complexities and contradictions of our lives as "more than a mere category" (Sandelowski 1991, 165) of scholarly inquiry but rather as an "intellectual and embodied experience" (Revecca and Dauphinee 2018, 8). Thus, rather than arguing that the study of narrative offers a 'better'/'more accurate' way of knowing the social world, narrative IR emphasizes that narratives also "reveal multiplicity, contingency, and uncertainty of the research process" (Daigle 2016, 25). Following from this, I take narratives as legitimate sites to study political subjectivities while at the same time not silencing the difficulties, tensions, and limitations inscribed in such study.

Crucially, narrative IR does not call for relativism or for fetishizing narratives—quite the opposite. As Revecca and Dauphine warn, the terms often ascribed to narratives such as "shared, contextual, and relational […] along with 'otherness' and 'contingency' can be fetishized through ritualistic and automatic referencing—the doxa of particular critical approaches" (Revecca and Dauphinee 2018, 5). Such fetishization tends to equate interest in narratives with what Inanna Hamati-Ataya calls "'critical' and 'emancipatory theory'" and thus, confuse "ethical/normative

issues with strictly epistemic/theoretical ones"(Hamati-Ataya 2014, 669). This reminder is crucial for my own methodological choices and for my interpretation of activists' imaginaries. I recognize both in myself and in the activists I studied (at different moments and through different means) an interest in narratives and the tendency to see those narratives as shared and relational sites, and thus as by default carrying emancipatory potential. Such fantasies were visible in my initial desire to listen to the narratives of LGBTQ asylum seekers (as well as my broader methodological focus on narratives) and transpire from the ways in which the imaginaries of dialog, personal relationships, and proximity with migrants lay at the core of the activists' political, counter-hegemonic project (Chapter V). My investment in narratives and the activists' investment in speaking with those who were marginalized should be read as closely intertwined with the imaginaries of proximity, fantasized as the most potent way of challenging structural inequalities (Chapters II, V). Thus, I draw continuities between my methodological choices and my field. These continuities challenge the researcher-researched dichotomy by clearly demonstrating continuities between the activists' critical imaginaries and my own.

Acknowledging these continuities was both challenging and fruitful for my methodological choices. It made it difficult for me to distinguish between my research subject, my methodological apparatus, and my embeddedness in critical discourses. At the same time, it helped me to connect the activists' narratives with broader critical discourses and put them in dialog with my own practices. I locate our interest in narratives within the broader paradigm that encourages us to "believe in the capacity for stories to create social, political, and intellectual change" and that emphasizes "political and epistemological importance of heeding individual experience, in part as counterpoint to totalizing 'grand' narratives, but also as a part of politics of valuing the local, the situated, and the specific" (Cameron 2012, 580). Our shared embeddedness in those discourses allowed me to mobilize my own failures and problems with using these emancipatory narrative

politics[49] to think through the limitations of the activists' project and vice versa—recognizing tensions and ambiguities in the activists' investment in proximity and dialog helped me to think critically about my own methodological choices.

Paraphrasing Spivak[50], Sara Ahmed writes that "to always return to the question of speaking is to conceal the structuration of speech by labor" (Ahmed 2000b, 61; Landry and Maclean 1996, 296). I find her reminder crucial in indicating some of the possible tensions inscribed in the very focus on (and at times fetishization of) narratives. The narrative is an element of socio-economic and political structures of power, and it acquires meaning in relation to these things. At the current political and historical conjuncture, where economic inequalities are often equated with politics of representation, a focus on narrative runs the risk of sustaining hegemonic structures of power by imagining individuals and their voices as the primary sites/expressions of violence, inequality, and/or counter-hegemonic struggle.

Narrative methodology takes seriously academic text's ability to convey meaning, both in terms of new understandings of the world that the text proposes and with regard to its reproduction of the existing discourses. Thus, narrative methodology encourages scholars to "write [them]selves back into […] research" (Edkins 2013, 290), make the 'I' visible, by disclosing one's positioning vis-à-vis the text, the world, the research subjects, and the Self. This 'writing back' takes various forms. It can be done through reflexivity, which I understand in this dissertation as a positioned practice aimed at working through one's embeddedness in the structures of power, often, but not always, with an intention to counter social injustice (Rose 1997). Reflexivity, as an intersubjective practice aimed at making sense of the "muddy ambiguit[ies]" (Finlay 2002, 209) of a researcher's positioning within various structures of power and her own beliefs is rarely a comfortable practice (Kurowska 2020b). Rather than staying focused on achieving an imagined success of knowing oneself and one's relationship with the world (an

[49] For a description of one such failure, see: (Maczynska 2020)
[50] Original in: (Landry and Maclean 1996, 296)

impossible task), reflexivity is "discomfort" (Pillow 2003, 193): it's a practice of wanting and trying to stay accountable to the encountered worlds (Visweswaran 1994, 32).

A suggestion that narrative IR makes in regard to "writing ourselves back" into the research that I find particularly relevant for my work is to think of theory as a way of disclosing the "I". As Revecca and Dauphinee write:

> "Theory is the tissue that connects experiences and makes […] engagement [between the text and reader] possible. We do not understand narrative writing as a mechanism of mere exposure—as confession. To expose for exposure's sake—that is, to reveal one's "secrets" for the sake of revelation alone, as though one's experience can speak for itself—is an a-theoretical move with little analytical value. Mere exposure leaves both writer and reader lonely. What is important for us here is to examine how the reader might see theory working through narratives, as well as to recognize what a text offers (or does not offer)" (Revecca and Dauphinee 2018, 135)

This intervention helped me to move beyond the dichotomy between theory and narrative in my writing. It allowed me to think of theory as a narrative itself rather than a mere apparatus that originates somewhere outside of the fieldwork and the text. The theoretical framework that I developed, which I recognize as part of broader discursive formations which "enable certain political subjects and (re)produce specific understandings about facts, relations and peoples" (Moulin 2016, 138), is also how I write myself back into the research and disclose my own political subjectivity. In so doing, I move beyond an understanding of reflexivity as a practice to be undertaken and completed on the side of the researcher (with a desire to illuminate the complexities of her own positioning) and towards a space that accounts for the limitations of self-scrutiny—without at the same time silencing the fact that academic writing *is* a positioned practice. By treating my theoretical intervention as a site that discloses my own subjectivity, I invite the reader to treat my analysis as part of the broader political discourses and imaginaries that I study.

3. Ethnography and the construction of the field

I understand ethnography not only as a "method for gathering information through interviews and participant observation" (Vrasti 2013, 17) but also "as an attitude, a perspective,

and above all, a specific mode of 'epistemological encounter'" (Juris and Khasnabish 2013, 9).[51] Ethnography thus rests on the willingness to treat fieldwork as an experience and "involve[s] an ethic of openness and flexibility and a willingness to allow oneself to become personally transformed through the research process" (Juris and Khasnabish 2013, 9). This does not mean that I fetishize an immersion in the field and see the changes in my political, ethical, and epistemological stances as inherently a result of the ethnographic experience. Rather, following Wanda Vrasti, I see ethnography as "a textual strategy for building theory from the disparate events, statements, experiences, dilemmas and surprises […] encountered during […] travels, but also at home, at my desk, in libraries, at conferences and during seminars" (Vrasti 2013, 17). This understanding of ethnography creates the possibility to treat the field as both informing my interpretation of activists' subjectivities and as being constructed by the worlds in which I have taken part outside of the 'field' which shaped my engagement with the subjects I studied.

Multi-sited ethnography opens the possibility to study attitudes, ideas, practices, and imaginaries across various geographical, political, and social spaces. It focuses on "multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the 'local' and the 'global,' the 'lifeworld' and the 'system'" (Marcus 1995, 95). My multi-sited ethnography in Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden consisted of various solidarity structures, academic exchanges, and transnational discourses.

In my research, multi-sited ethnography also indicates different temporalities (Dalsgaard 2013). I not only conducted fieldwork at different times but also came to realize multiple temporalities within migrant and solidarity struggles. My fieldwork started shortly before the summer/autumn of 2015 and ended a year and a half later. In popular discourse, this time period often served as a temporal frame for thinking about migrants' mobility.[52] While many activists

[51] For a discussion of the limitations of ethnographic approaches in IR, see for example: (Vrasti 2008)
[52] For the analysis of the underpinnings and consequences of framing the summer and autumn of 2015 as the "European refugee crisis" see for example: (Apostolova 2015; Bojadžijev and Mezzadra 2015; Rajaram 2015; 2016b; Cantat 2016; N. P. De Genova 2016; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016)

recalled the summer/autumn of 2015 as a clearly distinguishable period that "changed" them (Eric, Eli, Kate), a significant number of activists and migrants also called the summer/autumn 2015 temporal division of migrant struggle into question. As one of the activists told me, the summer of 2015 was neither more crisis-ridden than migrant struggles she had encountered before nor surprising for her (as she clearly saw it coming). A number of migrants I spoke to emphasized that their experiences of migration could not be captured by the pre/during/post summer of 2015 time period. Rather, they experienced time in terms of longing for home, waiting for decisions on one's refugee status,[53] living in transit zones, etc. For many activists, as well as for me, time was also divided by our own mobility: we moved in pursuit of education, temporal projects, scholarships, and short- and long-term voluntary experiences. Thus, at a closer look, the pre/during/post summer of 2015 rarely corresponded with the experiences of time those I came in contact with (and I myself) had. Additionally, each of the sites of my fieldwork had its own complex socio-political history of which I, the activists I studied (often outsiders in the given context), and the migrants had different understanding.

I understand the ethnographic field as always constructed by the researcher, rather than existing separately from the researcher awaiting to be discovered (Amit 2000, 6). I constructed my field around a paradigm of critical, pro-migrant activism as practiced in the EU in the 2010s. Taking as my primary focus of interest individuals, their practices, and their shared imaginaries, I conceived of my field as "social worlds" which were "formed as a "set of common or joint activities or concerns bound together by network of communication," rather than according to spatially delineated sites (Falzon 2009, 237). Activists' imaginaries over what constituted the most inclusionary and liberatory engagement with migrants and other marginalized groups were shared across borders: activists were mobile subjects and many of them pursued activism outside of their national context and in multiple countries. At the same this activism was not part of an established

[53] For problematization of waiting and different temporalities in migrants' struggles, see for example: (Griffiths 2014; Jacobsen, Karlsen, and Khosravi 2020)

transnational social movement, nor was it defined by pre-existing set of rules over what constituted HSP. Thus, the meaning of horizontal solidarity activism could only be uncovered in its use.

The lack of clarity over what constituted HSP, although challenging in specifying my focus and picking my interviewees, was also fruitful as it allowed me to study HSP as 'in the making.' It also allowed me to draw continuities between my own imaginaries of what constitutes critical thinking (that I carried with me into the field) and the imaginaries of critical engagement with the world that transpired from activists' narratives. One of the ways I drew continuities was from how my acceptance within activists' circles was conditioned on my proximity to their critical stances, rather than, for example, on my (lack of) activist past. I was rarely asked if I am/was an activist, and I never had a feeling that my history of activism played any important role in my access to the field. Instead, activists checked if I shared their critical stances: disagreement with humanitarian discourses, aversion towards the state, investment in horizontal forms of organizing, and building dialog and collaboration with those marginalized. The continuity between our understandings of critical, pro-migrant activism allowed me to be integrated into fieldwork sites, practices, and encounters that were not part of my immediate fields but were nevertheless strongly influential for their creation. The academic exchanges, for example, which I and many of the activists I studied took part in were important sites of my fieldwork, as were various discourses around migration and the broader imaginaries of critical paradigms in which horizontal solidarity activism was developing.

I also traced a series of similarities between the activists' positioning and my own within broader existing structures of power. We all held passports from EU (or other Western) countries, shared similar class belongings in our national contexts and, most notably, were all part of the making of a transnational middle class embedded in the global structures of power. This proximity between myself and the activists, both in terms of our critical investments and our positioning within hegemonic structures of power, meant that an important part of my research was structured around my intuitive understandings of one's tension-driven positioning at the intersection of

counter-hegemonic and hegemonic discourses. As Naeeem Inayatullah and David Blaney argue with regard to the intersection of intuition, research, and method:

> "Perhaps […] our research is driven less by our method and more by the kinds of texts we have been drawn to read (or that have chosen us) […] 'our' methods and texts have become intertwined in ways we cannot decipher. We are tempted to say that both method and research are inspired intuitively by the urgency of our questions and both reach out towards what we cannot yet say" (2017, 27).

Recognizing intuition as a valid dimension of academic inquiry helped me to think of my intuitive (mis)understandings of the field, the urgency of my questions, and my interests as elements of my methodological apparatus but also as part of the field. Intuition should not be seen as separate from the existing structures of power. To take intuition seriously as a tool and site for the study of political imaginaries also means to locate such intuition within and as part of broader structures of power. Thus, it was helpful in making sense of the "perverse temporalities of the life of ideas" (Braidotti 2014a)—the time and context specific intertwining of critical and hegemonic imaginaries in which both myself and the activists were embedded and which shaped our political subjectivities.

In the case of my research, the construction of the field also meant a construction of the subjects of my inquiry. By focusing exclusively on the activists who held EU/other Western countries' passports and who did not have experiences of migration, I delineated them in a perhaps arbitrary manner from other actors involved in migrant and solidarity struggles. My focus put activists' positioning within the existing structures of power as quintessential in defining their political subjectivities and as such ran the risk of downplaying the possible counter-hegemonic continuities that activists (aimed to) establish between themselves and those who occupied different positions within local and global structures of power.

The notion of fieldwork as an attitude showed itself particularly strongly in the ways that the field deconstructed itself in front of my eyes. Throughout my research, I was acutely aware of my ability to move in and out of the field—to switch from one mode of relating to reality to another (Amit-Talai 1996; Amit 2000). I felt it particularly strongly in moments when I visited places that

were both sites for my research and sites of my everyday practices: markets, bars, train stations, and shops. At times I moved through those spaces as sites of invisible and/or overly visible lives of migrants, as sites that were at the core of migrant and solidarity struggles in that they represented the ways in which exclusion and racialization worked. But there were times when I just needed to rush home—tired, sick, engaged in a conversation with a friend, failing to move through the space with an attention to the complexities it held with regard to migratory struggles. In those moments, the field was deconstructing itself as though it was never a field. In other moments, the field would suddenly appear where I least expected it, on the plane back home, in random meetings, or in conversations with friends located in places far away from my research site. Reflecting on a similar inability to "hold" the field, Amina Nolte recalls how the "boundness of [her] research subject dissolved in front of [her]" (Gunesch and Nolte 2020, 57). This feeling of dissolution of the field made her realize that "there was no 'beginning' of the fieldwork and no 'ending'. All I found was shaky continuity: a continuity of experience, of journey, and of conversation" (57). Nolte's reflections resonate closely with my own experiences, where the field was both dissolving in front of my eyes and extending beyond its spatial and temporal borders.[54]

The possibility for the field (of research and of activism) to shift into the space of daily routines was something that I shared with the activists I studied and that reflected our positioning as outsiders to migratory struggles. Our access to the possibility of disengagement with the struggle was the clearest expression of our position within the broader structures of power. Reflecting on the possibility to disengage, I often recalled the opening lines of an essay by Frances Stonor Saunders, a British journalist and historian, which stayed with me throughout my fieldwork:

> "The one border we all cross, so often and with such well-rehearsed reflexes that we barely notice it, is the threshold of our own home. We open the front door, we close the front door […] You have 'the power of the keys', the right of possession that connects you to thousands of years of legal history, to the rights of sovereigns and states, to the gates of salvation and damnation. You open the door, step through, and turn to close it" (Saunders 2016).

[54] The continuities between field and non-field are also visible in the practices of reflexivity. The most productive reflections over one's positionality vis-à-vis her research subjects often take place far away from immediate reflexive practices: in conversations with friends, random academic exchanges, recollections of field experiences (Kohl and McCutcheon 2015).

Her text illuminates the ways in which access to power shows itself in the smallest daily practices. The keys stand for years of legal history. The possibility of 'just doing groceries' stands for access to social and economic security that establishes possibility for disengagement. As bell hooks critically points out in regard to dominant subjects' desire to establish proximity with those who hegemonic discourses frame as 'others': "to make one's self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the other, does not require that one relinquish forever one's mainstream positionality" (hooks 1992b, 23). Saunders' text also elucidates the limits of reflexivity. The "well-rehearsed reflexes that we barely notice" stand for the ways in which the expressions of our embeddedness in the complex structures of power can easily go unnoticed. Not because we fail to be reflexive, but because of our mundane practices, well-rehearsed reflexes and our internalized ideas about the Self, the Other, the political. These things, alongside our ideas about what constitutes critical, reflexive research, pose limits to our ability to reflect on the ways we may reproduce and/or challenge complex intersections of power.

4. Sites

The sites of my research and the focus of my dissertation are a result of circumstance. I went to Denmark to document the experiences of queer asylum seekers because of the country's progressiveness in terms of LGBTQ rights coupled with the most exclusionary migration regimes in the EU. My focus shifted to activists after Lucy's passing comment that unexpectedly stayed with me and transformed into a lingering question (as described in the Introduction). Thus, my research focus was the result of serendipity, which ethnographers describe as a moment of unexpected thought/discovery which cannot be predicted, which can be easily missed, and which ends up shaping further inquiry (Rivoal and Salazar 2013). It was also a result of meetings I could not have envisioned, failures I experienced, people I was not able to understand, and people who I immediately bonded with (Vrasti 2010; Fujii 2015; Kušić and Záhora 2020). A lot of the interviews I conducted in Denmark did not make it into this dissertation as they were focused on

migrants' experiences. Yet, as I have stated above, while these interviews are absent in this dissertation in terms of concrete data, they nonetheless crucially shaped my further inquiry, disclosing limits of my methodological choices, my analytical work, and, most importantly, my ability to grasp the complexities of migratory experiences. They also made visible miscommunications and discontinuities between migrants and the activists that came to support them. Thus, if Vrasti is right in describing ethnography as "an exercise in being truthful about the distance, we travel from research questions to finished manuscript" than my time in Denmark comprise represented my essential initial steps (Vrasti 2010, 79).

The decision over what my second site would be was a result of pure coincidence: I returned from Denmark to my university in Hungary at the start of the migrant and solidarity struggles of the summer of 2015, and thus I took those struggles as a site for my research. Thus the fieldwork was a result of a series of events that I could not have envisioned and took place during a moment of high alert, tension, and violence for thousands of migrants (Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Fujii 2015). It cemented my decision to shift away from the narratives of migrants as I felt, once again, that I was ill-equipped to approach their complexities. The focus on activists' narratives in Hungary meant that without expecting to conduct fieldwork with people I knew personally, I all of the sudden found myself interviewing friends and colleagues since a significant number of solidarity activists were people I knew or knew of. Having relationships with my respondents before and after the time of my fieldwork was crucial for my analytical work: the conversations I conducted during the fieldwork were part of pre- and post-fieldwork exchanges. They distorted the already blurred boundaries of the field, allowed me to trace continuities between critical activism and critical scholarship and helped me to think of my interpretation as part of broader discourses around migration. Linking activist mobilization during the moment of an urgent socio-political event in the Central Eastern European context with the discourses employed by activists in Northern Europe during a period without 'extraordinary' events felt challenging. Based on the continuities and tensions that I saw in the narratives of the activists across these two different

contexts, I started to construct what became the greater field of my inquiry: activists' political subjectivities.

I picked the last site, Sweden, in order to observe HSP in a country that provides high levels of social security, is often presented as one of the 'dream' destinations for migrants, has a long history of pro-migrant mobilization, and, at the same time, is undergoing a process of xenophobic radicalization and strengthening of border regime. It was the most challenging part of my fieldwork. Activists I worked with were well-rehearsed in critical thinking, careful about their positioning, and self-reflexive, framing their activism and engagement with migrants in a manner that was more often than not in line with the imaginaries of ethical encounters with difference—as advanced by the brand of critical thinking that I was educated in. I enjoyed spending time with the group, taking part in cooking food for a soup kitchen, renovating the space in which some of the activities of the group were located, and hanging out with the members of the group. I was not able to find any 'cracks' in the activists' narratives, experience any "revelatory moments" that would transform into nagging questions or sudden realizations, any surprises or moments of discomfort that would fall outside of the regular discomfort I felt throughout all of my fieldwork (Trigger, Forsey, and Meurk 2012). My fieldwork there felt to me more like mundane life. I had a good scholarship, nice people around me, free food from the group's food bank, interesting conversations, and a sense of accomplishment after long hours of painting walls and building tables. I wondered anxiously, 'Am I even doing fieldwork?' It was the lack of cracks that later became the "hook" around which I built my interpretation. I came to realize that the comfort I felt myself around the activists and their critical stances was precisely the expression of our political subjectivities. It was not the hoped-for cracks that I needed to investigate in order to trace the complexities of their project. Rather, I needed to focus on analyzing what made me experience the (imagined) lack of those cracks.

Rather than being divided by the temporal rapture of the summer/autumn of 2015 or by the spatial and socio-political distance between sites, my three sites of fieldwork were most

connected by a series of imaginaries. Those imaginaries, while taking different expressions depending on the context in which they were articulated, formed together a coherent political project structured around series of tensions. Thus, instead of organizing my dissertation around the research sites, I decided to organize the text around themes that were repeatedly showing up in activists' narrations. Thus, rather than tracing how the implementation of activists' projects differed depending on the context, I am able to look more closely at the paradigmatic dimension of HSP: critiques of the system (Chapter III), aversion to humanitarianism (Chapter IV), investment in practices of proximity (political, physical, and affective)(Chapters V, VI), and the desire to redistribute resources (Chapter VI). By working through the imaginaries and assumptions underlying these themes and by linking them with hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses, I trace the contours of activists' political subjectivities.

5. Ethical considerations

I conducted all of my interviews with the express permission of my respondents. I conducted all the interviews in English. I was always clear about the focus of my dissertation, and before each interview I received permission from my interlocutors to use the interviews in my dissertation. I only quote excepts from recorded interviews, with the exception of the story at the opening of the dissertation which was participant observation (which I got permission from the people involved to use). I do not disclose or use any information that was described by activists as confidential or that I considered as such. I also do not disclose any information that to my knowledge and best intentions could put anyone in danger or hinder migrants' struggles. I quote verbatim from the transcribed interviews. Most of my respondents were not native English speakers. In order to ensure that the meaning of the quote is not changed and that the flow of the narrative it is not disrupted too often I neither correct the grammar in the quoted passages nor use "[sic]", except two instances. I only omit in the quotes those words and passages which removal does not change the meaning of the narrative. In all the instances the emphasis in the quoted interviews is mine.

The majority of my interviewers requested anonymization, several were indifferent, and two did not mind being mentioned by name. I anonymized all my interviewees by removing from the interviews any references to countries, places, and personal details. I also did not indicate the names of initiatives or of cities in which I conducted my research. All the activists I talked to expressed what felt to me as a genuine interest in taking part in my research. I felt that they were eager to share their thoughts and experiences. All my interviewees had or were in the process of pursuing higher education in humanities and social sciences. I did not have difficulties explaining what partaking in my research entailed and I had a general sense that there was a clear understanding between me and my interlocutors about the fact that I would use the interviews in order to build my interpretation and, thus, that some of my conclusions and ideas might sound critical of the activists' narratives and practices. Throughout my fieldwork I encountered several activists who refused to talk to me, one of them clearly saying that he did not wish to be a subject of anyone's study.

As mentioned above, I only analyze narratives of activists, although throughout my fieldwork I also conducted interviews and hung out with a lot of migrants who had diverging opinions about solidarity activism. I purposefully do not include any of those conversations in my research in order to avoid 'judging' activists' projects vis-à-vis the expectations and experiences of the migrants. The focus of my study was not to what extent HSP responded to the individual needs of those with whom it expressed solidarity, but rather what the imaginaries inscribed in its making were. Juxtaposing Western practices with the expectations and experiences of the migrants is a common practice among activists and migration scholars. While often fruitful in uncovering limitations of Western practices, such an approach also runs the risk of locating at the core of the question of inequality the dynamic between individual practices and individual expectations. As such, it might fall into a trap of romanticizing the voice of marginalized individuals due to their marginalization and individualizing structural violence by locating it in individual actions.

This research emerges in a time of growing racism, xenophobia, and exclusionary border regimes across and beyond EU. I analyze narratives of those who aim to oppose the hegemonic radicalization of the political landscape, a goal that I strongly identify with. This dissertation was not written with the intention of putting into question HSP's investment in social justice or to discredit concrete enactments of solidarity projects. At the same time, it is crucial to highlight that, from an ethical perspective, writing critically about counter-hegemonic projects in times when the hegemony becomes more and more radically right-wing may run the risk of contributing to weakening of the projects' potential. While this recognition is crucial, I want to avoid fantasizing myself and my research as a quintessential site for the reproduction of structural inequalities and violence. The fantasy of the individual Self as the primary site of political and ethical struggle is something that I identify in this dissertation as one of the limitations of the expressions of the brand of critical theory that I locate myself and the activists I study in. I wish to signal that the ethical considerations of this dissertation includes not only the ways in which one (as a researcher and/or an activist) might run the risk of (re)producing in her practices and narratives the existing structures of power, but also the ways in which the constant return to the Self, as often advocated through practices of reflexivity and discourses of privilege, constitute the Self as the subject trapped between a fantasy of being able to transcend the structures of power and the despair of the inherent failure and inability of the Self to do so. This focus on the Self runs the risk of overshadowing the collective, structural, and institutional dimensions of violence.

Chapter II: Conceptualizing activists' political subjectivities. Critical consciousness, the neoliberal great man, and the fantasy of a universal transcendent subject.

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce my conceptual framework. I study activists' political subjectivities (Rahimi 2015; Braidotti 2014b) through the overarching conceptual framework of Self-Other (hooks 1992a; Ahmed 2000b) and through the conceptual employment of three figures: critical consciousness (Braidotti 1994; 2014a; 2014b), the great man (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018), and the universal transcendent subject (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000a). This conceptual framework allows me to investigate the entanglements between activists' critical, counter-hegemonic stances aimed at challenging structures of power, the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism, and the hegemonic production of the Western Self through the practices of inclusion and exclusion of the Other.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In section 1, I present my take on political subjectivity, which is at the focus of my analytical work and which, following Sadeq Rahimi (2015), I understand as the relationship between individual experiences and broader structures of power. In this section I also introduce my employment of the Self-Other framework. This framework allows me to analyze what I identify as constituting the core of activists' political subjectivity, namely: the narrative about the Self (critical, Western subjects in solidarity with migrant and marginalized struggles positioned high in both local and global structures of power), its relationship with the Other (migrants and other marginalized populations), and its positioning vis-à-vis the structures of power in which it operates. In the following sections, I introduce the three figures—critical consciousness, the great man, and the universal transcendent subject—each of which facilitate the investigation of different component of the activists' political subjectivities. Together, they disclose the entanglements of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses which

are informing these subjectivities. In section 2, I introduce the figure of critical consciousness, representing what (in activists' narratives) constituted the desired features, practices, and positioning of critical subjects invested in building solidarity with migrants and other marginalized groups and developing a counter-hegemonic political project. Engaging with Braidotti's concept of critical consciousness as "shift[ing] away from hegemony" (Braidotti 1994, 5)in this section I also reflect on my usage of the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony. In section 3, I introduce the figure of the great man which systematizes the features of an ideal subject under neoliberal capitalism. I locate this figure within a broader discussion of the relationship between capitalism and its critiques and historicize the development of the new, neoliberal spirit of capitalism as reflecting a particular articulation of this relationship. In section 4, I present the figure of the universal transcendent subject. The figure elucidates the ways in which the hegemonic positioning of the Western Self might be reproduced not only through the exclusion of the constructed Other but also through the imaginaries of overcoming constructed difference, especially through the establishment of proximity between the Self and the Other.

2. Political subjectivity and Self-Other framework

The notion of political subjectivity emphasizes that the individual experience is always already embedded in context specific systems of power and meaning and thus allows us to investigate "the relationship between subjective human experience and the political paradigm in which the individual is embedded" (Rahimi 2015, 1). The political component of subjectivity is thus not an "added" aspect but rather, as Rahimi argues, "precisely what the subject is" (2015, 8). He locates the political in the "apparatus of meaning making" which he defines as a "process through which one makes sense and is made sense of by the other" (2015, 9). This type of meaning is always already political and reflects structures of power "because it is always the representation of a specific 'interest" (2015, 9). Rahimi elaborates further by arguing that the "fundamental function of meaning is a preferential legitimization of certain associations of signifiers or putting forward certain patterns of associations of concepts as more accurate or more truth bearing and

thus more legitimate or more desirable than others" (2015, 9). In my study, this refers to the ways that activists made sense of and gave meaning to what they constructed as a counter-hegemonic political struggle. This kind of meaning making must always be read as already shaped by (and shaping) the broader hegemonic discourses in which it takes place. Thus, I study the meaning of counter-hegemonic stances transpiring from activists' narratives as shaped by and disclosing the working of the hegemonic discourses in which activists operated.

Rosi Braidotti's articulation of subjectivity highlights another important element of the construction of political subjectivity. As she argues:

> "Subjectivity is a socially mediated process of entitlements to and negotiations with power relations. […] subjectivity names the process that consists in stringing the reactive (potestas) and the active instances of power (potentia) together, under the fictional unity of a grammatical 'I'" (2014b, 168).

This intervention sheds light on the "I" aspect of political subjectivity, which I conceptually translate into the notion of the Self. This "I" reflects the ways in which one's participation in political, social, and economic processes of meaning making (and having meaning made of oneself) through expressions of entitlements to and the negotiations with power relations not only reflects, reproduces, and challenges broader structures of power but also constructs particular narratives about the Self. Thus, activists' articulations of their critical stances were inseparably intertwined with a particular construction of the activist Self which was in turn part of and a reflection of context-specific articulations of power which continued privileging Western Self vis-à-vis the constructed Other.

At the core of activists' critical stances lay the desire to "take the distinction between us and them away" (Kate). I understand this as an investment to destabilize the hegemonic construction of difference between the Self and the Other to challenge and reformulate unequal relations of power and, inscribed in them, violence, and injustice. As a result, at the center of activists' political subjectivities lay narratives about the Self (Western subject politically, socially, and economically privileged in the hegemonic discourses produced at the state-capital nexus) as well as the Self and

its relationship with the Other (migrants, homeless people, and Roma population, subjected to processes of exclusion, marginalization, and humanitarian governance within the discourses produced at the state-capital nexus). Thus, I investigate activists' political subjectivities through the framework of Self-Other,[55] which I conceptualize by drawing on bell hooks' essay *Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance* (1992b) and Sara Ahmed's book *Strange Encounters, Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000b).

The Self-Other framework allows me to analyze activists' political subjectivities as constructed around a series of negotiations between the Self's critical desire to challenge the unequal structures of power, the Self's relationship with the Other, as well as the Self's negotiations of its advanced political, social, and economic positioning vis-à-vis the existing structures of power. In case of the activists I studied, the Other belonged to marginalized groups and thus its relationship to the Self (a subject positioned high in the local and global structures of power) was shaped by series of inequalities. It is precisely those inequalities that the activists I spoke with aimed to challenge, marking the critical component of their subjectivities. At the same time, as I show throughout this dissertation, the ways in which activists narrated and imagined such challenges often overlapped with some of the hegemonic imaginaries of neoliberal capitalism. Throughout the dissertation, my analytical focus often shifts onto the Self component of the Self-Other framework. This shift allows me to investigate how the activists' political subjectivities were constructed through their negotiations with/(re)production of their positioning within structures of power. For example, it elucidates that the activists' political subjectivities were constructed through (self)-differentiation from other social actors, especially humanitarian volunteers,

[55] Both Self and the Other are configured as symbolic figures. The Self-Other framework, while sharpening my analytical scrutiny, also has important shortcomings. It runs the risk of further reproducing hegemonic discourses that draw distinctions between the hegemonic Self and the racialized and classed construction of the Other as different (Doty 1996). It is not my intention to feed into such narratives. I am also aware of the possibility that the Self-Other framework reproduces narratives, including those critical ones, that privilege difference rather than commonalities as a starting point of analytical work. It is not my intention to argue for privileging difference, but to think through the ways in which constructed and imagined difference continue to shape not only exclusionary but also inclusionary discourses.

reflecting the neoliberal differentiation between the "great" man and the "little people" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018; see section 3). It also brings attention to the ways in which this Self negotiated between its counter-hegemonic investments and its embeddedness in the hegemonic structures of power through narratives pertaining to (re)distribution of resources, particularly affect-based resources and privileges (Chapter V). The focus on the Other component of Self-Other relationship sheds light on the ways in which activists' political subjectivities and embeddedness in/(re)production of hegemonic structures of power was facilitated by the construction of the Other as different, particularly through narratives of self-development (section 3).

3. Nomadic subject as critical consciousness

In order to make sense of the activists' self-positioning as critical subjects, I borrow Braidotti's figure of "critical consciousness", which she introduces as a "figuration of contemporary subjectivity" (1994, 5; 2014a; 2014b). At the core of this figuration lies a desire to "destabilize dogmatic, hegemonic, exclusionary power structures at the very heart of the identity structures of the dominant subject" (Braidotti 2014b, 181) as part of a broader feminist, anti-racist, and post-colonial counter-hegemonic struggle. The figure helps to identify and systematize the series of imaginaries structuring activists' critical stances.

Braidotti develops the figure of the nomadic subject throughout several of her writings. I focus on the ways that she frames critical consciousness in the book *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994), her article *Writing as a Nomadic Subject* (2014b), and a lecture entitled *Thinking as Nomadic subject* (2014a). In employing the figure of critical consciousness, I do not aim to enter into discussion with Braidotti's work or to challenge her contribution to critical and feminist thinking. I also do not use the figure to represent concrete theoretical developments proposed by Braidotti. Rather I introduce it as particular "symbolic figure" that describes political, ethical, and theoretical positioning in the world, which I saw as guiding the activists.

The conceptualization of critical consciousness as a "figuration of contemporary subjectivity" allows me to locate activists' imaginaries on the continuum of the historical development of critical thinking. As Bradiotti reminds us, we need to always keep in mind the "perverse temporalities of the life of ideas" (2014a). The figure of critical consciousness facilitates the "task of drawing a cartographic reading of the present, in terms of cultural, political, epistemological and ethical concerns" (2014b, 167). As such, it allows me to interpret the activists' articulations of their critical stances as shaped by and reflecting political and historical conjunctures in which HSP operated—namely, in the 2010s in Europe—and their particular articulations of state-capital nexus under neoliberal capitalism. Therefore, while the imaginaries constituting Braidotti's figure of critical consciousness are vividly present in activists' narratives, their meaning might play out differently than it did in the historical and political conjuncture that informed Braidottti's writing.[56]

The first crucial element of critical consciousness is its positioning within and vis-à-vis structures of power. As Braidotti argues, critical consciousness means "being worthy of the times while resisting the times, being of the world in the mode of opposition" (2014a). Such opposition is spoken from a position of a "European nomadic subject moving across the variegated landscape of whitenes" (2014b, 181), a subject embedded in, shaped by, and in many regards privileged within Eurocentric discourses. Thus, the critical intervention that Braidotti makes is spoken from within one of the important centers of power "that structure the contemporary globalized world" with an investment in challenging and reformulating that center (Braidotti 1994, 180). As Braidotti further argues, it is a response to a "claustrophobic self-referential Euro-centred philosophical thought that is not living up to the challenges of diversity multiculturalism and the kind of

[56]As Braidotti articulates (reflecting on the political and historical conjuncture that informed her writing): "I belong to a generation that fell in love with the present […] We are a generation, to quote Deleuze, that got "inebriated on water, got high on life"" (2014a).

mediated societies which we have already become. We need more planetary dimensions" (2014b, 181).

The investment in being in the "mode of opposition" was vividly present in activists' narratives. Similar to Braidotti's critical consciousness, activists' desires to destabilize the prevailing structures of power were spoken from within one of the centers of power by subjects privileged within the Eurocentric articulation of the state-capital nexus with the intention to create what one of the activists framed as a "better society" (Jess). Activists' investments in global justice issues and the need to challenge the differentiation between the Self and the Other and question state exclusionary border regimes corresponded with the desire for a more "planetary dimension" and an investment in "living up to the challenges of diversity multiculturalism" (Braidotti 2014b, 181).

In practicing the mentioned above mode of opposition, critical consciousness is clear about its alignment with "black, anti-racists, post-colonial, and other critical thinkers" who oppose and question hegemonic discourses and structures of power (2014b, 181). The goal of critical consciousness thus is to support liberatory struggles through "addresses[ing] in both a critical and creative manner the role of the former 'center' in redefining power relations" (2014b, 181). As Braidotti further argues, "margins and center shift and destabilize each other in parallel, albeit dissymmetrical, movements. I want to resist the identification of the centre as inertia and self-perpetuation and to the aporetic repetition of Sameness" (2014b, 181). This type of critical consciousness exhibits clear political and ethical investments in positioning itself alongside those speaking from more marginalized positions. Similar to critical consciousness, the activists aimed to join in the struggles of migrants and other marginalized groups and their political project was informed by anti-racist and post-colonial thinking.

The figure of critical consciousness further discloses the ways in which one's positioning within the structures of power in not only a location from which one speaks but is also a constitutive element of one's subjectivity. As Braidotti writes:

> "The nomad is my own figuration of a situated, postmodern, culturally differentiated understanding of the subject [...] In so far as axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once" (1994, 4).

In line with Braidotti's reminder, the activists' positioning as critical subjects should be read as always already shaped by their positioning as European, middle class, white, mobile citizens. This conceptualization of critical consciousness brings attention to the ways in which the meaning of one's stances, including the critical ones, is always already mediated by one's positioning within the structures of power. The figure of critical consciousness' awareness of her positionality and of the inscription of various axes of differentiation onto her cognitive, political, and ethical apparatus corresponds with the activists' attentiveness to think through the ways in which they themselves were reproducing the very structures of power they aimed to destabilize. Similar to Braidotti's critical consciousnesses, activists were likewise thus invested in the practice of reflexivity, often linked in activists' narratives with the invocation of the notion of privilege (Chapter VI).

The commitment to resist and destabilize "hegemonic, exclusionary power structures" from "within" the center of power is connected with critical consciousness' ethical investments as well, since "the tactics of resistance and the ethical approach are not only mutually compatible but also inter-linked" (Braidotti 2014b, 165). Those ethical investments are framed by Braidotti, following bell hooks, as "yearning," which she understands to be as a "common affective and political sensibility, which cuts across the boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice" and serves as bases for building solidarity (1994, 2). I use the term "yearning" throughout the dissertation to indicate the affective and ethical underpinnings of the activists' investments in building solidarity and creating "better society" (Jess). The notion of yearning sheds light not only on the ethical dimension of HSP but also elucidates a series of tensions and silences around the language of ethics that transpired from the activists' narratives (Chapter IV). I interpret those silences as part of the activists' aversion to grand narratives, which characterizes both counter-hegemonic and hegemonic discourses (section 3). Similarly, the activists' orientation towards a "better society"

(Jess) should be read careful as both driven by counter-hegemonic stances and echoing the imaginaries of the great man and his orientation towards "common good" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018) (section 4). My dissertation shows that yearning was often expressed and practiced by the activists through the establishment of proximity between the Self and the Other, which I complicate by employing the figure of a universal transcendent subject (section 5).

Critical consciousness' investment in destabilizing hegemonic structures of power is further elaborated by Braidotti as a "resistance [to] settl[e] into socially coded modes of thought and behavior" and as a "qualitative shift away from hegemony, whatever its size and however 'local' it may be" (1994, 5). Such resistance is connected in Braidotti's writing with the symbolic image of the nomad. Yet, while inspired by actual nomadic cultures, Braidotti's critical consciousness as a nomadic state of "becoming" is defined by the "subversion of set of conventions […] not the actual act of traveling" (Braidotti 1994, 5). As she argues "some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one's habitat" (1994, 5). Her conceptualization of mobility as "blurring [of] boundaries" (Braidotti 1994, 4) and a movement "across established categories and experiences" (Braidotti 1994, 4) builds continuity between resistance to hegemony, the symbolic imaginaries attached to mobility (section 4), and the development of the Self. This development of the Self—the "nomadic becoming"— is further described by Braidotti as a performative gesture that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction, experience, and knowledge"(2014b, 182). Thus, the becoming of the Self is "neither a reproduction nor just an imitation, but rather an emphatic proximity, an intensive inter-connectedness (2014b, 182). Such a conceptualization of resistance locates the Self, its "greatest trips," and its proximity with the Other, as crucial elements of the anti-systemic struggle. Throughout this dissertation I show how such conceptualizations of counter-hegemonic struggles were translated in the activists' narratives into the centrality of the Self and aligned HSP with broader discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

Defined this way, the figure of critical consciousness is also invested with imaginaries of mobility—physical but also intellectual, social, political, and ethical movement and change. This mobility and change, embodied in the figure of the nomad, is a crucial element of the counter-hegemonic stands which aim to transform the prevailing structures of power, including those that constitute the Self. The imaginaries of mobility and change are crucial in that they also inform the features of the ideal subject under neoliberal capitalism, both in its investment to move between ideas and spaces and in self-development (section 3).

Thus, critical consciousness' investment in destabilizing structures of power corresponds with core elements of the activists' critical stances. Activists subverted conventions (as a way of challenging structures of power) by reversing the discursive articulation of power, often through jokes, or through establishment of proximity with those marginalized (Chapters V; VI). A resistance to settling "into socially coded modes of thought and behavior" (Braidotti 1994, 5) showed itself in the activists' rejection towards taking hegemonic discourses as objective truths and in activists' practices of reflexivity (Chapters IV, VI). The activists' insistence on establishing closeness (political, physical, and emotional) with the Other (Chapters V; VI) demonstrated the importance of proximity. Their general disregard for the state (Chapter III) and humanitarianism (Chapter IV), as well as general distrust towards grand narratives and universalizing discourses, meanwhile, illustrated their aim to shift away from hegemony. In my reading of Braidotti's work, this type of mistrust emerges from the postmodern recognition that there is no objective truth, only 'truths' reflecting various structures of power which is a crucial element of critical thinking. Hence, in my interpretation of the activists' narratives, postmodern disbelief in (universal) truths was also at the core of their political project. While disbelief towards grand narratives was present in the 1960s as an element of anti-capitalist critique, under the political and historical conjuncture in which activists operated it was also an important element of the discourses of neoliberal capitalism and a defining feature of the great man (section 4).

3.1 Hegemony and counter-hegemony

Braidotti does not offer a clear explanation of her mobilization of hegemony. For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the working definition in line with Gramscian thought in which:

> "In hegemony […] a certain way of life and thought is dominant, and is diffused throughout society to inform norms, values and tastes, political practices, and social relations (Sassoon, 1982). It is based on a specific organization of consent, which has an economic base but is not limited to it (Carroll, 1992). It results from a combination of coercion and consent, the latter achieved through the hegemonic cooptation of groups in civil society, resulting in 'coercive orthodoxy' (Persaud, 2001, p. 65)" (Katz 2006a, 335).

Thus, hegemony is a formation of power that is expressed in a "structure of values and understanding about the nature of order" (R. W. Cox and Sinclair 1996, 151) that comes into being through "compromises articulated in social struggle" (Ludwig 2011, 52). As a result of social struggle, hegemony is never stable, it is always context specific and historically, politically, and geographically situated. Counter-hegemony refers to "the way people develop ideas and discourses to challenge dominant assumptions, beliefs, and established patterns of behavior" (R. H. Cox and Schilthuis 2012, 1). It competes with hegemony with the hope of establishing a new set of beliefs and practices that will challenge and/or replace the existing status quo. Counter-hegemonic struggles are located within civil and global civil society. Hegemony and counter-hegemony are not separate from each other but "reciprocally shape one another"(Katz 2006, 336). I identify the hegemony in which the activists operated (and opposed) as a particular articulation of the relationship between nation state and neoliberal capitalism (R. W. Cox and Sinclair 1996, 126).

I interpret the activists I studied as hegemonic subjects insofar as they occupy advanced positioning within the existing structures of power and partake in the reproduction of the discourses of neoliberal capitalism. I interpret them as counter-hegemonic subjects insofar as they question hegemonic discourses of state-capital nexus and identify "alternate values and principles"(R. H. Cox and Schilthuis 2012, 1), which they try to disseminate among both local and global civil society. The activists' narratives reveal the ways in which counter-hegemonic imaginaries underlie HSP, particularly requests for mobility, critiques of the state, and the location

of positive politics in one's personal life rather than in institutional structures, corresponded with the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism (Chapter III).

4. The Great Man

I investigate the ways in which the imaginaries inscribed in the activists' critical stances not only challenged but also corresponded with and reproduced the hegemonic discourses by locating them within the development of the new, neoliberal spirit of capitalism[57] and employing the figure of the great man introduced by Boltanski and Chiapello in their seminal book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018).[58] The figure systematizes the features of an ideal capitalist subject under the neoliberal spirit of capitalism. A historical contextualization of the development of neoliberalism allows one to challenge the assumed dichotomy between capitalism and its critique, and thus between activists positionings as hegemonic subjects and their investment in acting as counter-hegemonic ones.

The spirit of capitalism refers to a set of values and "patterned ways of thinking" which constitutes the logic with which capitalism justifies its modes of capital accumulation[59] (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 10). This justification aims to successfully engage people into capitalist practices "who are indispensable to the pursuit of accumulation"—the vast majority of people engaged in consumption and production patterns—by making them adhere "to a lifestyle conducive to the capitalist order" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 24, 11). For successful engagement to take place, capitalism needs to provide people with what seems to be "attractive, exciting life prospects while supplying guarantees of security and moral reason for people to do what they do" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 25). Thus, the spirit of capitalism consists of

[57] In defining the term capitalism, Boltanski and Chiapello use "minimal formula stressing an imperative to unlimited accumulation of capital by formally peaceful means" (2018, 4). They study the development of the neoliberal spirit of capitalism by comparing managerial discourses of the 1990s in France with those of earlier decades.
[58] Boltanski and Chiapello use the term 'new spirit of capitalism,' which I refer to as neoliberalism.
[59] Boltanski and Chiapello argue that the spirit of capitalism can be seen as the "dominant ideology, so long as we stop regarding it as a mere subterfuge by the dominant to ensure the consent of the dominated, and acknowledge that the majority of those involved—the strong as well as the weak—rely on these schemas in order to represent to themselves the operation, benefits, and constraints of the order in which they find themselves immersed" (2018, 10–11).

"normative conceptions of social order" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 26): it establishes narratives about the "common good," (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 9)[60] improvement of people's lives, and fairness. In defining which profits and behaviors are just, the spirit of capitalism also places a series of constrains on capital accumulation.

The role of the great man is to embody and further spread values promoted by the spirit of capitalism so that the logic of justification is reproduced. Thus, the great man is never simply driven by a desire to accumulate capital and exploit resources but also represents a set of values that tie him with imaginaries of justice and narratives of common good (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 114). Highlighting the normative dimension of spirit of capitalism allow me to study activists' imaginaries around solidarity and justice as not necessarily (only) counter-hegemonic but rather as disclosing complex ways in which hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism might be reproduced also through projects invested in global justice issues (Chapters V; VI).

Capitalism produces its justification by incorporating into its logic some of the demands put forward by anti-capitalist critique. In doing so, it creates a sense that anti-capitalist dissatisfaction has been heard and addressed, which in turn helps to "disarm anti-capitalist forces" and prevent their re-emergence (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 27). At the same time, by incorporating critique into its logic, capitalism shapes this critique. Thus, capitalism and its critiques co-constitute one another, with the critique serving as a "motor in changes in the spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 27), always already the subject of capitalist incorporation and/or disarmament. As a result:

> "It is [often] pointless to search for a clear separation between impure ideological constructs, intended to serve capitalist accumulation, and pure, utterly uncompromised ideas, which would make it possible to criticize it. Frequently, the same paradigms find themselves engaged in condemnation and justification of what is condemned" (2018, 20).

[60] They elaborate on this approach by arguing that "In taking the effects of the justification of capitalism by reference to a common good seriously, we distance ourselves both from critical approaches for which only capitalism's tendency to unlimited accumulation at any price is real, and the sole function of ideologies is to conceal the reality of all-powerful economic relations of force; and from apologetic approaches which, confus- ing normative supports and reality, ignore the imperatives of profit and accumulation, and place the demands for justice faced by capitalism at its heart" (2018, 26).

In line with this assertion, Xymena Kurowska reflects on the "critical academics" arguing that "we may readily identify the complicity or co-optation of the other […] but [it is] less common to extend this critical scrutiny to the practices with which such diagnoses are made" (Kurowska 2020a, 29). I extend this assertion to the activists I studied. Those interventions remind us that critical apparatus in which one operates should not be considered in terms of a critical-not critical (enough) dichotomy but rather as a reflecting the complex ways in which critical thinking, both in its practices and assumptions, not only departs from and challenges but is also embedded in and reproduces neoliberal discourses (Vrasti 2011).

Boltanski and Chiapello divide critiques of capitalism into "social" and "artistic" critiques,[61] which have different sources of indignation and thus each put forward different imaginaries of change (2018, 36). Social critique originates in socialist and Marxist, thought and locates its indignation in social inequalities, poverty, and exploitation. It is often inspired by (Christian) morality and tends to point to the individualism and egoism of the ruling classes as a source of growing social inequalities and exploitation (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 38). Artistic critiques have their roots in the bohemian lifestyle of the 19th century and tend to object to inauthenticity, disenchantment, hypocritically invoked morality, and individual oppression resulting from the subjugation of the individual under the institutional structures (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 39). The differences between these critiques—particularly in relation to their perspectives on individualism, morality, and institutions—means that "one of the difficulties faced by critical work is that it is virtually impossible to combine these different grounds for indignation and integrate them into coherent framework"[62](2018, 37). The activists' narratives showed that HSP was shaped

[61] These are ideal types and such a division is analytical only. In practice, the two critiques are often intertwined in their context specific articulations.

[62] As Boltanski and Chiapello argue: "Depending on the historical conjecture, they may find themselves associated, but often at the cost of misunderstanding that can easily be denounced as incoherence; alternatively, they may enter into tension with one another" (2018, 38). The incompatibility of these two critiques is also linked with the ways in which they oppose and reproduce imaginaries of enlightenment modernity "in which capitalism – by the same token as democracy, but in different respects – claim to be rooted" (2018, 39). Both have modernist and anti-modernist elements: "the artistic critique is anti-modernist when it stresses disenchantment, and modernist when it is concerned with liberation […] the social critique is rather modernist when it underscores inequalities and anti-modernist when, fixing on the lack of solidarity, it is constructed as a critique of individualism" (2018, 40).

by and put forward elements of both of these critiques. In line with social critique, it aimed at denouncing inequalities and marginalization and, in line with artistic critique, it was critical of the subjugation of the individual under institutional structures, of hypocritically invoked morality, and of grand narratives. This dissertation argues that the incompatibility of these two critiques was one of the elements which contributed to the tensions underlying HSP.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, capitalism in Western countries became the target of both social and artistic critique. The former presented itself in a series of strikes and strong labor union activism and took as its focus the "exploitation, struggle against monopolies, and the egoism of oligarchy" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 169). The latter was articulated by students' movements and denounced "hierarchical power, paternalism, authoritarianism, compulsory work schedules […] the division of labour," lack of autonomy and creativity, various forms of oppression and the "dehumanization of the world under the sway of technicization and technocratization" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 170). The critique of capitalism was "conflated in one and the same denunciation with the bourgeois family and the state," which were seen as "closed, fixed, ossified worlds, whether by attachment to tradition (the family), legalism and bureaucracy (the state), or calculation and planning (the firm)" (2018, 145). While the social critique requested security for the working classes, the artistic demanded "autonomy and self-management, and the promise of an unbounded liberation of human creativity" (2018, 170), juxtaposing the rigidity of capitalism, the state, and the family with the "mobility, fluidity and 'nomads' able to circulate, at the cost of many metamorphoses, in open networks" (2018, 145).

One of the ways in which capitalism overcame this crisis the late 1960s and early 1970s was by incorporating elements of the artistic critique into its spirit.[63] Meanwhile, the social critique "found itself nonplussed, bereft of ideological props, and consigned to the dustbin of history"

[63]This is not to argue that the restructuring of capitalism that started in the 1970s was a result of the artistic critique (Introduction). But it is to argue that the artistic critique was partially addressed and utilized in order to provide a new "normative conceptions of social order" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 25).

(Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 346). The weakening of social critique meant (among other things) the abandonment of the class framework, the disappearance of the language of exploitation and the weakening of trade unions. Capitalism's incorporation of parts of the artistic critique into the new spirit of capitalism justified the weakening of institutions (dismantling an image of the state as the provider of welfare and security), the emergence of flexible forms of capital accumulation, and, linked with it, the development of subcontracting, outsourcing, and project-based, flexible labor relations—as well as the disarmament of social critique seen to be in conflict with individual freedoms. The emergence of this new spirit of capitalism also meant changes to some features of the great man image, which in turn resulted in the development of new political subjectivities. It was this new spirit of capitalism that cemented itself in the 1990s which I read activists' narratives as historically embedded within.

Under neoliberal spirit of capitalism, networks are the primary logic of capital accumulation and thus "activity par excellence […means] integrating oneself into networks and exploring them" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 110). The development of networks is connected with the generation of social and informational capital (crucial forms of capital under neoliberal capitalism) which in turn further stimulate network generation. Thus "information is at once the result and the condition of multiplying connections, so that inequalities of information are cumulative" (2018, 113) (Chapter V). In order for the reproduction of networks to be perceived as just, they are generated and constrained around the logic of projects. Such logic creates a sense of possibility, seemingly accessible to all: projects are flexible and allow for or even stipulate simultaneous integration into and production of various new networks. As part of justification, the "development of oneself and one's employability […becomes] the long-term personal project underlying all the others" (2018, 111). Thus, integration into projects seems to offer "attractive, exciting life prospects" not only in terms of professional careers but also personal life, allowing one to connect participation in capitalist structures with one's personal investments, interests, and desires (Chapters V; VI). Since the *logic* of project sustains flexibility of labor relations and capital

accumulation, from capitalism's perspective the content of the project is often of a secondary importance. As Boltanski and Chiapello argue:

> "Anything can attain the status of project, including ventures hostile to capitalism. Describing every accomplishment with a nominal grammar that is the grammar of the project erases the differences between a capitalist project and a humdrum creation […] Capitalism and anti-capitalist critique alike are masked" (2018, 111).

Thus, to investigate the activists' embeddedness in neoliberal discourses it is necessary to analyze not only HSP's demands but also activist participation in and mobility across various projects, from those aimed at solidarity building to those facilitating self-development (Chapters V; VI).

The neoliberal great man is someone who can generate networks, who integrates himself into multiple projects, and who thus accumulates information which is to be further "integrated into a representation of the universe to be explored" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 113, 122). Yet, as Boltanski and Chiapello argue, "in a network world […] there can be no question of an overarching representation. Useful representations are local, singular, circumstantial, able to be deployed from one person to the next, and bound up with a kind of knowledge deriving from personal experience" (2018, 113). Thus, one of the greatest assets of the great man is personal experiences, which allow for the generation of innovative, context-specific representations. The importance of personal experiences further blurs the distinction between personal and professional life, between the "disinterested bonds of friendship" and "professional or useful relationships" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 123). The great man is able to integrate diverse relationships acquired in different settings into his professional (Chapter V). The importance of personal experiences, further connected with the narrative of self-development, corresponds with critical consciousness' search for experiences through the development of "emphatic proximity" (Braidotti 2014b, 182), disclosing one of the continuities between critical imaginaries and neoliberal discourses. The focus on personal experiences allows me to investigate the complexities of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses inscribed in the activists' investment in proximity with those who are marginalized, activists' articulations of HSP's advancement (vis-à-vis

humanitarianism) as structured around access to information and representation, and the activists' desire to push beyond their comfort zones (Chapters IV; V).

Since local, singular, and circumstantial representations are privileged, the great man must be both mobile and adjustable, "know […] how to be local" and be "at ease whenever he finds himself" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 114, 123). His mobility and adjustability is juxtaposed with "little people"—those who are "unadaptable, authoritarian, rigid, immobile, local, rooted, attached" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 119).[64] This emphasis on mobility and adjustability corresponds with the activists' positioning as mobile, global subjects who were nonetheless attuned to the complexities of local(ized) spaces and struggles (Chapter III).

The mobility of the great man means not only physical movement across different geographies but also an "ability to move around […] between people, or in mental space, between ideas" (2018, 123), which resonates with critical consciousness' "greatest trips" which take place without "physically moving from one's habitat (Braidotti 1994, 2–5).[65] Furthermore, the great man establishes connections that cut across class and social background and transgress "the circle of his immediate relations" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 117), similar to critical consciousness' investment in building relationships that "cuts across the boundaries of race, class, gender" (Braidotti 1994, 2–5). The neoliberal imperative of mobility and adjustability means that:

> "Unlike the old bourgeois society, a capitalism that incorporates connexionist justifications accepts those who, thanks to a rather erratic career path (at least in their youth), have a fund

[64] The features of little people are simultaneously counter to the logic of neoliberal capitalism and necessary for the processes of exploitation to take place. Boltanski and Chiapello point out that (im)mobility is often analyzed in the existing scholarship as a consequence of other exploitative practices rather than as tools of exploitation. They argue that such understandings of (im)mobility are in line with the discourses of neoliberal capitalism in that they allow one to condemn immobilizing practices without criticizing the system. In contrast, they show that in the capitalist system—in which networks are an important prerequisite for profit generation—the immobility of some people is necessary not only for reducing competition but also because networks can only stay in place if those who are mobile have immobile people in situ. Little people serve as "roots" of the spreading business networks (2018, 363). They are "exploited in the sense that the role they play as a factor in production does not receive the acknowledgement it merits; and the contribution to the creation of value added is not remunerated at the requisite level for its distribution to be deemed fair"(2018, 363). Linking (im)mobility and exploitation allows us to also situate a discussion of (im)mobility within the economic structures of neoliberal capitalism. For a discussion on how requests for migrants mobility might reproduce neoliberal discourses, see for example: (Hoofd 2005; 2012)

[65] Braidootii addresses the overlap between imaginaries of mobility as expressed in critical thinking and in neoliberalism across her writings and lectures (Braidotti 2014b). In marking the continuities between critical consciousness and the great man, I do not aim to point to a compliance between Braidotti's theories and neoliberalism, but rather between the imaginaries of critical thinking—as expressed and practiced by the activists.

> of experience and are acquainted with several worlds, endowing them with considerable adaptability" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 117).

Thus, under neoliberal capitalism, experiences such as activism, gap years, traveling, and even alternative forms of living can still be used and translated into a market value. Through this framing, I analyze how activists "shifting away from hegemony" (intellectually, politically, and in terms of lifestyle) is not necessarily in conflict with the discourses of neoliberal capitalism. While this is not to diminish the critical potential of the activists' investment in mobility (and particularly the establishment of connection with people marginalized by hegemonic discourses), it is to highlight the proximity between critical and hegemonic imaginaries of mobility and closeness.

The adaptability of the great man requires that he is spontaneous, curious, and open to difference. Such features are constructed and advanced vis-à-vis the imaginaries of rigidity, closedness, and stagnation, which are assigned to the institutions that hamper mobility or to universal ethical discourses, the state, and "absolutist personalities attached to the defense of universal values" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 122–23). Freeing himself from moralizing and universalizing discourses, the great man "acknowledge[es] the validity of ambivalence" (2018, 123-124). Thus, the rejection of the universalizing discourses that constituted a part of the artistic critique of capitalism in the 1960s, later, in the 2010s, became an integral part of the neoliberal spirit of capitalism. A recognition of the ambivalence of the world and suspicion towards moralizing discourses was evident in the activists' aversion to the language of ethics and grand narratives, as well as in activists' uncertainty about how to negotiate between an imperative to always question one's positioning and practices, and the necessity to act (Chapter IV).

The neoliberal imperative of mobility and flexibility additionally means that one of the crucial features of the great man is his autonomy, which he prefers over security (2018, 124). His "engagement is conceived as voluntary" and "he prefers to renounce official power in favour of network forms of power," which allows him to free himself from the "supervision, invigilation, management, representation" (2018, 110, 124). Thus, the great man is averse to institutions, both

state and non-state, and thus "'tends not to let himself be trapped by institutions, with all the various obligations that entails, and not to allow himself to become entangled in a web of responsibilities towards the other people or organizations he has responsibility for" (2018, 124). This aversion to institutions and constrains was visible in how the activists' distanced themselves from the state, institutionalized politics, and left-socialist projects, framing HSP as based on voluntary engagement (Chapters III; VI). While the activists expressed that opposition to state violence, institutional rigidity, and imposition of obligations was their reason for distancing themselves from institutions, this act also resonated with the neoliberal investment to diminish the role of discourses and structures that can hamper the mobility of capital.

The neoliberal emphasis on the ambiguity of the world, coupled with an aversion to grand narratives and institutions, results in a narrative in which the great man "can root […] [him]self only in […] [him]self […]–the sole instance endowed with a certain permanency in a complex, uncertain, and changing world" (2018, 125). This narrative perpetuates the neoliberal privileging of the Self vis-à-vis the collective, framing the Self as the primary subject of interest. This act of rooting oneself in oneself was visible in activists' shift towards the Self as the primary, and often only, site of political struggle (Chapters III; IV; V; VI) and in framing the Self as the main authorization for the (dis)continuity of involvement in solidarity struggles (Chapter VI).

In line with capitalism's need for justification, the great man not only knows how to integrate himself into networks but also supports others in accessing and generating networks and who "inspire in others their own dynamic […] making them collaborators" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 122). As part of encouraging others to develop networks, "[the] great man must redistribute scarce goods they have access to—in the first place information" and in that further contribute to the unrestricted flow of information and representations (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 122). This allows for an analysis of the complex ways in which counter-hegemonic and hegemonic imaginaries informed activists' redistribution of resources, particularly information and affect-based resources (Chapters V; VI).

Invested in sustaining his own autonomy, the great man also supports the autonomy of others—he "renounces exercising any form of domination, […] do[es] not impose […] [his] rules but agree to discuss […] [his] positions" (2018, 124). I translate renunciation of domination into general aversion to authority, which was visible in activists' narratives in the framing of HSP as voluntary and in the refusal to set any conditions for support. While driven by critical investments, activists' aversion to authority did not mean that the activists did not encourage the development of migrants' political subjectivities in line with the imaginaries advanced under neoliberal capitalism (Chapter VI).

5. The Universal Transcendent Subject

As introduced above, I investigate the entanglements of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses involved in the activists striving towards proximity with migrants by employing the figure of the universal transcendent subject, drawing on analytical work developed by hooks (1992) and Sara Ahmed (2000a). The universal transcendent subject elucidates the ways in which the hegemonic Self[66] constructs itself not only through differentiation from what it frames as different and Other but also through the desire to overcome the constructed difference. This figure helps to situate activists' narratives within broader historical processes in which "boundaries of bodies and communities, including the communities of living (dwelling and travel) as well as epistemic communities" have been constituted through the processes of "inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion [of the] stranger" often with the desire to (re)produce the hegemonic subject's position (Ahmed 2000b, 6). The universal transcendent subject is characterized by a fantasy that the constructed difference, rooted in structural inequalities and systemic violence, can simply be overcome through proximity—a complex set of practices aimed at establishing political,

[66] What defines the hegemonic Self is proximity to the center of power. The "ideal" hegemonic Self is often defined as Western, white, male, middle-upper class, heterosexual, able-bodied subject. Yet, the hegemonic dimension of the Self can also show itself in subject positions that do not represent all those "ideal" features but in a given context and relationship is positioned closer to the center of power than other subjects. As Ahmed's work for example shows, white liberal feminist women can be also discussed as a hegemonic Self when analyzed vis-à-vis women of color, migrants, and other marginalized groups (Ahmed 2000b).

physical, and emotional closeness.[67] In the focus on overcoming difference through proximity, the universal transcendent subject "assume[s] that he alone can decide the nature of his relationship to […] [the Other]" (hooks 1992a, 24) and imagines that "not only can he make but also unmake the border between the self and other" (hooks 1992b, 24; Ahmed 2000b, 124).

Hooks analyzes the ways in which the desire to come close to the Other informed the political subjectivities of white male college students in the USA in the late 1980s and early 1990s (1992b). She argues that those "critical of white imperialism" boys sought sexual encounters with women of color as part of their 'progressive' investments (1992b, 36). They imagined sexual intimacy as a space to transgress cultural norms and establish relationships alternative to hegemonic discourses. Yet, sexual intimacy with the Other was not only narrated as a site of systemic resistance but, even more notably, framed as a ritual of transcendence and a promise of change. Hooks argues that "to these young males […] fucking was a way to confront the Other, as well as the way to make themselves over, to leave behind white 'innocence' and enter the world of experience" (1992b, 23). As such, the encounter with the Other was "constituting the alternative playground" which, while imagined as reformulating social relations and structures of power, was in fact serving the hegemonic subject to assert himself as progressive, transgressive, and desiring (Chapters IV; V). The Other served as a witness to the transformation of the hegemonic subject and the (re)establishment of his hegemonic positioning.

Ahmed analyzes the movie *Dancing with the Wolfs* in which a white, male, colonizer protagonist develops closeness with a Native American tribe, seemingly challenging the constructed difference and distance between the hegemonic Western Self and the Native American

[67] In line with hooks and Ahmed's usage, I employ the notion of proximity to encompass various ways in which activists were invested in developing closeness with the other: physical (working together, meeting, talking), emotional (sharing lives, becoming friends, creating relationships), as well as political, aimed at challenging the hierarchies and inequalities between people (solidarity). The concept of proximity also corresponds with the imperative of personal experiences, as inscribed in the discourses of neoliberal capitalism, and with the imaginaries of HSP that establish the Self as the primary figure of political struggle (Chapter V). Thus, the notion of proximity, alongside allowing for me to conceptualize the activists' investment in developing closeness with the Other, also helps to problematize the relationship between the Self, the political project in which she was invested, and the imaginaries inscribed in the hegemonic discourses.

Other (2000a). Yet, in fact, the developed of proximity serves primarily for the transformation of the Self. The Other represents what the Self is missing: communal life, closeness to nature, and intuition. By established proximity, the Self neutralizes difference by reframing it as potent and, once it is no longer threatening, uses it to fulfill his own lack, to go through a process of change and become fuller. He constitutes himself as a "hybrid hero" (2000a, 123) The movie reflects "how contemporary Western culture is imbued with fantasies of becoming, in which the Western Self ceases to define itself against the bodies of strangers" (2000a, 119). Such becoming, similar to in the case of hook's 'progressive whites,' is embedded in and further reproduces a fantasy of a Western subject as able to transcend structures of oppression by promising the Other his closeness.

This kind of Western fantasy of transcending difference through proximity is linked with what Ahmed calls "shame of colonial past" (Ahmed 2000a, 120), the desire on the side of the Self to exempt itself from the guilt of social injustice and be assured of its 'innocence' (D'Arcangelis 2018). Thus, rather than addressing structural violence it "reimagines violence […] as the opening out for the possibility for friendship and love," which in turn reinforces a "liberal vision of the white self as always open to others"(Ahmed 2000a, 124). Thus, in the end the search for proximity to challenge the violence inscribed in constructed difference not only obscures responsibility for the past but also reaffirms the agency and primacy of the Western Self.

The figure of the universal transcendent subject thus sheds light on the continuities between the search for proximity, closeness, and friendship between the Self and the Other as a way of challenging constructed difference (Chapters V; VI); the Self's desire for change and self-development (Chapter V); and how hegemony of the Self is reinforced (Chapter VI). In activists' narratives, the transcendence of difference was also articulated in line with liberal multicultural and cosmopolitan discourses structured around imaginaries of shared humanity as seemingly neutral (and in fact taking the Self as the defining the scope of humanity) political project holding a promise of peaceful coexistence between the Self and the Other (Chapters IV; V) While articulated

differently and in a more critical and nuanced manner than what hooks and Ahmed describe as the Self's longing for the Other, I read the activists' desire for togetherness as reflecting the imaginaries of proximity with otherness that has been a constitutive part of the construction of the "modernity of European […] [Self]" (Ahmed 2000b, 10). It is not to simply reject the possibilities that a search for togetherness hold for counter-hegemonic struggles or to overlook the ways in which "desire disrupts, subverts, and makes resistance possible" (hooks 1992b, 39). But it is to study such desire carefully and to trace the moments in which it reinforces the centrality of the Self and her immediate encounters, marking the counter-hegemonic project fragile in its reliance on the Self's desires, needs, and abilities (Chapter VI).

Imagined as one who overcomes difference, the figure of the universal transcendent subject is conditioned by and further (re)produces the very construction of difference and otherness which "oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity" (Huggan 2001, 13). While a detailed investigation of the ways in which activists took part in the construction of the Other as different lies outside of the scope of the dissertation, the activists' presentation of migrants as more communal, less boring, richer in terms of culture and experiences and thus enriching the Self point to some of these dynamics (Chapter V). I read the activists' construction of migrants as different and richer vis-à-vis broader, often critical discourses that romanticize margins as inherently counter-hegemonic and transgressive spaces. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for example, argues that in postcolonial, critical thinking margins often represent spaces that have not only been subjected to violent colonial histories but that are also fantasized as inherently productive, which offer the possibility for resistance against the violent hegemony of whiteness, economic and social exploitation, and Western supremacy (Spivak 2009). As a consequence "marginality operate[s] as an important site of resistence for decentering unjust power relations," serving in Western knowledge production as a fetishized space through which to fantasize counter-hegemonic investments (Collins 2000, 44). In a similar vein, hooks argues that marginality—in her writing embodied in "blackness"—is not only countered but also (re)produced in progressive circles by

being constructed and celebrated as something that "invites engagement in a revolutionary ethos that dares to challenge and disrupt status quo" (hooks 1992b, 37). Ingrid Hoof argues that similar symbolic value is attached to the figure of the migrant in contemporary radical Italian thought "that seek to incorporate migrant issues within their conceptual framework of liberatory struggles" (Hoofd 2005, 130). Within such thinking, the figure of a migrant becomes "a crucial metaphorical breaker of judicial boundaries" and serves as a "utopian fantasy of a subject transgressing borders" (Hoofd 2005, 130–35). This type of fantasy is also visible among some non-Italian thinkers associated with critical migration studies. Peter Nyers', for example, proclaims that "refugees and other migrants with precarious status are emerging as key protagonists in global struggles concerning freedom of movement, social recognition, worker protections, and the right of asylum" (Nyers 2010, 127).[68] The symbolic configuration of margins and migrants' struggles in critical discourses helps me to situate HSP within the broader paradigm in which "the supposedly 'authentic' subversive struggles from those margins then become the paradigmatic fantasy of liberatory struggles for Eurocentric activist thought" (Hoofd 2005, 131).

[68] Hoofd challenges such approach arguing that romanticizing migrants as contestant of nation states silences migrants hopes for "much-needed sovereign citizen status within either their previous or those new national borders" and thus silences their precariousness (Hoofd 2005, 144).

Chapter III: "A different type of politics." Activists' positioning within the political sphere.

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the entanglement between the critical and hegemonic imaginaries inscribed in the activists' narratives by analyzing the ways in which activists positioned themselves within the political sphere. Particularly, I investigate how the activists' positioned themselves as critical of the "system"—a defining element of their counter-hegemonic stance—and how this compared to their positioning vis-à-vis the state, formal politics, and radical politics. Through this investigation, I also outline the imaginaries informing the activists' self-presentations as "political" and HSP as an alternative to the state-capital nexus. As introduced in the preceding chapters, I interpret these imaginaries together with the activists' high positions within local and global hierarchies of power. I show that their articulations of systemic critique and their aversion to the state and formal politics simultaneously echoed critical consciousness' investment in shifting away from hegemony (Braidotti 1994, 5) and reflected their embeddedness in the discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

The chapter is divided into two sections. In the section 1, I analyze how the activists articulated their critiques of the system. In particular, I focus on the meaning of "system" for them and demonstrate that it signified various things: the relationship between the nation state and capitalism; (global) capitalism; neoliberal governing practices; border regimes; and the workings of the state as an institution. Similarly, activists' critiques of the system encompassed various elements: social inequalities, marginalization, exploitation, coercion, authority, disciplining, meaninglessness of (the Self's) life, and consumption patterns. By tracing these various articulations, I show how the activists operated with a rather loose definition of the "system" and that their systemic critiques were constructed around both social and artistic critiques of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 36), which resulted in tension in their narratives. I also analyze

activists' critiques of radical, leftist politics and how these reflected the activists' alignment with and (re)production of the discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

In the section 2, I analyze the activists' positioning vis-à-vis the state and formal politics. I complexify my discussion by analyzing their critiques of the state as an expression of state-phobia (Dhawan 2016) and trace the ways in which such critiques correspond with discourses of neoliberal capitalism which aim to limit the role of institutions that hamper the mobility of capital. I also investigate how the activists' distancing from formal politics facilitated their alignment with the features of the neoliberal great man (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018), how this distancing located counter-hegemonic politics in one's personal life, and how, in this way, HSP reflected and further facilitated the establishment of the Self as the central figure in the activists' political project. Finally, I outline the tensions inscribed in the activists' imaginaries of forming an alternative to the workings of the state-capital nexus and examine activists' fantasies of living without the state.

1. System and radical politics

HSP has often been described by activists as offering an important counter narrative to the exclusionary discourses around migration produced within the state-capital nexus. For example, activists rejected how states frame migration as a "crisis" caused by migrants in the countries receiving them (used to legitimize the strengthening of EU border regimes). They also were opposed to framing migration as a "humanitarian crisis." As Kate emphasized, activists didn't want "the topic of migration to be discussed in terms of relief"—alleviating immediate suffering through a logic of "help" without a recognizing and countering the structural underpinnings of marginalization. As she further explained, activists were "looking more into structures" and aimed to develop systemic critique of social inequalities and states exclusionary border regimes.

Eli was one of the activists who advocated particularly strongly that HSP needs to develop social structures[69] that could serve as an alternative to the current socio-economic and political

[69] Those included autonomous spaces where people could meet, rest, take part in various workshops and projects, dine; soup kitchen; food and clothes bank; support groups; collaborative projects etc.

organization of life. Elaborating on her stances and her understanding of an anti-systemic critique, she argued: "when the revolution… come[s]… *when the system, capitalist system or, I don't know what system it is these days, fascist system*, when it's gone people [will] want something… better… an alternative." The reference to "these days" located her definition of the system in the context of the social and political developments of the second half of 2015. Eli's invocation of the term "system" together with "these days" and "fascism" indicated that she used the term system to refer to rising nationalism, populism, xenophobia, and growing authoritarian tendencies across Europe. Furthermore, by calling the system "capitalist" she indicated her affinity with leftist imaginaries and her attentiveness to the economic underpinnings of various forms of inequality and marginalization. Thus, in Eli's narrative the system came to represent the state-capital nexus, with a particular focus on political right-wing radicalization and the working of capitalism, an approach common among the activists. At the same time, her open acknowledgement that she didn't know "what system it … [was] these days" reflected the looseness of her definition of the system reflected in the narratives of other activists. Nonetheless, her invocation of the system constructed a positive image of HSP *as already distinct* from the system.

Iza, an activist experienced in working across various pro-migrant and anti-systemic initiatives in the EU, talked about the system as a relationship between the "state […] [and] state-affiliated structures" and on the other hand various forms of marginalization, oppression, and exploitation as embedded in the working of capitalism. She found it "important [to connect] the situation at the borders with neoliberal capitalism, global exploitation, sexism, anti-Semitism"[70] and racism. By linking the exclusionary practices at the borders with these broader processes, she reflected the activists' understanding that various forms of marginalization are structurally linked with one another. This approach was an important feature differentiating HSP from other social actors, particularly humanitarians (Chapter V), and resonated with critical consciousness'

[70] The invocation of anti-Semitism as one of the systems of oppression was not a usual practice among activists.

investment in establishing solidarity across social groups (Braidotti 1994, 2). By bringing together global exploitation, neoliberal capitalism, and border regimes, she indicated her understanding of system as global capitalism, highlighting the relationship between the prosperity of the EU and the impoverishment and exploitation of workers across the world. While most other activists did not reference global capitalism, Eli's invocation of the "global" dimension of the system reflected a common investment in global justice. Meanwhile, her emphasis on "exploitation" linked her critique of the system with the question of labor and capital accumulation. This made her narrative distinct from the narratives of most other activists who tended to use the language of marginalization and exclusion rather than exploitation, which echoed the shift in and the weakening of social critique that EU witnessed in the 1990s (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018).

Filip's critique of the system connected to his disillusionment with party politics and refusal to vote. He argued: "None of the political parties do… the things that I want to happen… because they operate … within the system and the system doesn't change itself but I want to change the system." Elaborating, he argued: "we [HSP] don't want to have any nations,[71] we don't want to have borders." By questioning party politics, Filip indicated the aversion to formal politics echoed in the narratives of other activists. His invocation of "no nations" and "no borders" likewise resonated with the imaginaries of no-border movement, which at the time of my research was an important form of radical politics.[72] Within this framing, the system referred to the socio-political organization structured around the idea of a nation state and the exclusionary practices there inscribed. While he was also critical of capitalism, the focal point of Filip's critique was the state, rather than capitalism and/or the state-capital nexus. The state represented both the concrete,

[71] In his narrative, the term "nation" was used interchangeably with "state".

[72] No-border movement refers to the network of people and groups united in the request for freedom of movement and the "removal, rather than refashioning, of all immigration controls and other methods in which freedom of movement is denied"(Burridge 2010, 401). Due to its critique of the nation state and border regimes, anti-deportation campaigns, as well as its direct action, no-border movement can be understood as pursuing radical politics. No-border movements operate across and beyond Europe. (For further discussion see for example: (Alldred 2003; Shantz 2005; Anderson and Sharma 2012))

context-specific articulation of formal politics (political parties) and institutions more broadly. His focus on the state and formal politics as the embodiment of systemic injustice (alongside the absence critiques of capitalism) was common among the activists.

While the activists were invested in developing systemic critiques and often aligned themselves with radical, leftist politics (such as, among others, no-border movement), they also clearly differentiated themselves from such political projects. Activists criticized radical groups for their inability to attend to the context-specific articulations of marginalization and thus their inability to develop immediate responses to the on-the-ground experiences of people. As Iza critically evaluated "[Radical groups'] main focus is definitely not providing direct support … [they are] focused on demonstrations, breaking down fences … actions against the state." She continued by saying that radical activism was defined by the "the lack of cooperation with other people in the field," referring to both the "marginalized groups and the civil society." Juxtaposing HSP with radical politics, she argued that anti-systemic critique must be accompanied by concrete practical action and that HSP was "balancing…. between radical ideas, radical questioning of borders and… work[ing] within the [political] environment of [the country[73]]." Beth appreciated that left politics were "critical" of the structures of power but as she argued, they lacked ability to attend to people's everyday experiences. Activists on the other hand wanted to "provide practical help [to marginalized groups] where it is needed but at the same time be clear that there is a problem, the system, that needs to be changed … try to find a way in between." In this way, activists tried to deliver both systemic critique and context-specific immediate support often through (re)distributing resources (Chapter IV).

Activists also criticized radical politics for being too unapproachable and exclusionary. As Iza for example argued:

> "When I read flyers and …. call[s] for no-borders camp I feel that the rhetoric is…connecting what I also find important … but it's written in a way that is so hard to understand, so I find it unapproachable for refugees for example. I find it often elitist."

[73] In order to ensure anonymity of the responder I removed the name of the country she referred to.

Similar to Iza, Beth found leftist imaginaries appealing but too theoretical and exclusionary. Thus, rather than joining radical and leftist political projects, she "[tried] to find a place that would do left politics, but not in the party system … and … without being … super theoretical." She found the theoretical investments of leftist groups to be too limiting and too rigid, with the groups often "end[ing] up … criticizing the same thing over and over again and not really getting anywhere." Liz expressed similar critiques, arguing that "it's easy to be excluding if you are too strict with things … with the [theoretical] perspective." Juxtaposing leftist groups with HSP, she emphasized that activists "want[ed] to … include everyone … create a place where everybody feels welcome…" She went on to express that "we are more trying to show alternatives instead of being this strict." These articulations of aversion to radical politics were often presented by the activists' as driven by a critical investment in shifting away from hegemony of any kind (Braidotti 1994, 5), here embodied in theoretically oriented, "elitist" Western leftist movements which were unable and/or unwilling to attend to context specific struggles and to welcome in those who were unaccustomed with leftist theories.

Activists' critiques of radical politics need to be read carefully. While not to dismiss the potential validity of such critiques vis-à-vis concrete articulations of leftist politics, it is crucial to highlight that the activists' aversion to radical politics as rigid, exclusionary, and strict were in line with the type of critique that neoliberal capitalism brings forward against any institutions or projects that pose challenges to the mobility and flexibility of labor and capital—particularly anti-capitalist, leftist initiatives (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 170). Furthermore, the activists' narratives of radical theory as too exclusionary established the ground for a loose definition of the system, which was further paradoxically framed as indicative of HSP's critical stances.

The activists' critique of radical politics for its inability to engage in context-specific articulations of struggles also needs to be read carefully. This critique, coupled with activists' attentiveness to local articulations of global struggles, can be interpreted as a practice of what

Vivien Jabri calls political cosmopolitanism, which "assume(s) not simply a terrain of an undefined, depoliticized humanity at large, but rather an articulation of political agency that is self-consciously particular in its choices of affiliation" (Jabri 2007, 724). In line with such narratives, attentiveness to context was presented by the activists as a critical gesture for shifting away from hegemonic representations and universalizing discourses and shifting towards articulations of the struggle, which are rooted in local context (Braidotti 1994, 5). At the same time, this attentiveness to the particularities of the context needs to be read together with the activists' high levels of mobility. Most of the activists were not citizens or long-time residents of the countries in which they practiced their activism[74]. Likewise, they were not themselves subjected to marginalization and were not part of long-term political opposition. Most of them were engaged in HSP(s) due to their disagreement with injustice, often on short-term bases[75]. Thus, their attentiveness was not a reflection of their rootedness in the context, but rather an alignment with the features of the "great man": the ability to adjust, to "know […] how to be local," to generate access to local representations through "*personal experiences*" and to recognize of the "validity of ambivalence" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 113–14, emphasis mine). This is not to dismiss the importance of the activists' attentiveness to context. Yet given the activists' privileged positioning within the structures of power, when such attentiveness was coupled with the rejection of a more theoretically-informed definition of the anti-systemic struggle, the activists ran the risk of enabling projects which were well-attuned to the context, but rather short-term and thus unable to contribute to a long-term counter-hegemonic struggle. In such projects the Self, while narrated as politically cosmopolitan, also embodied the figure of a global, mobile subject privileged under neoliberal capitalism.

[74] In all three locations significant number of activists were international students or people who moved to a given country in pursuance of careers and/or alternative forms of lifestyle. At the time of my research in all three-location people with German passports constituted significant number of non-local activists.

[75] Short-term encompasses several months to several years. As one of the long-term activists argued, most of the activists would disengage after 2-3 years of intense mobilization. The engagement was terminated for various reasons from a need to regain psychological strength to a desire to pursue professional career (Chapter VI). The temporality of the engagement was also connected with activists' own mobility often in pursuance of education and/or career.

My analysis so far has shown that, in the activists' narratives, the system came to signify varying elements and articulations of the state-capital nexus. The following narratives demonstrate how activists also tended to discuss the system by referring to more personal experiences. Lau, for example, used the term system to refer to capitalism and its relationship with the nation state, yet the focus of her critique varied significantly from those of Beth and Iza. Lau praised HSP for its investment in establishing autonomous spaces and creating an alternative to a hegemonic socio-economic system which subjected both the Other *and the Self* to various forms of coercion. As she explained, in Western societies "There are … systems … telling you what to do…, you have to work or you are going to starve, there is all this bureaucratical bullshit …" As she further explained:

> "My problem with adult life comes more with the coercion, money, capitalism, how you have to do things to have life …. School is … very coercive. As you become an adult the same structure still prevails but now it's not … figures of authority telling you what to do but …the systems. I can accept it on some days and on other days I can't, because I have this vision of the better world."

In her narrative, the system represented the governing and disciplining mechanisms inscribed in Western liberal democracies. Her decision to join HSP "came from … having been unhappy with the Western privileged life" and its coercive dimensions. Before joining HSP, she "felt so uncomfortable," constantly "trying to find a life that feels good and meaningful." With activism, she didn't have this overwhelming feeling of discomfort because the coercion was replaced by voluntary engagement and her life felt freer and more meaningful. This critique of the system as meaningless was also echoed in the narratives of other activists. As Kate explained, HSP "gave a balance to. … my life … [before] I was working with something super high and posh and I felt that my life is lacking something that might be actually doing something meaningful for people's lives." Natalia offered a similar depiction of HSP, suggested that it offered meaning in an otherwise meaningless life under neoliberal capitalism. HSP's anti-systemic stances were one of the crucial reasons she joined the organization. She explained:

> "I … [didn't] want to work just to work … to be able to spend money … In this type of organization [HSP] you feel more a part of creating a bigger thing. Before [HSP] I … was

> just in the capitalist way of thinking of the society … part of all the people making money … [As HSP activists we] don't really do that."

Here, the system comes to signify capitalism which in turn signifies an empty life. Meanwhile, HSP escapes the capitalist logic, offering fulfilment on the personal level through the promise of "creating a bigger thing." The anti-capitalist struggle was a result of personal dissatisfaction and was located in one's ability to oppose coercion and a meaninglessness of life under capitalism and in one's consumption related practices.

The need to find a more meaningful life and discomfort with coercion and disciplining was as a common element in activists' reflections on the system. If in Eli, Iza, and Filip's earlier narratives the system was narrated in regard to exploitation and marginalization (the focus of social critiques of the capitalism), Lau, Jess, and Kate's critiques of the system were focused on oppression, lack of individual freedoms, and loss of meaning (similar to artistic critiques of capitalism) (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). Thus, the system meant an articulation of neoliberal capitalism in Western liberal democracies as experienced by those who were subjected to its disciplining rather than its exploitative mechanisms.[76] HSP was presented as offering space for both: those who suffered marginalization and exclusion within the state-capital nexus and those who, while privileged within the state-capital nexus, struggled with being subjects of its governing practices. Eli argued, for example, that HSP was "a magnet for people that … [were] already out of the system somehow, not part of the system, like outcasts somehow." They were out of the system because, as she said, "they cannot work in the proper job, they don't want to, they are fucked by the system, they hate it, they don't want to have anything to do with it." Echoing the narratives of other activists, Eli drew continuity between systemic marginalization ("they cannot work in the proper job," "they are fucked by the system") and with the dissatisfaction of being subjected to the governing practices of the system ("they don't want to," "they hate it").

[76] The distinction between exploitative and disciplining mechanisms is an analytical one.

The violence experienced by those most marginalized and the feeling of discomfort experienced by those privileged within the state-capital nexus were often presented by the activists as carrying potential for the development of a shared struggle. At the same time, this framing overlooked a crucial difference between those groups, namely the access to the possibility of not being "out of the system." It also disclosed that HSP was constructed around both artistic and social critiques of capitalism despite their different takes on indignation (with activists articulating these critiques in varying manner). Such construction disclosed one of the tensions of HSP.

Conflating activists' dissatisfaction with their meaningless lives with the exploitation and marginalization of the Other was at risk of addressing the artistic critique (creating a sense of meaning) while silencing the social critique (establishing structural mechanisms limiting social inequalities).

The establishment of a continuity between artistic critique (the discomfort with the meaningless of life) and social critique (the disagreement with the exclusion from the system) was often visible both, between the narratives of different activists and within the narratives of singular activist. It often resulted with narratives in which anti-systemic struggle was to be pursued through alternative lifestyle. As Liz explained, HSP was a "lifestyle" that allowed for activists to depart from meaningless capitalist life based on consumption *and* devote themselves to working for the greater good of others by trying to create what Jess called "better society". Thus, HSP's anti-systemic stances were often embodied in various forms of 'lifestyle-based resistance' (Binkley 2008) and "micro-ethics" (Thompson 2012). While this is not to dismiss the importance of conscious individual practices in offering resistance to an ever-accelerating consumer culture, this conceptualization of anti-capitalist struggle shifted the discussion from more systemic solutions to the personal practices and freedoms of the individual. Within such approach the individual and her personal life was narrated as a crucial site for systemic struggle.

Finally, in activists' narratives the system also come to indicate the state and the workings of its administrative structures. Eric, for example, argued that HSP was not only positioned as critical

of the system but was also able to do things that the system was not able to do. Recalling the influx of migrants in the second half of 2015, he compared the response offered by the state versus that of the activists, arguing:

> "We [activists] were working … as a solidary network of volunteers, developing things quite organically among ourselves, *we were working very fast to help people*. And we could see *how slowly the migration agency was working* and responding. You … could see what the system. … [was] doing to help people, and … what we [activists] … [were] doing'

In his narrative the system was defined first and foremost as the workings of the state apparatus. Here, critique of the system was thus equated with critique of the state, understood as a bureaucratic institution falling short of addressing the needs of the arriving people. This echoes Filip's earlier narrative and resonated with the ways in which the state was often one the primary focuses of activists' anti-systemic stances (section 2).

As the above narratives show, activists emphasized various elements of the "system" and approached it from multiple perspective. The system came to represent global capitalism's marriage with the nation state and its production of inequality and exploitation (Eli, Iza, Filip), neoliberal governing practices and the meaninglessness of consumerist life (Lau, Jess, Kate, Liz), and the workings of the state and its apparatuses (Eli, Filip, Eric). I observed throughout my fieldwork that the multiplicity of interpretations of the system were not a reflection of *conflictual* approaches to the system as activists rarely argued over whose interpretation is more accurate. Rather they indicated the fact that HSP was structured around a *loose definition* of the system, accommodating for people's varying perspectives and interpretations. This looseness can be, to some extent, explained by the fact that my respondents were activists and that the interviews I conducted were informal in nature. Theoretical and conceptual precision was neither a requirement in the activists' settings/ the type of interviews I conducted nor should be read as indicative of a lack of shared understanding between the activists over the meaning of their critical-of-the-system stances. At the same time, their variability in defining the system must be taken seriously. While some of the activists' used the term system in a manner that clearly indicated its

meaning, others used it without specifying what they meant. Yet, I had a sense throughout my fieldwork that activists shared (with me and between themselves) an intuitive understanding of the system as something oppressive/violent/negative. The critique of the system was often used by the activists as a way of indicating one's disagreement with inequality and injustice and thus served as a disclosure of one's ethical and political orientation towards social justice. This loose definition of the system fostered conditions for the development of a *systemic critique driven by silences and lack of clarity*. Those silences were particularly visible in the loose conceptualization of the relationship between the state and (global) capitalism. As a result, capitalism, although repeatedly invoked in activists' narratives in order to indicate activists' critical stances as defined through an interest to develop systemic critique, was most often used as a signifier of social inequality and/or in relation to consumption patterns. It was often the state, either a particular ruling government or the institution more broadly, that was placed in the center of activists' critiques.

2. Activists positioning vis-à-vis the state and formal politics

Activists' positioning within the political sphere, on both the national and regional (EU) levels, was structured around two elements. First, activists were clear that they wanted to remain independent from formal politics[77] (state structures, party politics) and the sphere of non-governmental organizations[78]—both in terms of political influences and financial support, which they saw as closely intertwined. They also did not want to receive financial support from corporations whose politics were at odds with the activists' political and ethical stances. Their investment in maintaining independence was aimed at ensuring that HSP's was not compromised by other actors' interests. Second, activists were clear that they did not want to formalize the project, which was further connected with not setting conditions for joining HSP and/or for receiving its support (Chapter VI). Those two elements, while distinct from each other, together

[77] With couple of exceptions where activists who took into a consideration the possibility of collaborating with political parties, have they pursued leftist politics.
[78] Independence from NGOs didn't mean that activists never collaborated with NGOs, but that HSP remained independent from outside influence and that their collaborations were never bound by any formal relationship.

formed a coherent framework, which discloses the ways in which activists could simultaneously act in line with the imaginaries of critical consciousness and reproduce their positioning as a great man under neoliberal capitalism.

Activists gave two—often overlapping—explanations for remaining independent from formal politics. First was their disagreement with the current political landscape. As Lau argued "politicians … [were] too far from what … HSP want[ed] to see" because the political discourse was dominated by rising right-wing radicalization and centrist-liberal narratives. Activists saw these discourses as reproducing rather than challenging social inequalities and/or exclusionary border regimes. Dialog with these politicians would thus make HSP compliant with the reproduction of the existing structures of power.[79]

Second was that the state was often perceived by the activists as *an institution* contradictory to activists' counter-hegemonic investments. As Paula argued, clearly articulating the activists' aversion to the state as an institution:

> "One of the things [that is] powerful about [HSP] is … that [it] gets no support … from the state. The lack of support comes from the fact that [we] stand for a *different type of politics* and a *different system of providing for the citizens*."

Her narrative reflects how activists tended to describe their decision to remain independent from formal politics as a way of occupying a different (and counter-hegemonic) position within structures of power than actors who were bound by formal politics and power relations. The imaginaries underlying this aversion to the state were visible in the activists' open critiques and were connected to the implied assumptions around which HSP was structured.

[79] Disagreement with the political climate was particularly evident in the case of activists working in Hungary. They often articulated their critique of the state through a critique of the ruling party Fidesz and the residing Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Their critiques targeted violent anti-migration discourses from the Hungarian government, various processes of marginalization, and the broader so-called "illiberal turn" that the country had been experiencing since Fidesz took power in 2010. It affected a spectrum of groups across the society, including NGOs and activists working in the sphere of human rights. The possibility of drawing continuities, and thus building solidarity, between migrants and human rights activists, as well as oppositional groups in Hungary, created space for quite tangible anti-governmental rhetoric on the part of horizontal solidarity activists. (For further discussion on political changes in Hungary, including the critique of the "democratic backsliding" framework see for example: (Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018; Krekó and Enyedi 2018; Krizsan and Roggeband 2018)(Krizsan and Roggeband 2018; Krekó and Enyedi 2018; Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018)

Two of the most important of these assumptions were the refusal to partake in formal politics/collaborate with state structures and that positive, liberatory politics were necessarily located outside of formal politics. Throughout my fieldwork, I often got the sense that the way activists distanced themselves from the state was taken for granted as a sign of counter-hegemonic positioning, rather than as the subject of an "ongoing and rigorous critique" (Böhm, Dinerstein, and Spicer 2010, 21). For activists, HSP was political, *not despite* but *because of* its investment in remaining independent from the state. For example, Kate argued that activists were political because they "work[ed] … in the sphere of information, not party politics."[80] She spoke dismissively towards party politics and made clear that activists' refusal to partake in them was a sign of HSP's political advancement in line with the imaginaries over what constitutes critical of hegemonic discourses stances. Her value-driven emphasis that activists were political due to their focus on information not party politics points to the two overlapping imaginaries described above, as well as to a third: the value placed on spreading information and connecting it with mobility, which I analyze in detail in Chapter V.

One critique of the state often articulated by activists was related to its vertical/top down power structure. Diana, who had experience working with/supporting migrants through both a state agency and HSP explained the difficulties she had while working for the state:

> "The power relations [in this job] are so strong and obvious … I don't like it… I have to know the rules and follow the rules…I am an employee, and you are an asylum seeker…in this fucked up structure, [I am] giving [migrants] no agency by being in charge."

In her narrative, as in the narratives of other activists, the state was seen as (re)producing hierarchies and distance between the Self and the Other. In this way, it sustained the subordination of the Other under the socially-constructed and bureaucratically-reinforced superiority of the

[80] This positioning in the sphere of information pertained to disseminating information about conditions of marginalization to the broader public (domestically and in the EU) and supporting marginalized groups in acquiring various types of information (Chapter V).

Western Self. This critique of vertical forms of power resonated with discourses developed by critical migration scholarship, which I argue served as an important authorization for such critiques. Averse to top-down governing structures, activists located social change in replacing vertical forms of power with the horizontal ones (solidarity structures); replacing governance and control over the Other with the recognition of the Other as an agent; and reformulating the relationship between the Self and Other alongside imaginaries of proximity and collaboration. As Diana further explained, when working with migrants as an activist rather than as a state employee, she "could always do … [her] own thing, create a project, workshop, where … [she was] not in charge but they [migrants] … [were]." Thanks to the lack of hierarchical structure, as she argued, "there was no distance between … [her] and the people," which she saw as an important element of HSP's liberatory potential. The critique of vertical forms of power coupled with the equation of distance with inequality and proximity with liberatory politics resonated with critical consciousness' investment in destabilizing hegemony through "emphatic proximity". The critique of the state as a hierarchical institution limiting one's agency and freedoms also corresponded with the artistic critique advanced towards capitalism and the state in the 1960s and later incorporated into the neoliberal spirit of capitalism. Likewise, it corresponded with what Nikita Dhawan, following Michael Foucault, framed as "state-phobia": an attitude characterized by "deep distrust of state institutions *per se,"* which tends to "conflate the critique of the state and the critique of domination, with the state being characterized as the origins of all violence" (2015, 63). State-phobia describes projects and attitudes that treat the state with distrust *without* taking the critique of the state as their primary focus and/or as a theoretical necessity and without locating such distrust within broader socio-economic, political, and theoretical discourses. As Dhawan argues, state-phobic discourses have been a distinct feature of both liberal and left politics since 1970, normalizing anti-state rhetoric as part of both hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism and counter-hegemonic struggles (2015, 63).

The activists' tendency to locate positive politics outside of the sphere of formal politics and discredited formal politics, was connected in activists' narratives with series of imaginaries over what counted as counted as "being political". First, as Iza argued, "political… [was] to radically question the status quo… the system," aligning HSP with critical consciousness' imperative of "being in the mode of opposition" to the hegemonic structures of power (Braidotti 2014a). Second, activists' narrated politics as located everywhere, particularly in one's personal life. As Olga argued, echoing other activists, the political dimension of her activism was located in her everyday practices and "daily meetings with migrants." When I asked Jake what he meant by being political, he replied: "personally for me political means anything and everything." The location of politics in one's personal life resonated with critical discourses—especially feminist, post-colonial, and anti-racist—which underline the necessity of recognizing people, spheres of life, and practices which are (intentionally) denied access to power in hegemonic discourses by being framed as "apolitical" (Schuster 2017). By locating politics "everywhere," activists resonated with the paradigm of critical thinking that discloses the omnipresence of power, both in order to show the daily (re)production of hegemony and highlight the multiplicity of the sites of resistance[81].

There were two elements to locating counter-hegemonic politics outside of the sphere of formal politics. First, locating politics this way corresponded with the activists' investment in politicizing the struggle of migrants and other marginalized groups, as I analyze in detail in chapters IV and VI. Second, by discrediting formal politics and placing the emphasis on the political dimension of one's everyday actions, the Self, its individual practices, and its relationship with the Other were defined as the primary, and often only, site of political struggle—resonating with the activists' descriptions which I analyzed earlier of anti-systemic struggle as a 'lifestyle'.

The activists' insistence on remaining independent from formal politics and delivering systemic critique was further coupled with their investment in developing an alternative to the

[81] See for example: (M. Baaz, Lilja, and Vinthagen 2017; Murru and Polese 2020; Çağatay, Liinason, and Sasunkevich 2021)

state-capital nexus. This aligned HSP with a growing number of left-oriented social movements focused on building autonomy from the spaces and practices of the state-capital nexus (Hansen 2019; Böhm, Dinerstein, and Spicer 2010). Echoing these autonomous movements, activists argued that they wanted to serve as an example that it is possible to "live together [with migrants and other marginalized groups], without [the] state… self-organized" (Jess), to "create the society… [that activists'] want to see... solidarity society" (Olga) and to "stand for… a different system of providing for the citizens" (Lau).

Activists argued that they created an alternative to the workings of the state-capital nexus in two ways. First, they developed concrete structures and practices, especially pertaining to the (re)distribution of resources, that were independent from state structures (Chapters V; VI). As Eli explained:

> "[We are] "building … [our] own structures, … [our] own ways [of living] … We have changed … [the system] already. Just by … offer[ing] free food[82]…without support from government …. we don't need…government to give us money to feed people. You don't need money to feed people, the food is already there, come and eat. That is already a change."

Mark further explained the autonomous character of HSP by arguing "we just do… [things] ourselves without needing to rely on any government or anyone else… If you want to build a boat, we build a boat basically." While his invocation of "building a boat" served as a figurative statement suggesting the scale of HSP's freedom, the assertion that HSP didn't need to "rely on any government" was stated seriously and echoed the narratives of other activists. The second way activists argued that they created an alternative to the state-capital nexus was in their ability to think and act independently from hegemonic discourses and thus develop narratives and practices which challenged the hegemonic differentiation between the Self and the Other. Olga, for example, argued that activists did not think like state agencies; Kate emphasized that activists were able to refuse/transgress hegemonic constructions of difference between the Self and the Other and thus

[82] Food, like other basic resources such as clothes, toiletry items, toys, etc., were offered to HSP in the form of donations (coming from individuals, shops, and supermarkets) and/or were part of waste collection, particularly through dumpster diving.

engage with people as people, not as subjects defined by their positioning within structures of power. Echoing the narratives of other activists, she argued: "when you meet these people [migrants], you meet these people, you don't need any kind of system." Thus, the activists' refusal to partake in formal politics and state structures was closely intertwined with the imaginaries establishing autonomy from the state-capital nexus in terms of both social structures and modes of thinking. As such, this refusal opened the possibility for activists to embrace the fantasy of acting as a universal transcendent subject, able to transgress structural violence through personal practices.

The imaginaries inscribed in the activists' aversion to formal politics also transpired from activists openly-articulated critiques of the state and NGOs. As Max argued, state agencies and NGOs were restricted by a series of rules and/or political affiliations they needed to respect. Juxtaposing HSP with state agencies and formalized NGOs, he argued: "we [HSP] are not formal, not registered, which provides us with… *freedom that other non-governmental organizations don't have* in regard to what they say." This independence meant fewer restrictions on the workings of HSP, which in turn allowed activists to openly challenge governmental discourses around migration. As he further argued, thanks to this lack of restrictions activists were also able to develop more open and welcoming attitudes towards migrants than those extended by the state."It [was] a very important part of [HSP] to know that *everyone is welcome*, that *[the group is] open… more inclusive*."

Eric criticized the state for its exclusionary discourses and the slowness of its responses to the arriving migrants in the summer and autumn of 2015. It was obvious to him that the goal of the state was "to stop so many people from coming… *to stall the flow"* because everyone "could see how slowly the migration agency was working and responding." As he further explained, the state investment in "stalling the flow" was a result of both xenophobic political discourses and the bureaucratic "*overregulation*" of the state as an institution. The state's "r*egulations … don't change fast enough* to adapt to the situation" and thus the state "could not work fast enough to help… [migrants]" and to accommodate people's needs. Again juxtaposing the state's responses with the

activists' practices, he argued that activists were "developing things quite organically… working very fast to help people," and easily adapted to the changing situation. For him, this was because HSP was "an organization that… [did] not just follows the rules [but] work[ed] to [actually] help people." He also differentiated between the state and HSP's approach by arguing: "what we [activists] were doing was more personal than the state's approach… we tried to take care of every side of things to make people feel like they were heard rather than… pushed through the gates of the asylum system." Unlike the activists, state agencies lacked a 'humane face': care, compassion, and the ability to consider people's particular needs and hopes. These critiques of the state aligned HSP with the imaginaries of critical consciousness and its investment in not only disclosing and opposing violence and injustice inscribed in the hegemonic structures of power but also developing a more care-oriented relationship between various social groups.

I complicate activists' general aversion to the state as an institution as carrying only counter-hegemonic potential. I read activists' critiques of the state—equating aversion to formal politics with one's counter-hegemonic stances, activists' imagined autonomy from the state, and locating politics in one's personal life—also in relation to and as part of broader hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism. This is not to fundamentally question HSP's decision to remain independent from formal politics but rather to complexify whether the decision is inherently and (only) critical and counter-hegemonic, especially when taken by subjects occupying advanced power positions within the state-capital nexus. The activists' critiques of/distancing from formal politics and the state corresponded with discourses of neoliberal capitalism on two levels: a structural one, with activists' narratives reproducing the neoliberal rejection of the state as an institution hampering the flow of capital, and an individual one, with activists' narratives reproducing the imaginaries of the great man as one freed from institutional responsibilities.

First, the activists' critiques of the state depicted a slow, rigid, overly bureaucratic institution aimed at restricting mobility and lacking the ability to adjust to a dynamically changing situation. Such a critique, similar to the one advanced by the activists vis-à-vis radical politics, corresponds

with what neoliberal capitalist discourses have advanced relating to the state and other institutions restricting the mobility of capital and the flexibility of labor. Second, the rejection of vertical power which I described earlier was depicted by the activists as a form of individual liberation, both for the activists and the marginalized groups. This type of narrative corresponded with the justification of capitalism in its neoliberal spirit, where the rejection of institutions capable of hampering the mobility of capital and flexibility of labor are justified through narratives of individual freedoms, strengthening state-phobic discourses.

As Dhawan argues, in state-phobic discourses an outright suspicion of and distancing from the state can fail to "distinguish between administrative state, welfare state, bureaucratic state, fascist state and totalitarian state" (Dhawan 2016, 63). In the case of HSP, such a 'failure' did not mean that activists were not able/willing to make such distinctions. On a theoretical level, most of them were supportive of a more welfare-oriented state (while remaining critical of the state as an institution). Rather, the 'failure' was located in the activists' silences around the fact that the refusal to partake in formal politics, especially by subjects who were privileged within the state-capital nexus, also shaped institutionalized politics. It did so by limiting critical voices within formal politics hindering the possibility of (re)shaping the articulation of state-capital nexus through state's structures and by further (re)producing state-phobic narratives. Activists' state-phobia was thus located in their refusal to partake in the making of the state, *despite* the activists' recognition of the possibility of other (more equality, welfare, and justice for all-oriented) forms of state, aligning the activists' critique of the state with an aversion towards authority and institutional structures as such. Thus, HSP was constructed around seemingly contradictory imaginaries: an aversion to the state as an institution, the location of counter-hegemonic politics outside of the state's structures, and the recognition of the state as a possibly protective institution. I interpret the coexistence of these imaginaries as one of the defining elements of the activists' political subjectivity and as a reflection of a contradiction within the project.

The activists' critiques of the state were not only in line with the neoliberal diminishment of the role of the state as a protective institution but also with imaginaries of the great man as an ideal subject under neoliberal capitalism. Positioning themselves against the state, activists saw themselves as open-minded ("everyone is welcome, we are open" (Max)), inclusive ("we use the term 'migrant' to be more inclusive" (Max)), impacting change ("actually work[ing] for a change" (Eric)), removing barriers ("taking distinctions between us and them away" (Kate); "there was no distance between … me and the people" (Diana)), adaptable to situations and people ("we tried to take care of every side of things" (Eric)), free ("I could always do … my own thing" (Diana), "(we don't need any system" (Kate)), and amplifying ("we tried to… make people feel like they were heard" (Eric)). These features resonate with features of the great man, who praises freedom, mobility, and adjustability. The activists' refusal to partake in formal politics coupled with their investment in dispersing the power horizontally (alongside imaginaries of proximity, horizontality, and collaboration (Chapter V)) resonated with the ways in which the great man "prefers to renounce official power in favor of network forms of power" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 124). This renouncement of vertical power and distancing from institutions was also in line with the imaginaries of the great man, who avoids being "trapped by institutions, […] becom[ing] entangled in a web of responsibilities" at all costs (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 123).

The activists' adherence to locating counter-hegemonic politics in one's personal life rather than in the sphere of formal politics further resonated with discourses of neoliberal capitalism and its construction of the great man's independence from institutional constraints (Chapter VI). As discussed above, HSP's interpretation of the "personal is political," coupled with its rejection of formal politics, enabled a shift towards the Self, marking the Self as the primary (and often only) site of political struggle. Thus, activists' subjectivities were, on the one hand, defined by a critical adherence to systemic change and, on the other hand, structured around imaginaries which, in line with neoliberal capitalism, located such change in the Self—further privileging the Self as the primary authorization for action and diminishing the role of formal politics and the state.

One crucial element for tracing the continuities between critical and hegemonic distrust towards the state is that the activists' anti-state rhetoric was also constructed around imaginaries of the state as lacking compassion (people were "pushed through the gates of the asylum system" (Eric)) as opposed to activists, who cared (activists' work was "more personal than the state's approach" (Eric)). This framing resonated with state-phobic narratives in which "the wickedness of the state is juxtaposed against the inherent goodness of civil society"(Dhawan 2016, 65). The (re)production of the "bad" state and "good" civil society narrative creates an ethical justification for neoliberal "whithering away of the state" by framing it as part of critical, ethical positioning (Dhawan 2016, 65).

The "bad" state/"good" civil society dichotomy also allowed the relationship between activists and the state to be obscured. This was best visible in the activists' investment in building alternative to the state and imaginaries of living "without the state, self-organized" (Jess). First, it obscured the ways in which the activists' establishment of a "different system of providing" for people which was supposedly independent from the state was often possible due to activists' reliance on resources available to them within context-specific articulations of state-capital nexus. For example, a comparison of donations received by activists in Sweden versus those collected in Hungary[83] demonstrated that both the quality and quantity of the former was much higher than the latter, a difference reflecting the general quality of life experienced by people living in Sweden versus in Hungary. Thus, while both groups shared an investment in developing an alternative to the hegemonic, exclusion-driven relationship with the migrants, it was activists in Sweden, and not in Hungary, who were able to establish more developed and sustainable structures for the (re)distribution of resources and for "living together" (Jess). Since this difference was closely connected with the type of resources that activists had access to in Sweden, this experience of

[83] The comparison includes resources collected not only by HSP but also by the shelters for homeless people as well as humanitarian groups supporting migrants.

living "without the state" cannot be understood as independent from but, indeed, as *dependent* on the context-specific articulation of state-capital nexus.

Second, it obscured the ways in which the type of narratives that activists were able to develop (and which structured the scale and orientation of activists' practices) were dependent on and reflected the political climate and discourses produced by the state and NGOs. As one activist from Hungary argued:

> "Those huge NGOs…which are in [Western and northern EU countries] doing the nice rhetoric… they don't exist in Hungary. There is no Caritas, no big groups saying that refugees are not bad. So that is what… [we have] to do. There [are] so many…structures lacking [here]… in Hungary I am engaging with things that I wouldn't engage in back at home."

Since the narratives that activists were able to develop were connected with the other types of discourses present, the absence of civil society actors in Hungary resulted in activists taking on the role of "saying that refugees are not bad." This type of discourse was often problematized by the activists as not critical enough, such that activists preferred not to (re)produce it unless forced to by the political context. In Sweden—where the state enacted more protective measures towards migrants than in Hungary and where there was an established and well-organized sphere of civil society organizations supporting migrants—activists were able to pursue more nuanced and horizontally oriented narratives. The development of these more critical narratives was possible because there were other social organizations that were already saying that "that refugees are not bad," which could be built upon.

Third, the "bad" state/"good" civil society dichotomy also obscured the ways in which activists' personal reliance on the state and access to resources within the state-capital nexus influenced their ability to pursue these alternative 'lifestyles' and (seemingly) distance themselves from the state. Crucially, their distance was not a result of any state's exclusionary practices towards them but rather their own decision. As discussed in previous chapters, most of these activists held passports of Western and Northern EU countries or other Western countries and belonged to a broadly defined middle classes of their societies. Thus, due to their citizenship status and class

positioning they had access to social security and welfare structures as well as to labor markets, which created a sense of security that allowed them to pursue an 'alternative lifestyle.' As one of the activists working in Sweden reflected: "I …[don't have] a real job… [but] I can… still have…high quality life…I still have health insurance, I can go to the doctor, which is great. I can get jobs…for me as a white German it is quite easy to get jobs, so I still have some kind of backup." Likewise, while relying on their access to prospering and relatively welfare-oriented states, the activists were at the same time marked as mobile, global subjects. Their social and informational capital was strictly linked with their mobility and with the transnational character of their experiences. Thus, choosing to distance themselves from the state, as subjects recognized by and privileged within prosperous Western states, resonated with what Sara Ahmed has called "chosen homelessness." As she argues:

> "The subject who has chosen to be homeless, rather than is homeless due to the contingency of 'external' circumstances, is certainly a subject who is privileged, and for whom having or not having a home does not affect its ability to occupy a given space…. because the world is already constituted as its home" (Ahmed 2000b, 82).

If by 'home' we understand broadly defined security embodied in one's access to labor market, social recognition, resources, and power, activists' rejection of the state not only translated into no actual loss of reliance on state provisions but also opened the possibility of more freely exploring the world, already constituted as home. Activists' critiques of the state thus reflected and further reproduced the ways in which the practice of distancing oneself from the state, formal politics, and any other form of "rigid" institution (while relying on state's provisions) was not an inherently counter-hegemonic gesture. It also further facilitated access to mobility for subjects who were already privileged within the existing structures of power (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). In distancing themselves from the state, they also reflected the ways in which state-phobia, while mobilized as critical, limited their possibility of engaging with the state (through voting, lobbying, pursuing political career) and advocating for the anti-capitalist cause through state structures, reproducing hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed various meanings behind activists' critique of the system and outlined their positioning vis-à-vis the state and formal politics. I showed that activists operated with a loose definition of the system. This loose definition of the system meant that more elaborate critiques of capitalism and its relationship with the state were often absent from activists' narratives. As a result, while presenting themselves as critical of state-capital nexus, activists fell short of developing systemic critique that could mobilize formal politics in the reformulation of state-capital nexus. Instead, activists' critiques tended to mobilize the critique of the system into distancing themselves from the state and formal politics. The chapter showed that the activists' choice to distance themselves from the state reflected and further reproduced hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism, disclosing the entanglements of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses that structured the activists' political subjectivity.

The chapter further described the ways in which the withdrawal from formal politics was coupled in activists' narratives with locating counter-hegemonic politics in one's personal, daily practices. This enabled the establishment of narratives wherein the Self and her personal life became the primary and often only site of political struggle. This shift towards the Self, while critical for politicizing struggles and actions which were otherwise unrecognized within formal politics, was also in line with the imaginaries inscribed in neoliberal discourses invested with privileging the Self vis-à-vis collective struggles. As I show in the following chapters of this dissertation, the shift to Self was one of the crucial elements of activists' political imaginaries, structuring the conditions of HSP. In this chapter I showed how, on the most immediate level, this shift was authorized through narratives wherein discrediting formal politics and the state were presented as integral and necessary elements of one's critical stance. Thus, the Self was authorized as the primary site of political struggle, aligning the project with the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

The analysis developed in this chapter shows the continuities and similarities between counter-hegemonic and hegemonic discourses with regard to descriptions of the state, formal politics, and institutional structures. The chapter likewise shows how those continuities and similarities, when evoked by subjects who are privileged within local and global structures of power, can play out under current historical and political conjuncture in manner that actually enables the reproduction of hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism under the guise of being "critical" or "ethical."

Chapter IV: Paradox of critical activism: from the critique of humanitarianism to the embracement of "selfish reasons"

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the entanglements between counter-hegemonic and hegemonic imaginaries inscribed in activists' narratives by analyzing activists' critiques of and self-differentiation from what they framed and constructed as humanitarian[84] responses to migration. I show that the activists' critiques of humanitarianism were constructed around a disagreement with the humanitarian framework of "help" and its vertical forms of power. This framework of help was criticized by the activists for several things, including (re)producing distance between the Self and the Other; depoliticizing the struggles of migrants and other marginalized groups; and governing the Other through the deployment of moral sentiments and the establishment of conditionality for support. The chapter traces a series of slippages and continuities between the activists' articulation of their critiques and the discourses of neoliberal capitalism. It further shows how the activist negotiated their own embeddedness in power structures and outlines the strategies they employed to avoid (re)producing the unequal power structures for which they criticized humanitarians. This chapter builds on the discussion developed in Chapter III, particularly regarding the ways in which the Self tended to configure in HSP as the central site of political struggle. The chapter argues that the activists' critique of the framework of help and universalizing discourses coupled with their desire to support marginalized groups without (re)producing them as subordinate to the Western Self resulted in a particular paradox of critical activism: the Self, its

[84] It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to evaluate the 'accuracy' of activists' critiques and/or enter into discussion over what constitutes humanitarianism. I treat humanitarianism as a notion, a signifier, employed and constructed by the activists to make sense of their approach to the question of social inequalities. For a scholarly discussion on the assumed dichotomy between activism and humanitarianism, see for example: (Rozakou 2016; Cantat 2018; Cantat and Feischmidt 2019)

personal motivations, and its reflexive practices became the primary framework for addressing the activists' engagement with the Other—further aligning HSP with the discourses of neoliberal capitalism and its privileging of the Self vis-à-vis collective struggles.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the section 1, I indicate the main tenants of the activists' critiques of and self-differentiation from humanitarianism. In section 2, I unpack those tenants by analyzing the activists' critiques of the framework of help in four stages: I show that activists criticized humanitarianism for its embeddedness in colonial histories and participation in the modern-day reproduction of structural inequalities (2.1); I outline activists' critiques of humanitarian's 'moral superiority' and governing practices (2.2); I show activists' disagreement with what they frame as the "humanitarian denial of agency" (Laura) (2.3); and I present activists' critiques of the ways in which the framework of help depoliticizes the struggles of migrants and other marginalized groups (2.4).

In the section 3, I problematize the articulation of activists' critiques and self-differentiation from humanitarianism. I show the continuities and slippages between activists' critiques and the discourses of neoliberal capitalism. I also outline continuities between the activists' project and humanitarianism. In doing so, I challenge the assumed dichotomy between the two and suggest reading the activists' critique as an expression of competition over "cosmopolitan competencies" between the activist and the humanitarian Self.

In the section 4, I analyze the strategies that activists employed to avoid the (re)producing the unequal relations of power between the Self and the Other for which they criticized humanitarianism. I show that activists' critical desire to avoid framing the Other as a subject of the Self's practices resulted in activists withdrawing towards narratives that focused on their own personal motivations (rather than the needs of the Other) as a reason for developing solidarity structures. I analyze this withdrawal as an expression of a particular paradox of critical activism due to its compliance with the discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

1. "A huge difference": Activists' self-positioning as distinct from humanitarians

One of the core elements of activists' political subjectivity was a critique of self-differentiation from what activists saw and constructed as a humanitarian response to migration. Activists used the term humanitarianism in two, often (but not always) overlapping regards. Firstly, they used humanitarianism to refer to (and construct) a series of imaginaries about a certain type of *logic of engagement with the designated Other*. Secondly, they used it to refer to humanitarian actors and practices that they encountered during their activism. Activists often acknowledged the complexities and nuances of this second use of the term. They also recognized the time and context-specific importance of immediate humanitarian relief in addressing issues around migration. At the same time, they were highly critical of and differentiated themselves from the *logic of humanitarianism* (hereafter: humanitarianism), which is the focus of this chapter.

During an interview, Maya reflected on the vast social support that emerged in the second half of 2015 in response to the arriving migrants. As a large number of migrants arrived to both Hungary and Sweden, migrants and migrant issues were visible in public spaces in unprecedented ways. Residents in both Hungary and Sweden mobilized around providing the migrants to offer immediate support, reacting to the states' failures and/or intentional refusal to attend to migrants' demands for mobility and/or settlement. As Maya argued, this support was primarily offered by "humanitarian groups" and centered around the humanitarian logic of help which focused on collection and redistribution of basic recourses and was based on differentiation between people eligible for the support. Like other activists, she was clearly critical of the tenants and execution of societal support.

As a person who was engaged in supporting migrants long before the summer/autumn of 2015, Maya was able to reflect on the societal mobilization which occurred during that period. I asked her what she thought of the mobilization and how she located herself within those emerging pro-migrant initiatives. "For me there is a big difference between an activist and a [humanitarian]

volunteer," she began, with a clearly derogatory tone making clear her value-driven differentiation between activism and humanitarianism.[85] She continued:

> "*Activists are political* and giving someone sandwiches is rather not... I think… [people] engaged so much due to the humanitarian aspect of the situation… to help this group of children, mothers etc., and we can do that because we all know that they are passing through, they are not staying… as soon as refugees stop being people who are passing through and they become just part of the society all of the sudden helping them becomes as impossible as helping homeless people or Roma population … this is why *I don't see a contradiction in humanitarian volunteers helping refugees but not homeless people.* As soon as refugees will be staying the humanitarian engagement will end."

Maya's narrative reflected activists' disagreement with the short-term nature of societal support which is structured around the logic of humanitarianism. As she observed, people supported migrants because they saw their presence and needs as temporary. This temporary nature was particularly visible in Hungary, often perceived by both migrants and Hungarian residents as a transit country. [86] As another activist asserted, the support enacted around such assumptions only challenged Hungarian xenophobic discourses in a limited manner (if any all)– migrants remained perceived as outsiders in Hungary. While Sweden was seen more as a destination country, migrants' presence was still perceived by residents as temporary, in that once integrated into the state's asylum system migrants were removed from public spaces (often through deportation). Thus, societal support came almost entirely to an end when migrants were no longer residing in public spaces, either because they continued on their migratory route or because they were integrated into the state asylum system. Activists criticized this type of support for resting on a desire to *help the temporally present stranger* rather than to invest in challenging exclusionary border regimes and structural inequalities.

Maya's narrative also brought together three crucial imaginaries around which the activists' differentiation from humanitarianism was structured. By saying that "activists are political and

[85] While this value-driven self-differentiation from humanitarianism was typical from most of the activists, such differentiation was not always delivered with a derogatory tone, as in Maya's case.

[86] For a discussion on the framing of Hungary as a transit country, see for example: (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016; Kallius 2019; Cantat 2020); Activists' in Hungary often emphasized that an important element of their political activism was to work towards a more welcoming Hungary, so that migrants could also settle in and not only pass through the country.

giving someone sandwiches is rather not" she highlighted the different political investments inscribed in activists and humanitarian practices. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, for activists 'to be political' meant to challenge the existing structures of power. Activists saw humanitarians as apolitical because they were unwilling to acknowledge the political underpinnings of their practices as well as the political dimensions of marginalization and migrant struggles.[87] Thus, their practices sustained rather than challenged the existing structures of power.

In critically assessing humanitarianism as focused on providing "help to… children [and] mothers," Maya emphasized activists' disagreement with the humanitarian framework of help and pity as the primary way of engaging with social inequalities.[88] Activists, as well as many scholars, argued that this framework rested on a "series of binaries […] distinguishing groups to be acted on and the institutions that do the acting" (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016, 26), depoliticizing migrants' struggles, producing a hierarchy of vulnerability, and narrating humanitarian support in terms of the morality and generosity of the (Western) helper[89]. These relations of power were seen by the activists as establishing *distance* between the Self and the Other, as I elaborate below, and lay at the core of the activists' critiques of humanitarianism.

Finally, by stating that humanitarians were willing to help "refugees but not homeless people," Maya criticized humanitarianism for refusing to approach the struggles of various marginalized groups as connected with each other and as a result of broader systemic inequalities. As activists argued, humanitarianism, unlike HSP, lacked an investment in imagining structural change.

[87] This does not mean that the activists argued that humanitarian practices were not political. They recognized humanitarianism as political insofar as it took part in sustaining the hegemonic articulation of state-capital nexus. They also recognized that at times humanitarian practices were political, particularly when humanitarian help was provided against state discourses. The apolitical character of humanitarianism was in humanitarian actors' disinterest in recognizing the broader power dynamics in which humanitarianism, border regimes, and the struggles of migrants and other marginalized groups were embedded.

[88] She also pointed out gendered underpinnings of humanitarian discourses and the construction of vulnerability.

[89] For the discussion on humanitarianism and moral sentiments see for example: (Fassin 2012)

Maya's narrative indicated the ethical underpinnings of the activists' critique of and self-differentiation from humanitarianism. Activists' critique of humanitarianism was centered on the humanitarian reproduction of systemic inequalities and power structures and was spoken from a place of concern for social justice. At the same time, the ethical commitments were almost never openly addressed by the activists marking HSP as on the one hand constructed around ethical considerations and on the other hand around a series of silences surrounding them.

In order to further analyze the imaginaries inscribed in the activists' critique of humanitarianism and the ways in which those imaginaries played into the construction of HSP, in the next section I look closely at the activists' critique of the humanitarian framework of help. My discussion encompasses their critiques of humanitarianism's depoliticization of migrants' struggles; the humanitarian denial of agency; the humanitarian adherence to a universalizing language of ethics; and the lack of an anti-systemic perspective within humanitarianism. This will also allow me to trace the activists' articulations of and silences around questions of ethics.

2. The activist critique of the framework of help

Both Jess and Kate were long-term activists who, like Maya, were critical of the humanitarian framework of help and were clear about the differences between activists and volunteers. As Jess argued:

> "It's important [for activists] that we don't… become [a] humanitarian organization that just gives food, that's not what we want. The problem is when it's just giving. [Then] I am superior… I am the helper, and someone is a receiver. That's humanitarianism. But [the] solidarity movement is more like be[ing] together and fight[ing] for the same cause."

An aversion towards a framework of help was also present in Kate's narrative. While she acknowledged the importance of providing people with help when needed, she also argued that "helping as a motivation" was for her "really debatable… [because]… it entail[ed] a lot of problematic things." Elaborating on these problems, she said:

> "When helping people… [it's] easy [to] have these power structures… there is somebody who helps and somebody who is being helped… it is… dangerous… [and] can easily lead to strange behavior… You *distance* yourself from other people and all of the sudden you

become western helper helping someone who wouldn't be able to do things herself, which is completely not true."

At the core of both Jess and Kate's critiques of the framework was the construction of *distance* between the Self and the Other and the underlying vertical forms of power therein. Like other activists, they criticized this kind of distance-driven engagement for framing the Other as less capable and agential than the Western Self, and thus inherently different and inferior—a narrative that reflected and further legitimized the exclusion and marginalization of the Other. The framework of help not only silenced structural and political underpinnings of marginalization but also further reinforced the superiority of the Western Self (the helper), vis-à-vis the inferiority of the Other (being helped). The activists positioned themselves in opposition to (re)production of unequal structures of power between the Self and the Other and the exposure of the Other to various forms of mistreatment. This aligned activists with the imaginaries that critical consciousness opposes and destabilizes hegemonic structures of power and also those "at at the very heart of the identity […] of the dominant subject" (Braidotti 2014b, 181).

In Jess' narrative, activists, *unlike humanitarians*, positioned themselves *together with* those who were marginalized, aligning the activists with the yearning of critical consciousness. This positioning indicated the ethical, liberatory underpinnings of the activists' project. Thus, through differentiating themselves from humanitarianism, which they criticized for operating alongside a logic of distance, activists advanced their own activism. I interpret their investment in establishing togetherness with those marginalized ("solidarity movement is more like be[ing] together and fight for the same cause" (Jess)) through the notion of proximity, which, I argue, formed the core of the activists' political project (Chapters V). By emphasizing proximity and critiquing humanitarianism's distance, a shift towards the Self, already visible in the location of counter-hegemonic politics in one's personal life, is further emphasized (Chapter III).

2.1 Colonial past and neoliberal discourses

The activists' critiques of the framework of help were both historically informed and concerned with present day expressions and (re)productions of inequality, marginalization, and subordination of the designated Other. The historical underpinnings of the critique were visible in Kate's invocation of the figure of the "Western helper" ("you become a Western helper") and in Jess' linkage between the practices of help and imaginaries of superiority ("I am superior… I am the helper") and were further reflected in activists' critiques of colonialism. Activists emphasized their adherence to postcolonial scholarship by recognizing the colonial underpinnings of modern articulations of humanitarianism: particularly, the racist and colonial underpinning of Western superiority vis-à-vis the dehumanized and racialized Other. This critique indicated that their alignment with critical consciousness was driven by postcolonial and anti-racist commitments (Braidotti 2014b).[90] Yet while activists were invested in pursuing postcolonial critique, they in fact rarely elaborated on the relationship between colonial histories and modern forms of humanitarianism. Thus, their invocations of postcolonial narratives were often primarily an indicator of their ethical investments and disagreement with structural and historically rooted injustice.

With regard to modern-day expressions of humanitarianism and the (re)production of inequalities therein, activists interpreted humanitarianism as operating alongside what Sarah—an activist involved in several solidarity struggles across different countries—described as a "neoliberal notion about performance and fault." As she argued, humanitarians tended to see one's socio-economic positioning not as a consequence of structural inequalities but rather as a matter of individual failure to succeed, thus tending to extend their support only to those who best "fit

[90] To see how solidarity discourses (including those driven by critical investments) run the risk of silencing/omiting discussions about the historical relationship between the EU and the arriving migrants, see for example: (Danewid 2017).For more on the historical development of humanitarianism, its relationship with colonial projects, and the role humanitarianism plays in governing racialized subjects, see for example: (Malkki 1996; Barnett and Weiss 2008; Barnett 2011; Ticktin 2011; Fassin 2012)

into [their] idea of a [vulnerable] person."[91] Political refugees, for example, were seen as vulnerable so long as they fit into the imaginaries of a victim of narrowly understood political violence. Humanitarian support was refused to those perceived as "being guilty for their position [or] not performing well," such as "people who are homeless"[92] and economic migrants. Thus, humanitarianism was structured around an idea that, as Sarah framed it, "you make your own life"—silencing the fact that people had different access to the possibilities to 'make a life.' By perpetuating certain narratives about deservingness and fault, humanitarianism partook in the (re)production of the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, activists' critiques of humanitarianism resonated with their broader critique of neoliberal capitalism (Chapter III) and indicated their investment in liberatory politics.

2.2 Critique of the 'moral superiority' of the Western Self and its governing practices

Activists further criticized humanitarianism for resting on and reproducing imaginaries of Western moral superiority. It was often seen by the activists as driven by what Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram call the "moral mission for the aid worker" (2016, 3). As they explain:

> "The very concept of charity reproduces a vertical form of intervention in which agency and action are rooted in the charitable act to the extent of precluding a commensurate agency from receivers. Vertical politics and interventions displace violence, naming the problem […] as a moral mission for the aid worker […]. Vertical politics can isolate the complex structure of violence that affects migrants in Europe today, depoliticizing and dehistoricizing "cases" for charitable […] intervention" (2016, 3).

In line with this critique, activists argued that humanitarians performed moral generosity by extending their compassion towards those less fortunate—a gesture pertaining not only to the 'alleviation of suffering' but also to the construction of goodness of the Western Self. They further criticized humanitarians for narrating their help as a means of 'advancing the wellbeing' of the Other alongside the imaginaries of what such advancement meant for the Self. As one of the

[91] For the discussion on the relationship between humanitarianism and the discourses of neoliberalism and the construction of vulnerability and performance within both see for example: (Ilcan and Rygiel 2015; Sözer 2020)
[92] When talking about humanitarianism, activists referred to humanitarians' who supporteed migrants. Support for homeless people was outside of the focus of migration-oriented humanitarianism. In other contexts, humanitarians focused on homeless people, impoverished populations, etc.

activists, Jane, argued "humanitarian[s]… say 'I will give you resources, but I will also tell you how to live and how to be… [I will] make priorities for you." This corresponded with Sarah's earlier assertion that humanitarianism (re)produces "neoliberal notions about performance and fault" by establishing and sustaining imaginaries over what counts as well-spent resources and successful life. The conditions humanitarianisms placed around support included adherence to Western imaginaries of a 'proper life.' This was seen by the activists as dangerously echoing the ways in which, throughout the history, the Western Self created, sustained, and used the narratives of its moral superiority to exploit, discipline, and violently subjugate the (constructed) Other to its power. In opposition to this approach, activists refused to take up the position of moral superiority and advocated for a lack of conditionality, as I analyze in detail in the Chapter VI.

2.3 Opposing the "humanitarian denial of agency"

Activists argued that one of the ways in which the humanitarian framework of help continued to (re)produce inequality between the Self and the Other was through what Laura framed as the "humanitarian denial of agency." This denial, as Kate asserted, meant that humanitarians took on the role of "helping someone" with the assumption that the person "wouldn't be able to do things herself." By presenting the Other as incapable, humanitarian discourses dehumanized the Other, narrated it as dependent on the Western Self. This dependency was in turn presented as a sign of inability, inferiority, and lack of agency which justified Western interventionism and the subjugation of the Other to the governing practices of the Self.

In opposition to these discourses, activists emphasized the agency of those marginalized. This emphasis, driven by an investment in collective liberation, aimed at indicating the right of the Other to self-determination and self-representation and echoed narratives inscribed in CSM (critical migration scholarship) (see Introduction). As Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram argued analyzing the working of HSP, activists "seek to question distinctions between citizen and migrant or refugee and the way political agency is constricted" (2016, 3).

2.4 Depoliticization of the struggle and invisibility of the interconnectedness of various forms of marginalization

The final criticism activists levied against the humanitarian framework of help was the way it depoliticized the struggles of those being marginalized by obscuring the (interconnected) structural and political underpinnings of this marginalization. Activists often connected this depoliticization with the humanitarian differentiation between who counts as eligible for support, as I analyzed earlier. Reflecting on humanitarian practices during the second half of 2015, Maya told me: "There were… many strange things happening… there were groups who were handling food and some groups… denied giving food to homeless people because it… [was] not for them…." Luiza shared a similar memory, arguing:

> "What was really frustrating [for me] was how [the support for migrants] was done mostly on the [logic] … of the humanitarian groups … [they were] giving food to people only if they [people] showed their papers. Which is awful."

The fact that people needed to show their papers to get food and clothes meant that humanitarians were only willing to support a person if she was a newly arrived migrant, and not if she was a homeless resident of the country or a Roma person. As Maya argued, this type of differentiation meant that:

> "People do not connect various forms of exploitation, don't see the connection with capitalism … I think it's extremely important not to forget how those problems are being linked … the lack of structures for refugees and for homeless people."

Opposing this type of approach, activists argued that "a lot of racism towards refugees is… an extension of the racism that targets… Roma population" (Laura) and other marginalized groups. Thus, they aimed at developing systemic critiques of marginalization and extending support to various marginalized groups. Activists also argued that humanitarians obscured the fact that the hegemonic framing of who/what counts as (non)political was in fact deeply political in that it (re)produced racialized, classed, and gendered structures of power, privileging some (white, male, Western, middle- and upper-class, citizens etc.) at the expense of others (racialized people, poor populations, feminized subjects, migrants). In opposition to this humanitarian

depoliticization of migrants' struggles, activists framed their own project as political by clearly aligning themselves with the imaginaries of critical consciousness—showing "affective and political sensibility, which cuts across the boundaries of race [and] class" as well as political status (Braidotti 1994, 2). This differentiation between activists and humanitarians further highlights the contours of the activists' positioning as political, as I analyzed in Chapter III. When self-differentiating from humanitarianism, activists' self-presentation as political indicated their attentiveness to structural inequalities. Yet this was at the same time tied with an interpretation of politics that located the Self and her individual life at the core of the political struggle, as I elaborate on further on below.

3. Complexifying activists' critiques of humanitarianism

So far, I have outlined the main tenants of activists' critiques of what they saw as the logic of humanitarianism, as well as indicating the basis on which activists differentiated themselves from humanitarians. In this section, I analyze the meaning of those tenants vis-à-vis hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism. In particular, I trace continuities and slippages between the activists' critical stances and the imaginaries inscribed in the discourses of neoliberal capitalism. I also further analyze the imaginaries behind activists' self-differentiation from humanitarians and the consequences that such differentiation had for the construction of the activists' project. In doing so, I challenge the assumed dichotomy between HSP and humanitarianism by tracing a series of continuities between the two projects.

As I argued earlier, one of the reasons for which activists refuted a framework of help was that it was seen as partaking in the (re)production of Western moral superiority. This reluctance can be interpreted as driven by a critical desire to avoid the (re)production of Western universalizing moral discourses inscribed in humanitarianism and, thus, as a manner of shifting away from hegemony as advanced by critical consciousness (Braidotti 1994, 4). At the same time, as their narratives showed, activists' practices were driven by ethical commitments. Their reluctance to use a language of ethics coupled with their ethically-informed convictions that

transpired from the activists' mobilizations to oppose inequality and injustice meant that activists often had difficulties addressing the ethical dimension of their project—a sign of a tension underlying the activists' political subjectivities.

Activists indicated their ethical stances by framing themselves as political and by emphasizing the agency of those marginalized. By drawing an affinity between ethics, politics, and agency, activists were able to claim ethical positioning without invoking a language of ethics and thus running the risk of (re)producing Western universalism and superiority. Activists often understood the rejection of universalizing discourses, the focus on politics and agency, and the emphasis on the political character of their activism to be indicative of their counter-hegemonic stances. However, I complicate this reading. Activists' disagreement with humanitarianism and its invocation of morality was often translated in activists' narratives into a general aversion towards using a language of ethics or universalizing discourses. Their aversion towards universalizing discourses resonated with the aversion to grand narratives inscribed in neoliberal capitalism, and thus with the neoliberal weakening of collective struggles (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). This weakening was inscribed in the shift from collective expressions as sites of counter-hegemonic struggles, often articulated through grand narratives, to the particularities of individual expressions and the location of the Self and its relationship with the Other as the primary site of the political struggle.

The importance the activists placed on emphasizing the agency of the Other, as analyzed earlier, also held particular resemblance to neoliberal discourses. The notion of agency, while liberatory in some regards, runs the risk of (re)producing the ideal social agent of Western contemporary social theory. As Paul Benson points out, the concept of free agency (although seemingly presented as neutral) has a strong normative connotation that has been shaped by "socially advantaged white men," came into being thru "sexist and racist social practices," and is built around the notion that all individuals can and should be rational and capable of self-determination (1990, 47–50). It assumes that the possibility and need for self-determination is

relatively the same for each person. This conceptualization rests upon an understanding of the individual as an agent acting alone, able to define and purse their goals. Similarly, Kaplan Wilson points out that:

> "If the conceptualisation of agency as free will is central to the philosophical underpinnings of capitalism, it has also been argued that historically it became an inextricable part of dominant ideology which emerged at the specific conjuncture of the rise of European capitalism fuelled by slavery and colonialism" (2007, 126).

Under neoliberal capitalism, social agents are supposed to embrace the free market ideology and understand that "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free market, and free trade" (Harvey 2005, 2). Thus, the activists' investment in recognizing the agency of the Other, while critical in some regards, also ran the risk of constructing the Other along the lines of this idea of an individual as a subject capable of self-determination and self-representation (Wrenn 2015). With regard to those subordinated and marginalized, the narrative of agency served as a reminder that the Other can decide for herself, that she is *also* an agent. That narrative was problematic to the extent that it often assumed that structural inequalities were a result of a lack of acknowledgement on the side of the Self of the agency of those subordinated and exploited, rather than a bi-product of the practices of subordination. As such, it imagined that if the Self recognized the agency of the Other, than the Other would be able to advance her conditions. This framing created a possibility for offloading the responsibility for structural violence on the (now recognized as an agent) Other, and fantasized the Self's recognition of the Other's agency as of the primary importance in the struggle for social justice (Tudor 2012) (Chapter VI). With regard to the Self—already recognized in the dominant discourses as the primary agent—this narrative of agency further (re)established the primacy of the Self by reinforcing agency (constructed alongside Western imaginaries of an ideal social agent) as the defining feature of one's political capacities. With the location of counter-hegemonic politics primarily outside of formal politics and in one's personal life (Chapter III), and with agency further

highlighting the importance of the Self, the individual and her life were further narrated in HSP as the primary, and often only, site of counter-hegemonic struggle. Thus it echoed discourses of neoliberal capitalism, which invests the individual with imaginaries of her primacy (hyper-individualism) through and alongside weakening collective struggles (Wrenn 2015). It also fantasized the Self as the universal transcendent subject who, in her private life and individual practices, can undo structural and historical social inequalities.

Alongside their critiques of humanitarianism for depoliticizing various struggles, activists described HSP as being invested in developing structural critiques of marginalization. Through this criticism, the activists argued that HSP was invested in drawing a connection between the violence inscribed in exclusionary migration regimes, the marginalization of the EU's "troublesome internal population" (Rajaram 2015) (mostly homeless people and Roma population), the processes of gentrification (and thus further exclusion and marginalization of classed and racialized groups), and the workings of the state-capital nexus. The activists' investment in linking the marginalization of various groups with the workings of capitalism clearly marked HSP's leftist critical aspirations, when read together with the looseness of their definition of the system (Chapter III). Still, it often resulted with the activists' focusing on those who they recognized as marginalized without developing a more comprehensive and structurally-informed critique of the processes of marginalization.[93] This speaks to Jane's earlier assertion that while critical of the discourses of help, HSP was nevertheless a project primarily oriented towards

[93] For accounts of the connection between different types of marginalization, see for example: (Rajaram 2015; 2018). As Prem Kumar Rajaram explains, "An account of the production of surplus populations may provide the relational link between the management of troublesome populations, internal and external. In brief, the production of surplus, of an excess of unproductive labor, is, according to Marx, a necessary supplement to the production of labor. The surplus population (such as those on public work schemes) is not excluded from modes of production. Rather, they have a tangential relation to the norm, brought in as needed to work 'black' in low-paying jobs. Foucault argues that the surplus population is delimited by the exercise of sub-power, of localized action on populations. The activity of the Hungarian state, and other European states, against migrants is an exercise of this sub-power, a logical extension of the "meta" level capitalist production of labor and surplus labor. The governing of migration is not separate from domestic political and social processes but rather an outcome of these. Declarations of states of exception are means by which a surplus population is outlined at the edges of the nation-state, and points to ongoing processes of cultivating surplus and unproductive populations at the core. There is, in other words, a dialectic relationship between the management of a supposedly troublesome internal population, like the Roma, and the same of an externalized population of migrants and refugees" (2015).

offering support to those in need, even if articulated in a more critical and inclusionary manner. As such, the activists' focus on different marginalized groups often served primarily as an indicator of their ethical sensitivities towards various forms of injustice. This shows continuities between HSP and humanitarian imaginaries: while the activists' project encompassed a variety of marginalized groups (challenging the singular and depoliticizing humanitarian focus), it nevertheless remained limited to groups that were suffering immediate marginalization. It thus framed social struggles in terms of inclusion, resonating with the shift in social critique from the language of exploitation to that of marginalization and exclusion that Europe went through in the 1990s. That shift marked the decline of leftist critique and the weakening of social critique's ability to recognize and address those responsible for inequalities. It likewise weakened the ability to express shared interests of marginalized groups beyond requests of inclusion (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 346). While activists were clear in indicating that the state-capital nexus was responsible for inequalities, their focus on those most visibly marginalized groups (coupled with their loose definition of the system and insistence on the individual's life and agency as crucial sites of political struggle) allowed me to read HSP's imaginaries as a product of the same discursive shift from exploitation to exclusion. This is not to argue that HSP was simply a more inclusionary version of humanitarianism, to dismiss the critical differences between HSP and humanitarianism, or to simply criticize HSP for practicing help. But it is to show continuities between HSP and humanitarianism and thus complexify activists self-positioning as distinct, critical actors.

The continuities between HSP and humanitarianism also allow me to read the activists' critiques of humanitarian practices as an expression of competition between two social actors aimed at extending care towards the Other. By critically evaluating the logic of humanitarian engagement and at the same time presenting HSP as offering a more nuanced, inclusive, ethical, and engagement with marginalized groups, activists positioned themselves on the side of the marginalized and participated in the establishment of a new discourse of "us" versus "them." This new "us" versus "them" discourse challenged usual hegemonic articulations of "us" as referring

to those sharing national, class, and ethnic belonging. In activists' narratives, "us" referred to the (imagined) togetherness between activists and marginalized groups and "them" referred to Western subjects who were not activists. This differentiation between the activist Self and the humanitarian Self was on the one hand done through activists' critiques of the power structures inscribed in humanitarianism, as I analyzed already, and on the other hand through narratives presenting humanitarians as having less knowledgeable engagement with the Other. As Luiza argued, reflecting on the ways in which humanitarians attended to the arriving migrants in the second half of 2015:

> "There were some really basic misunderstandings. Because for [humanitarians] cultural sensitivity amounted to halal food or non-halal food, you know? But there is so much more… how you eat bread in the Middle East, questions about the personal space, how can you touch people… what was frustrating for us is that we tried to share the information we had with the volunteers but they just didn't want to talk about it… if your whole identity is based on helping those people… but you still don't want to listen to two hours talk where someone will explain to you the cultural differences, someone from the region..."

She spoke with a subtle yet hard to miss derogatory tone and finished her thoughts by saying in dismissively: "Although I was not surprised, because I had done research on humanitarianism before so I knew that this is the way it goes."[94] Her dismissal of humanitarian engagement was strengthened by immediately countering this humanitarian lack of knowledge with a more nuanced and knowledgeable engagement on the part of the activists. Humanitarians were presented as poorly educated/ insensitive towards cultural differences while activists, on the other hand, had all what humanitarians were missing—knowledge, sensitivity, and access to "someone from the region" who could straighten out those "basic misunderstandings." On the one hand, the activists' emphasis on speaking with rather than for/about those who came from "the region" was in line with a strategy (long advocated for by feminist and postcolonial thinkers) to counter the violent politics of (mis)representation that dominate Western approaches towards those framed as Others. On the other hand, it narrated activists as those with the access to cosmopolitan competencies—

[94] Her comment indicates her academic background and her participation in and competition over critical social capital.

knowledge of and ability to operate across different cultures and serving as "a new kind of distinction" (Igarashi and Saito 2014, 223–25) in the processes of social stratification. Meanwhile, humanitarians lacked such competencies. Juxtaposing activists and humanitarians clearly drew and produced distinctions between those who were competent (the great man), and incompetent (little people). Read from this perspective, the activists positioning themselves "together" with the marginalized (Chapter V) served not only to indicate their critical positioning but also as part of a competition over social capital (Chapter V).

Finally, while critical of the framework of help, activists also recognized that they themselves were engaged in help-oriented practices—a position that was often challenging for them to navigate. As Jess argued, reflecting on the reasons for which people joined HSP: "I think many activists… [join the project] because it is *something that helps other people*, it allows you to develop yourself *and work for a better society as a whole*." At the same time, she recognized that it was hard for her to navigate how to practice help without reproducing unequal structures of power. Reflecting upon practices of help, Jane, an activist critical of some of the activists' practices, argued for example: "even if I am positive towards activism in comparison for example to humanitarian work, I think it still builds on this idea that you help someone." She further reflected that with any help-based relationship being inherently unequal "it [was] hard to say what kind of relations you build [with migrants] and [if they] … lead to another kind of society [and] group relations." While critical of helping, she felt even more uneasy with the activists' constant stress over helping, As she argued: "I think if we get stuck with the idea that… helping people… [is] paternalistic and so that's wrong then we are missing the point that people live in a system where they need support."[95] These ambiguities between one's positioning and the discourse of help were also heard in Rosa's narrative. As she reflected, she was unsure how to position herself vis-à-vis her own practices of help:

[95] To see how the tension between activists' critiques of help and the recognition of the necessity to provide support was negotiated in the context of Greek solidarity struggles see for example: (Rozakou 2016)

> "Helping individuals? On the individual level?... Of course, I do that whenever I can… But… helping people… [as a] key word and as a motivation for me is really debatable because it entails a lot of problematic things but also, of course, helping people is [also] always cool."

These narratives show an important tension inscribed in the activists' relationship to helping. Helping was often simultaneously recognized as problematic and as valuable and needed. Similarly, the withdrawal from practicing help, while seen by the activists as a critical refusal to establish an unequal relationship with the Other, was at the same time recognized by some as problematic in its failure to attend to immediate needs. I argue that navigating one's positioning, vis-à-vis the discourses of help and trying to avoid the (re)production of unequal relations of power was one of the important challenges faced by the activists. Rosa's narrative reflects one way that activists tended to resolve such challenge. Her statement: "Helping individuals? On the individual level?... Of course, I do that whenever I can…" indicates that individual practices and personal relationships were often sites where the reproduction of power structures was least likely to take place. This prioritization of the "individual level" likewise resonated with the activists' aversion to institutionalized politics and the location of the political in one's personal, daily practices (Chapter III), which in turn resonated with the neoliberal tendency to diminish collective struggles.

4. The paradox of critical activism

In this section I analyze the ways in which activists made sense of and navigated their own possible participation in the (re)production of unequal relations of power when the figure of the humanitarian worker was no longer sufficient to sustain their critical self-positioning and when the negative self-definition (we are not like…) needed to be replaced with a positive one (we are …).

During our interview, Jake reflected on humanitarian responses to migration and the problems inscribed in the ad-hoc societal mobilization that Europe witnessed in the second half of 2015. He argued that the emergence of social support was crucial for countering the exclusionary discourses produced by the states. At the same time, like other activists, he was very critical of the ways in which the support for the migrants was carried out without any reflection

on the ways it (re)produced unequal relations of power. I asked him what he made of his own critical stance and how activists navigated and made sure that they did not reproduce the power dynamics for which they criticized humanitarians. He told me, that he found it "super difficult" to find a balance between his critical stances and the necessity to act. As he argued:

> "I have the feeling that with my critical inclinations and interests… I find *it* a little *debilitating*. How far do you go to be critical, skeptical, questioning and where do you start to actually do things differently? So *how to bridge this divide between on the one hand thinking about it, being critical, and on the other hand having to start somewhere*? It is very difficult. And I am sure that *in many ways we reproduce a lot of things that if we thought in solitude we wouldn't want*. I am sure that… political work that we are doing, it's full of all sorts of tensions and discrepancies… it is, in my understanding, a big dilemma… I don't see how it could easily be resolved."

Jake disclosed his awareness of the existence of unequal structures of power and his own embeddedness in those. At the same time, he made clear that he recognized the inability of an individual, regardless of her intentions, to remove herself from those structures or to completely avoid their reproductions ("I am sure that… *we reproduce a lot of things that… we wouldn't want"*). His narrative crucially highlighted the state of uncertainty in which most of the activists operated. Beth for example argued that she found it "impossible" to create a project in which everything would be done in a "right [way] all the time." "To do everything perfect," she asserted, "that… can never happen." At the same time, similarly to Jake, she insisted that one also needs to act, despite the impossibility to always do everything in the right manner. She explained that it was "important to be self-critical [to a certain extend] because otherwise you don't really do good work," but at the same time without "finding a way in between" one would "get too stuck." These two narratives disclose a crucial condition of HSP, namely the state of constant uncertainty over how to approach one's critical inclinations and the necessity to act, how to navigate between reflecting and acting, and between trying to avoid the reproduction of power relations and at the same time remain engaged in the struggle against them. I read the activists' recognition of uncertainty in a twofold manner.

First, Jake's being "critical, skeptical, questioning" reflected an important element of the activists' critical stances: namely, the activists' attentiveness to the practice of reflexivity, which I

here understand as a sensitivity towards one's own participation in and reproduction of unequal structures of power. Activists were committed to recognizing, reflecting on, and acting upon the ambiguities, "tensions, and discrepancies" (Jake) of solidarity activism. This commitment reflected their adherence to critical scholarship's imperative to think about one's positionality in order to remain accountable for one's actions (Haraway 1988) and aligned activists with critical consciousness' investment in resisting "settl[ing] into socially coded modes of thought and behavior," including those inscribed in one's own thoughts and behaviors (Braidotti 1994, 5). At the same time, Jake's assertion "I find it a little *debilitating*" as well as the question "where do you start?" indicated the difficulties in which activists' found themselves when having to navigate the imperative of self-reflexive critical scrutiny and the necessity to act within a paradigm where neither formal politics (Chapter III) nor grand narratives were seen as reliable sources for resolving those difficulties.

Second, the ambiguous position in which activists found themselves was not only a sign of their investment in being critical, as I argued above, but also a condition of neoliberal capitalism. Under neoliberal capitalism, the great man is encouraged to embrace an ambivalent position vis-à-vis the world to quickly adjust to complex and uncertain situations. Embracing ambiguity also diminishes the possibility of establishing grand narratives and collective action. The world is uncertain and neoliberal capitalism frames the great man as the "sole instance endowed with a certain permanency in a complex, uncertain, and changing world" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 125), and thus, as rooted solely in himself. Such discourses further strengthen the centrality of the Self vis-à-vis collective struggles. Thus, when read from the perspective of hegemonic discourses, the uncertainty activists felt enabled the (re)establishment of the centrality of the Self and facilitated their alignment with features of a great man: mobility, flexibility, and adjustability. I interpret this as a particular paradox of critical activism operating under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism. The activists' investment in questioning hegemony "no matter how small and local it might be" (Braidotti 1994, 5) always already ran the risk of turning into narratives which, quite unlike what

the critical project envisioned, echoed the neoliberal construction of the great man as the only certain permanency in a complex, uncertain and changing world. Jake's question "where do I start?" (with the emphasis on "I") was telling of this centrality of the Self. It reflected the ways in which the Self continued to play the central role in HSP, acting as the subject responsible for making the final decision over where to draw the line between thinking how to act and acting. As such, the individual was also the primary agent deciding the scale and scope of her activism, a decision that was further negotiated in narratives of self-care (Chapter VI).

My interpretation of the activists' narratives suggests that they responded to the ambiguities outlined above and the tensions inscribed in the question of how to act towards structural change (without at the same time reproducing the unequal relations of power between the Self and the Other) by shifting the narratives to the Self. The following quote from Kate shows the direction that activists took in responding to the above consideration particularly well. Reflecting on the power-driven dichotomy of helping/being helped inscribed in humanitarianisms, she argued: "I would feel disgusted if I were reinforcing these roles myself because when you meet these people, you meet these people, you don't need any kind of system." The second part of this sentence "when you meet these people, you meet these people" reflected the activists' embeddedness in broader (liberal) cosmopolitan discourses and how the accompanying imaginaries depicted universal humanity as the basis for peaceful coexistence. Within these discourses, the Self was fantasized as a universal transcendent subject, capable of transcending social inequalities through personal contact with the Other (hooks 1992a; Ahmed 2000a). I interpret the first part of Kate's narrative "*I* would feel disgusted" as reflecting activists' general tendency to withdraw into narratives that focused on the Self ("*I* would feel") rather than the Other, as a way of minimalizing narratives that could potentially frame the Other as the subject of the Self's practices and narratives. Like Kate's focus on her own comfort ("I would feel disgusted), activists often responded to the question of how to support the Other without victimizing and/or patronizing her (and thus without reproducing unequal structures of power) through narratives that avoided

addressing the Other and instead framed support as an act of attending to the personal needs or motivations of the Self. I interpret such responses as in line with critical consciousness' investment in subverting conventions—used by the activists to avoid the (re)production of paternalistic (humanitarian) discourses that framed the suffering Other as the "motivation" (Kate) for action. Their withdrawal towards the Self can be interpreted as driven by a critical investment in avoiding speaking in the name of the Other, (mis)representing the Other, and/or treating the Other as a referral point for the construction of the Self as a Western savior. By speaking only of itself and not the Other, the Self was able to assuage some of the worry about reproducing violence inscribed in misrepresenting the Other and assuming authority over the story of the Other. I read this avoidance as a continuation of the way that the activists distanced themselves from the state and institutionalized politics (Chapter III). The primary concern in both cases was ensuring that the Self was not personally involved in structures of power that could possibly be accused of (re)producing inequality.

Yet, while driven by these critical considerations towards the Other, this avoidance/withdrawal not only allowed the activists to remain independent from institutions and discourses of responsibility, as I analyzed earlier, but also created space for narratives that explained their participation in the project by referred to what it did for them themselves (rather than the Other). This was already partially visible in Jess' earlier narrative where she described HSP as a project that "helps other people" and "allows you to develop yourself." Similarly, Olga argued that people wanted to partake in HSP in order to create a more equal society. As she further explained, being part of such a project: "is something that brings you forward and makes you satisfied in a completely different way than working for something you don't even understand, or you already know is wrong." By "working for something you don't even understand" she meant having a 'regular' job and being primarily focused on earning money and advancing one's career. In both Jess and Olga's narratives, the importance of the project was in both the support being offered to the Other and the promise of personal development that was presented for the Self.

The project established a connection between the investment in creating a "better society" (Jess) and narratives about self-development, an important feature of the great man, as I elaborate more on in the Chapter V. The activists' investment in creating a better society, when linked with narratives of self-development, can also be translated into an "orientation towards common good"—another desired feature of the neoliberal great man and justification for neoliberal capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 27, 356). I heard similar linkages between the desire to support the Other and to benefit oneself in Rosa's and Luiza's narratives. When I asked Rosa what made her join HSP, she told me:

> "A big part of me being engaged is due to very selfish reasons… I feel [that] I can do something useful with my time… I know it sounds horrible, but it [activism] gave balance to my life… [before] I felt that my life is lacking something… [like] doing something meaningful for people's lives."

She then explained what she meant by "sounds horrible" by arguing: "I think it's a bit of a taboo that people do that for their own sake... I do that for my own sake as well. There are a lot of individual motives."

Luiza's reflection imparted a similar emphasis on personal motivations. In explaining why she decided to support migrants, she argued:

> "I engage with those people because… this is the movement of our life. This is what the future historians will write about. And then I will have to tell my children what I did. And I want to be the person who was involved… I need it to be able to look in the mirror in the morning."

Even more clear about her personal motivations was Diana, who used to volunteer in one of the refugee camps in Europe. When I asked her if she planned to go back to the camp she replied:

> "I don't know if I am going back… I am thinking to go and work maybe in another camp, in Lebanon or Jordan next semester, or maybe not, you know. I don't know. I don't want to have it as this big thing, oh I have to go to the camp. If the possibility is there, I will do it. I have to say that I also do it for egoistic reasons; I want to learn Arabic, perfect way to learn Arabic. I am not going to lie."

I interpret the above narratives in a twofold manner. First, they subverted conventions—an expression of activists' positioning as critical consciousness. As I argued so far, activists criticized humanitarian discourses for using the language of charity and thus dehumanizing marginalized groups and depoliticizing their struggles. As a critical response, activists narrated their engagement with those who were marginalized in a manner that refused to (re)produce the hegemonic imaginaries of the Other as inferior, in need of help, or dependent on the Self. Shifting the narrative from what activists saw as a humanitarian framework of help ("I am engaging because people need help") to a narrative that framed their engagement as fulfilling their own needs was a means of destabilizing hegemonic imaginaries of the inferiority of the Other. By emphasizing their "selfish" and "personal" motivations, they established a narrative in which, at least at the discursive level, their engagement in the project was not structured around imaginaries of dependency, charity, or superiority. Instead, by emphasizing that they themselves benefited from the project, they invested in narratives that marked both the Self and the Other as beneficiaries of HSP. Framing the Self as in need of something that the Other had to offer (language, a sense of meaning) aimed to reverse what Prem Kumar Rajaram describes as the hegemonic distribution of fullness and lack between the Self and the Other. As he argues, the hegemonic responses to migration that Europe witnessed in 2015 were structured around and reproduced superiority-driven racist and colonial imaginaries which attached "a sense of fullness about the imagined geography of Europe, contrasted – actively contrasted – with the lack that is seen in the others it names; Said's barbarians, or migrant others" (Rajaram 2016b). Within these hegemonic discourses, the Self was positioned on the side of fullness, the Other on the side of lack. Within such imaginaries, the Self was to either protect its fullness from the Other, or, if charitable, share its fullness with the Other, but only conditionally and as a gift. Read from this perspective, the activists' insistence on framing their engagement with the Other as driven by selfish, egoistic reasons—by the desire to take rather than by the imaginaries of giving—can be interpreted as a way of subverting this hegemonic narration and reversing the roles: showing lack on the side of the Self and fullness on the side of the Other. Thus, Diana's

statement that she went to the camp to learn Arabic was a way of subverting dominant narratives by showing that it is not the Other that needs and takes from the Self but that it is the Self that needs and takes from the Other.

While these narratives aimed at subverting humanitarian discourses of one-directional, power-driven engagement with the Other, they nonetheless echoed some of the imaginaries of what Lilie Chouliaraki calls "post-humanitarianism as neoliberalism," which introduces "a shift from the idea that doing good to others without expecting a response is both desirable and possible to the idea that doing good to others is desirable when there is something to gain from the act" (2013, 179). As she argues, humanitarian discourses (of the 2010s) under neoliberalism were marked by the "retreat of 'grand-narratives.'" The calls for collective action in the name of the "vulnerable other" that dominated humanitarian communicative strategies between the 1970s and 1990s were replaced in the 2010s with narratives of individual activism, driven by doubt, irony, and imaginaries of mutual benefit (2013, 178). This neoliberal post-humanitarianism "posits the individual self as the source of solidarity […] [and] further legitimizes this self […] as the justification for action" (Chouliaraki 2013, 178). This construction resonates with features of the great man who, recognizing the ambiguity of the world "can root […] [him]self only in […] [him]self" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 125). The activists' withdrawal towards "selfish reasons" and emphasis on their own benefits clearly resonated with this neoliberal shifting of attention from the "vulnerable other to the Self as a cause for action" (Chouliaraki 2013, 178). This is not to suggest that HSP was no different from humanitarianism. But it is to show that the activists' critiques towards the language of ethics and, as a consequence, shift towards the self as the primary source and justification of political action (Chapter III, V, VI) resonated with the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, paradoxically, it was not far from the communicative strategies of post-humanitarianism, with both projects attending to those framed as suffering Others *through individual practices of the Self*.

Furthermore, as the above narratives show, the 'gains' from activism that activists listed spanned from fulfilment derived from working for a better society, to feeling good about oneself, to learning a language. In avoiding paternalism (I engage to help the Other), the activists mobilized narratives that shifted the focus from the Other to the Self to such an extent that they encompassed openly "selfish reasons" (Rosa). To provide these selfish reasons was imagined as ethically less problematic than framing their engagement within the language of help and thus running the risk of (re)producing hierarches. This shows that the activists felt more comfortable running the risk of being accused of egoism than running the risk of being accused of paternalism, which I argue is telling of their political subjectivities. In an almost perverse logic, the horizontal solidarity project, which positions itself at the forefront of the struggle for equality and against violence, mobilized highly individualistic language that praised the advancement of personal gains as a source of legitimization for actions. Furthermore, the shift towards selfish reasons established space for disengagement from the project; to narrate investment as a way to fulfill personal desires meant that once those reasons were no longer relevant, engagement could lose its foundation (Chapter VI). On the flip side of HSP's critical desire to avoid the (re)production of structures of power and violence (inscribed in humanitarian desire to help) were narratives that closely resonated discourses of neoliberal capitalism, with its withdrawal from grand narratives, its emphasis on ambiguity, and its privileging of the self and her needs over the collective struggles.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the contours of the activists' political subjectivities by tracing the entanglements of critical and hegemonic discourses inscribed in the activists' critiques of what they saw and constructed as humanitarian responses to migration. I outlined their critiques of humanitarian discourses of help: the depoliticization of migrants' struggles, the erasure of migrants' agency, the colonial residues of humanitarian practices, and the humanitarian participation in neoliberal governance of 'unwanted' and vulnerable populations. I showed the critical underpinnings of such critiques as well as the slippages between activists' critiques and

discourses of neoliberal capitalism. Particularly, I argued that the activists' emphasis on agency ran the risk of reproducing the construction of an ideal social agent of Western contemporary social theory. I also showed that activists' dislike of the language of ethics and universalizing discourses resonated with the neoliberal aversion to grand narratives, diminishing the possibility of establishing collective and institutionalized struggles. I also complexified activists' critiques of humanitarianism by showing the ways in which activists recognized and navigated their own investments in practicing help.

Throughout this chapter, I showed how activists' critiques of humanitarianism, while driven by criticality, were at the same time (re)producing narratives that further established the Self as the primary site of political struggle. By refusing grand narratives and institutionalized politics, HSP narrated the individual Self as the primary site where structural inequalities were to be resolved. This led to a paradox of critical activism embodied in a state of debilitation which resulted from difficulties navigating both the need to constantly reflect upon the existing structures of power inscribed in one's actions (for example: the desire to help and the possible paternalism inscribed in it) and the necessity to act (for example: the importance of offering help). This state of debilitation was reflected in activists' critical, ethical desires to avoid (re)producing inequalities and power dynamics between the Self and the Other. Likewise, the activists' paralysis was paradoxically resolved by invoking a language of selfish reasons as a means of justifying and explaining one's participation in solidarity structures. This language was presented by activists as a subversive strategy aimed at opposing the construction of the Other as the subject of the Self's practices. At the same time, it authorized and validated the Self and her personal needs as the primary site of interest, aligning activists' narratives with the ways that the individual is privileged under neoliberal capitalism.

It is also crucial that the activists constructed their critiques of humanitarianism around the ways that it (re)produced distance between the Self and the Other. The activists' critique of this distance served as the background for their problematization of proximity and horizontality with

the Other—the basis of their critical activism (Chapter V). Finally, the activists' critiques of the way that humanitarianism established conditionality around support and constructed desirability served as the background for their own refusal to set conditions around who they supported (Chapter VI).

Chapter V: Proximity

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the contours of the activists' political subjectivities by analyzing how they narrated proximity with migrants and other marginalized groups as one of the core elements of HSP. These narratives of proximity disclose the entanglements of counter-hegemonic and hegemonic imaginaries that constituted the activists' political subjectivities. They illuminate how the activists positioned themselves alongside critical consciousness, with proximity serving as a means of challenging the hegemonic distribution of power. The narratives likewise disclose the activists' alignment with the imaginaries of the great man, with proximity serving as a means for self-development, acquiring experiences, building networks, and developing social and informational capital. The activists' enactment of the imaginaries of the universal transcendent subject (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000a) are also reflected, with proximity being fantasized as offering both a transgression of unequal power structures between the Self and the Other and the enrichment of the Self through exposure to the constructed difference of the Other. Finally, the narratives of proximity revealed further ways in which HSP was constructed around and further (re)produced the centrality of the Western Self as the primary site of action.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In section 1, I briefly introduce the activists' investment in establishing proximity with the Other. In section 2, I analyze the configuration of proximity as a means of spreading information. I argue that the way proximity was narrated disclosed a series of slippages between counter-hegemonic and hegemonic imaginaries, particularly between the critical search for "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988)and the neoliberal investment in local representations (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 113). As such, proximity as means of spreading information was authorized as knowledge and the activists' search for proximity aligned them with the imaginaries of both critical consciousness and the great man. In section 3, I analyze the activists' search for proximity as manifesting in being together in mundane

practices, collaborative projects, friendships, and casual encounters. The activists presented proximity (through togetherness) as carrying critical potential for challenging socio-cultural representations that depicted marginalized groups as different and subordinate to the hegemonic Self. In doing so, they put into practice HSP's investment in "tak[ing] the distinction between us (Self) and them (Other) away" (Kate) and establishing equality-driven relationships between the Self and the Other. I show that while the activists theoretically described proximity as a means of striving *towards* equality, in practice the two were conflated— in other words, *proximity was equated with equality itself*. This conflation aligned activists with the imaginaries of a universal transcendent subject, fantasized as capable of (un)making the border between the Self and the Other (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000a). As such, they also took part in the construction of the Other as different and/or familiar (Huggan 2001). In section 4, I show how in the narratives proximity was also a means through which the activists (i.e., the Self) acquired experiences and challenged their comfort zones. While in line with critical consciousness' investment in subverting conventions, the narratives of *proximity as experience* (re)produced the Other as different and resonated with the neoliberal imperative for self-development.

1. Proximity

In Chapter IV, I argued that activists criticized humanitarianism for (re)producing *distance* between the Self and the Other through the enactment of vertical forms of politics and the framework of help. The activists also identified the production of distance between the Self and the Other as an element of exclusionary state border regimes and xenophobic discourses as I discussed in Chapter III. Imaginaries of distance lay at the core of the activists' critiques of how the state-capital nexus functioned, with humanitarianism as its affective dimension, sustaining and reproducing structural inequalities. Acting in opposition to hegemonic discourses, the activists located proximity between the Self and the Other as a core element of their political project. For example, elaborating on the counter-hegemonic potential of HSP, Olga argued that the project created the possibility to "be together and fight for the same cause" with people, regardless of legal

status, skin color, class position etc. This framing emphasized two crucial dimensions of HSP's imaginaries of proximity: their investment in a shared struggle ("fight for the same cause") and their hope for a shared life ("be together"). Thus, proximity was understood as establishing political, physical, and emotional closeness and togetherness with the Other and was narrated by the activists as an antidote to structural violence and inequality. To analyze how privileging proximity impacted the construction of the activists' political subjectivities, I analytically divide their narratives on the topic into three groups: proximity as means of spreading information; second, proximity as way of establishing equality; third, proximity as experiences.

2. Proximity authorized as knowledge

Activists often narrated the establishment of proximity with migrants and other marginalized groups as a means of spreading information that was otherwise intentionally silenced within the hegemonic discourses of the state-capital nexus. Activists sought proximity to document and publicize the conditions of marginalization, on both the national and the EU levels.[96] They also sought proximity in order to provide migrants with information that could help them navigate national and EU legal systems and support them in settling in the EU. Thus, at the core of the activists' search for proximity lay a desire to challenge the political and economic inequalities between the Self and the Other.

Activists' established proximity with migrants by traveling to reception centers, interviewing migrants living in these reception centers (and/or living in/traveling through the cities in which the activists operated) and inviting migrants to join HSP initiatives. As Maria explained "the objective" of traveling to the reception centers and interviewing migrants was "to monitor and keep track of what… [was] happening inside the camps, to keep in touch with people." For Max,

[96] This encompassed both violence that the marginalized populations were subjected to and acts of resistance that emerged in spaces of marginalization. HSP documented this to disclose the violations produced at the state-capital nexus without at the same time obscuring the agency of the migrants and other marginalized groups and their ability to challenge and surpass hegemonic discourses. The documentation of acts of resistance resonated closely with the activists' recognition of the migrants' agency (Chapter IV).

establishing personal contact with migrants was one of the crucial goals of HSP as it helped "to document what… [was] happening [to the migrants], to document [their] experiences." It created access to information that "is otherwise not possible to have: the conditions in the camps, [migrant] experiences, how [migrants] encounter authorities, what route they take." These documented experiences were disseminated to the general public and NGOs with the hope of "stop[ping]… Dublin deportation" (Max), push for the improvement of the treatment of migrants (Liz), and request more a "humane and inclusive border regime" (Gunesch et al. 2016, 17).

Activists' investment in documenting and opposing state treatment of the migrants positioned HSP in the sphere of non-governmental organizations documenting state violence and human rights violations.[97] At the same time, it is crucial to remember that, for activists, the goal of HSP was *not to 'improve'* the workings of the migration system, but to challenge it radically (Chapter III). The activists' investment in attaining and disclosing information about the conditions of marginalization was counter-hegemonic because its fundamental aim was to challenge the workings of state and EU border regimes and the exclusionary, xenophobic discourses produced at the state-capital nexus.

Activists saw collecting information *directly* from those affected by marginalization as a critical practice because it privileged the voices of those who were otherwise silenced in hegemonic discourses and/or mediated through other actors (such as state agencies and humanitarian groups). The activists' emphasis on listening to and sharing the experiences of those marginalized resonated with paradigms of critical thinking (particularly feminist and post-colonial) which call for an attentiveness to "situated knowledges" as the only way of challenging power relations inscribed in the hegemonic production of knowledge and representations(Haraway 1988). By collecting information from those who were marginalized and disseminating it to the broader public, activists were positioned as *carriers of the information from margins to the center*.

[97] The language of "human rights" was a contentious topic among the activists. Most activists were critical of its liberal character and the ways it depoliticized violence by silencing the question of systemic inequalities. At the same time, they treated it as useful discursive tool and often employed it strategically to publicize migrant struggles.

Proximity with the migrants also allowed activists to provide migrants with information that the state and EU agencies made difficult to acquire otherwise. Thus, activists were also positioned as *carriers of the information from the center to the margins*. For example, as Jess argued, the first step in supporting migrants was to make sure that they understand the legal system, "know… what rights they have inside the system" and to provide them with "good [reliable] information" which, as she emphasized, "they don't get from the [governmental] agencies." Practices of obscuring legal information were seen by the activists as part of state and EU exclusionary migration regimes aimed at keeping migrants outside national and EU borders.

By providing migrants with legal information, activists supported them in obtaining legal status, avoiding deportation, accessing the labor market and state provisions, and increasing their socio-economic well-being. As Boltanski and Chiapello argue, under neoliberal capitalism those isolated are "threatened with *exclusion* [from networks] – that is to say, in effect, with death in a reticular universe. They risk not finding a way to attach themselves to project and ceasing to exists" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 111). The socio-economic and political isolation of the migrants through lengthy asylum procedures produced and sustained their marginalization, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Thus, by integrating those marginalized into the flow of information (a crucial form of capital under neoliberal capitalism) and by challenging their isolation, activists opposed the hegemonic distributions of power and the violence inscribed in it.

While counter-hegemonic in its intention, spreading information this way was also in line with the ideological justification of capitalism. By challenging restrictions around the circulation of information between citizens and migrants, activists acted in accordance with imaginaries of the great man, who knows that "the good network remains open and expands continuously, to the maximum benefit of all" and thus is committed to "eliminating the restrictions that limit everyone's access to information" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 122, 121). Thus, activists challenged social inequalities through imaginaries of inclusion for those marginalized. This approach resonated with the shift in social critique from the language of exploitation to that of exclusion, weakening the

activists' ability to articulate the exploitative dimension of current forms of inequality beyond those who were immediately marginalized (Chapter IV). The imperative of an ever-expanding and accessible-to-all network created the illusion that under neoliberal capitalism mobility is accessible to all and, once achieved, allows anyone to elevate themselves out of socio-economic inequalities. This ideological justification obscured the fact that neoliberal capitalism requires informational inequality for capital accumulation, and thus requires unequal access to mobility. As I argue further, activists' narratives, particularly those framing other social actors as less mobile and less knowledgeable, partook in the *displacement* rather than the eradication of such inequality.

In Maria's earlier narrative, the need "to monitor" was coupled with the need "keep in touch," reflecting the ways in which the activists' investment in spreading information was intertwined with imaginaries of personal relations between the Self and the Other. The activists saw the migrants' difficulties in acquiring legal information and the lack of reliable discussion about the conditions of marginalization in public discourse as an effect of the states' deliberate silencing strategies aimed at removing migrants from the public eye and thus away from possible societal empathy, compassion, and support. As Maria's narrative showed government diminished the possibility of the development of relationships between migrants and citizens by locating "all those camps [centers for asylum seekers] in the *margins* of the cities." They were so far from public view that Maria couldn't help but wonder, if "people [citizens] [even] know about them [migrants]? […] know that next to […] this supermarket there are people lost in those camps?" Activists argued that erasing the migrants' presence diminished the possibility of solidarity and togetherness between citizens and migrants, framing the lives of migrants as "ungrievable" (Butler 2009), and thus facilitating the states' exclusionary practices. Thus, the activists' desire to come in proximity with migrants and collect information was counter-hegemonic in that it was structured around a desire to establish affective continuity between the Self and the Other and thus challenge migrants' exclusion from hegemonic affective considerations. This aligned activists with the imaginaries of

critical consciousness: its yearning—an affective sensibility towards the Other and its positioning together with the margins (Braidotti 1994, 2).

While presented by the activists as driven by critical investments, their search for proximity also needs to be read together with their advanced socio-economic positioning within the local and global structures of power. In the context of the growing radicalization of xenophobic discourse in Europe and elsewhere, the activists' solidarity with migrants was counter-hegemonic in terms of their political, ethical, and affective investments. Yet, in terms of socio-economic positioning, the activists were located in the core rather than the margins,[98] and thus occupied hegemonic positioning, from which they extended solidarity. As Nikita Dhawan points out, we must look carefully at those "placed in a situation from which […] [one] can aspire to global solidarity and universal benevolence," since this is already a reflection of historical processes that put some in the position of extending solidarity and others in position of receiving it (2013, 144). I carry this assertion further by arguing that activists were in position of extending, rather than receiving, solidarity not only due to historical processes but also due to fact that the imaginaries and modes in which this solidarity was practiced allowed the activists to further sustain/reproduce their positioning.

As discussed earlier, activists were able to translate the information and experiences they acquired into knowledge and informational and social capital. As Max's earlier narrative indicated, activists acquired information about various topics: the conditions in the camps, people's personal experiences, migration routes, and relationship to authorities. They later shared the collected information with authorities and/or NGOs to request more transparent and humane treatment for those being marginalized. They also used it to create reports, produce academic papers, claim knowledge about the conditions of marginalization, claim on-the-ground experiences of working with those disenfranchised, acquire jobs, build connections with other activists and NGOs,

[98] Due to their elusiveness, both "margins" and "core" indicate proximity to structures of power rather than concrete socio-political or economic condition.

develop contacts with, and gain trust of other marginalized groups. For example, as Kate argued: "[activism] also defines my professional [and] academic careers. It has become one of the main pillars of my life. It's one of my main interests." The blurring between activism and (academic) career/other projects was a repeating theme in activists' narratives.

The activists' ability to acquire and (quickly) carry information between the core and the margins, use the collected information for different purposes and across various audiences, and transform information into knowledge meant that activists were not 'simply' messengers of information from the margins to the core and vice versa, but rather were active information holders and knowledge producers, with proximity being in fact "*authorized as knowledge"* (Ahmed 2000a, 125). This reflected the activists' access to social mobility and capital and aligned them with the imaginaries of the great man—a subject whose aim is to extend networks and collect/utilize information across various projects (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 361). The activists' investment in spreading information further facilitated the (re)production of their positioning within existing structures of power, if not in terms of immediate economic gains, certainly in terms of social and informational capital (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 361). The authorization of proximity as knowledge was in line with the neoliberal privileging of "local representations," best derived from personal experiences as the most valuable sources of information and network generation (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 113). Thus, on the flipside of the activists' critical investment in listening to situated knowledges I mentioned earlier was the hegemonic search for local representations. The continuity between those critical and neoliberal underpinnings of proximity shows that the activists were able to act simultaneously as critical consciousness and as the great man.

The authorization of proximity as knowledge was based not only on activists' access to first-hand information but also through claims to personal connection with the Other, as already visible earlier in the ways they shared information and established affective bonds. Comparing her activism before and during the summer/autumn of 2015, Luiza recalled that before "it was [a]

huge effort" to travel to the reception centers to document the migrants' experience, as activists were often not allowed to enter the facilities. The migrants' presence in public spaces in the summer/autumn of 2015 allowed for "*socializing* with people with so much more ease," which she "was *very happy* about" not only because she could collect information but also because she was able to spend time with the migrants. By linking the need to collect information with the pleasure of socializing, she disclosed continuity between the production of knowledge and the establishment of personal connections, echoing the narratives of other activists and reflecting the neoliberal blurring of the distinction between the more 'professional' (here, activist) encounters and the personal (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 456).

Reflecting on documenting migrants' experiences during the second half of 2015, Laura recalled:

> "What I really liked… was to sit down with the family for like one, one and a half hours. Half an hour would be about the actual interview [collecting information about their experiences] and then the rest …[was] just you know, making stupid jokes about Europeans and that white people are racist. This kind of stuff."

As she further argued, "when you relate to people like this then they also start sharing much more." In Laura's narrative, her proximity with migrants was embedded not only in physical closeness between the Self and the Other but even more so in Laura's assumed ability to transgress the interviewer-interviewed dichotomy and enter into a personal relationship with the Other. This assumption was common among activists and in case of Laura was often done through the subversion of conventions, aligning activists with the imaginaries of critical consciousness (Braidotti 1994). By laughing at herself and other hegemonic subjects, she positioned herself as no longer speaking as a hegemonic subject but rather as someone transgressing her own position to speak with and as the Other (Ahmed 2000b). This claim to more personal relationship with the Other facilitated activists' claim to migrants' situated knowledges ("people … start sharing much more") which served to authorize the local representation acquired by the Self and re-establish the Self as the great man. While presented as critical, this imagined transgression of relations of power

also resonated with imaginaries of the universal transcendent subject, who is fantasized to be able to undo the relations of power between the Self and the Other through both establishing proximity and creating ironic, critical, and reflexive distance from the Self (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000a).

The claim to personal connection with the Other, and thus the authorization of activists' knowledges, was coupled with activists' value driven self-differentiation from other social actors, particularly humanitarians (Chapter IV). Their self-differentiation was established along two lines. First, as I mentioned earlier, they narrated their proximity with migrants as indicative that activists, unlike other social actors, spoke with rather than for the migrants and thus avoided misrepresentation. While driven by critical investments, this narrative located HSP on the continuum of a "saviors of marginality" tradition (Spivak 2012, 61). While activists did not objectify the Other as "in need of help" as humanitarian discourses did, there was nonetheless a "savior" claim to relationality—the Self was saving the Other from hegemonic (mis)representation by offering the Other casual, personal proximity with the Self, the possibility of *becoming one with the Self* (Ahmed 2000a). Proximity as a way of saving the marginalized from hegemonic misrepresentations further authorized proximity by narrating it as a counter-hegemonic.

Secondly, through the invocation of proximity activists established themselves as more knowledgeable than other social actors. Maya, for example, argued that humanitarians "didn't know about the law," unlike activists whose "role [in the second half of 2015] was to explain what Dublin is, how […] [to travel further] etc." She remembered that she "really liked [that] much more" than "giving humanitarian aid" because while sharing knowledge one "could actually have a moment, connection with people." As she recalled with a smile, "there were some very beautiful moments." In the summer/autumn of 2015, the spatial distance/proximity between citizens and migrants was no longer enough to mark the activists' 'advanced' 'access' to those marginalized. With migrants being present in public spaces, the (imagined) proximity to and knowledge about the conditions of marginalization became accessible to a number of actors collecting interviews and documenting the migrants' struggles. Thus, in order to distinguish themselves from other

actors and to continue authorizing proximity as knowledge, activists strengthened their claims to proximity by invoking (imagined) personal relationality with those marginalized ("beautiful moments" (Maya)). The differentiation between activists as knowledgeable (about law and about migrants) and other actors as lacking knowledge reflected the conceptual distinction between the great man and the little people, with little people lacking the skills of mobility, adaptability, flexibility, and open-mindedness to subvert the conventions and to *be* (with) *the Other* the way that the activists were (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). Narratives of proximity were mobilized by the activists in order to claim informational inequality not between citizen and migrant, as the hegemonic discourses would have it, but between activist and other social actors. Thus, activists partook in the production of *inequality of information* as a necessary element of neoliberal capitalism.

In the narratives I have presented so far, the Self was configured as capable of challenging power relations by establishing proximity with the Other and disseminating information. The following narratives reveal a sense doubt and the activists' recognition of the insufficiency of the Self and her dissemination of information vis-à-vis structural inequalities. Reflecting on her experience of conducting interviews, Julia argued that "initially… [she] thought that… [she] can help by listening to… [migrants'] stories." As time passed, she "started seeing that maybe… [she] cannot really do much." She recalled feeling like she was intruding, burdening people with her questions and that the "legal help that… [activists were] giving… [was] minimal…" Faced with the feeling of insufficiency, she argued that the only thing that her activism did was to allow her to "feel… less stupid… [to] know a bit more…" about the conditions of marginalization. She argued: "how I see my activism, is just knowing, for myself." Julia's disclosure of feeling insufficient echoed the narratives of other activists and can be interpreted as an expression of the disappointment in the Self and her powerlessness vis-à-vis systemic violence. It can also be seen as a subversive strategy of critical consciousness aimed at challenging hegemonic imaginaries of the Western Self as the mighty subject able to challenge structural violence. Finally, it can be

interpreted as an expression of the activists' critical self-reflection that allowed the Self to disclose her inabilities and lack of knowledge.

Yet this disclosure of inadequacy, although seemingly marked by the Self's disillusionment in her abilities, did not eradicate the desire for proximity and witnessing. The reformulation of activism as *knowing, for oneself* continued to privilege the Self as the central figure of knowledge production. It also (re)produced the fantasy that it is possible to know *just for oneself*, as though the Self was not implicated in the complex relations of power (re)produced through claims to criticality and knowledge, among others (Kurowska 2020a). Julia's narrative framed the collection of knowledge and experiences as seemingly benevolent or even subversive, allowing the Self to accumulate social and information capital under the seemingly counter-hegemonic narrative of inadequacy and insufficiently and concealing the power of the Self rather than describing its lack. I draw a continuity between narratives that glorified and those that defamed the Self: both in self-congratulatory and in self-defeating tones, the Self remained the primary subject of knowledge production, with such knowledge being authorized through the Self's claim to (imagined) proximity with the Other.

3. Proximity narrated as equality

One of the main goals of HSP was, as Kate argued, to "take the distinction between us and them away"—the desire to challenge the hegemonic construction of difference between the Self and the Other. This desire was practiced by the activists by establishing proximity, understood as togetherness, between the Self and the Other. Activists practiced this proximity through social events, the creation of autonomous spaces, organizing soup kitchens, and mundane and everyday practices, such as joking, playing music, and just hanging out. As Liz, an activist actively involved in organizing the soup kitchens argued, one of the crucial elements of practicing horizontal solidarity and challenging hegemonic discourses had to do with:

> "Doing these mundane things … like cutting vegetables … going day by day, creating that day together … [being] part of the daily life of this tiny society that we [activists and marginalized groups] have created."

Proximity served as a way of putting into practice the activists' broader investments in creating a "better society" (Jess) and showing the possibility of acting and being *together* with migrants, rather than against/for them. The establishment of proximity with the Other through daily mundane practices, collaborations, and friendships (as well as conflicts) was seen as crucial for contributing to social change in that it *embodied the change* that activists wanted to see. It "was a practice that you preach" (Jake), a form of an "everyday activism" (Marta).[99] For activists, proximity offered a space to create affective bonds between the Self and the Other and thus to reconstruct the relationship between Self and the Other from one between citizen and migrant to one that was closer to "kinship" (John). Activists argued that "being a part of … [one's] mundane … life, that kind of make a family" (Liz) and that "it happens a lot that we [activists and migrants] become friends" (Jess). Activists narrated the development of friendship as a disruption of what they framed as hegemonic discourses in which people's identities are determined by bureaucratic categories. Proximity as togetherness became a way of practicing a more equal society, resonating with critical consciousness' investment to "live… up to the challenges of diversity multiculturalism" (Braidotti 2014b, 181). If proximity as way of spreading information aimed at providing migrants with access to resources and advancing their political and economic positioning, proximity as togetherness aimed at advancing migrants' social and cultural recognition.

While cherishing these moments of friendship, activists were careful not to *expect* friendship from those who were marginalized. They saw this type of expectation as reproducing hegemonic relations of power, in which the Other was subjected to the needs of the Self. Thus, proximity as togetherness was also located in the encounters that did not indicate friendship but were nevertheless built around imaginaries of equality. Activists located equality in the moments that

[99] This proximity resonated closely with the activists' interpretations of personal as political and the Self and her personal life as a crucial sites of the counter-hegemonic struggle (Chapter III).

subverted hegemonic tropes of treating the Other as dangerous and/or in need of help (as state and humanitarian discourses would) or approaching the Other with overdone political correctness (as some of the liberal discourses would). Recalling a time when she volunteered in a refugee camp, Diana for example argued that instead of approaching migrants as people who needed help, she approached them as "human being[s]" with whom she joked, quarreled, and just hung out. She argued that this allowed her to treat migrants as her equals despite their confinement and subjugation to the power of the state. Similarly, Jake argued that activists approached migrants the way they would approach any other group of people, with an understanding that "some are good, some are bad."

The critical potential of proximity as togetherness was never questioned by the activists even though activists tended to be "critical, skeptical, questioning" (Jake) regarding most of their (and other actors') other practices (Chapter IV). Their lack of critique towards proximity shows that proximity lay at the core of the activists' critical imaginaries. While the investment in proximity as togetherness was always presented as carrying critical potential, my closer reading of their narratives complicates the interpretation of proximity as togetherness as (only) critical. To do this, I will now supplement the narratives above with Sue, Eli, and Maya's stories which show activists' mobilization of proximity as togetherness across different situations. I first present the stories and then analyze them with alongside the other narratives.

At the time of our meeting, Sue was participating in several political and artistic collaborative projects run together by citizen activists and migrant activists.[100] She argued that behind "the creation… of [a] common project" was both the desire to illuminate the experiences of marginalization and "the ambition… to create more equal meetings" between citizens and migrants. While she recognized that such an ambition was a "very idealized picture," she nevertheless believed that "there… [was] still some truth in it." As she explained:

[100] In the projects in which Sue participated, everyone was referred to as an "activist," proceeded with "migrant" or "citizen" to indicate positioning within structures of power.

> "When you try to create something in common… there are moments of equality… when [legal/racialized] categories are not that important… when the life situations that we don't share are put in the back seat…"

She located these "moments of equality" in "creating … common humor … common ways of speaking … listening to the same songs." As she argued that "working together creates routines that you can joke about."

Eli's argued that proximity—located in daily, practical work such as cooking and renovating shared space—allowed them to challenge the hegemonic construction of difference between the Self and the Other. As she explained during practical work:

> "It doesn't really matter what is your background, you figure out that you are all different, we don't speak the same language, we don't talk in the same way but… we still move things out of the room, even if we are all different."

The final narrative comes from an interview with Maya, who located counter-hegemonic proximity in subversion of convention, facilitating the establishment of casual interaction between the Self and the Other. She described how she collected interviews with migrants during the summer/autumn of 2015 when not only activists but also regular citizens, state officials, humanitarians, and academics were interviewing migrants and documenting their experiences. Differentiating herself from other social actors who she argued treated migrants with curiosity, fear, or pity, she presented herself as someone who managed to establish more equal relationships with the migrants by simply sitting down with them, exchanging jokes, and accepting the food and drinks they offered. As she recalled:

> "I would … first introduce myself and ask if I can sit down and they say 'yes'…. and offer you something …. you have to accept … even though they don't have much … because it changes the power relations completely. And then I would start joking … and then they would start laughing … and then we would start interview."

In her narrative, proximity as togetherness was established through the subversion of convention and the reversal of hegemonic roles: the Self was narrated as no longer being the host but as the guest of the migrant Other. This subversion of convention allowed for further establishment of proximity and equality: the exchange of jokes and laughter was presented by Maya

as a sign of the spontaneity and naturalness of the relationship, no longer structured around unequal relations of power.

These narratives disclosed three co-constitutive dynamics that informed the ways in which proximity as togetherness was configured in activists' narratives. Firstly, proximity with the Other (whether established through collaboration (Sue), practical work (Eli), or subversive strategies (Maya)) was mapped onto imaginaries of equality. It was no longer narrated as a means of contributing to social change (as it was in case of sharing information) but *as the change itself*. Proximity created "moments of equality" (Sue), allowed difference to not matter (Eli), and changed the relations of power completely (Maya). As such, proximity was imagined as and *conflated with equality*. The conflation of proximity with equality was connected with and further advanced the privileging of the Self and her personal life as the primary site of political struggle, as already visible in and facilitated by way the activists distanced themselves from formal politics (Chapter III) and their aversion to grand narratives (Chapter IV). The conflation of proximity with equality also narrated and authorized the presence of the Self and her personal relationship with the Other as quintessential in the struggle against systemic inequalities. On the one hand, this reflected critical consciousness' recognition that the Self is a site of the reproduction of unequal structures of power and thus a site where those structures are to be unpacked, unlearned, and avoided through a commitment to reflexivity and change. On the other hand, it reflected hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism: its privileging of the individual Self as the primary site of interest and primary source of authorization for action and its privileging of personal experiences as the most productive site for generating information and networks (Chouliaraki 2013; Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 113). The conflation of proximity with equality justified a neoliberal imperative for personal experiences by invoking its (imagined) relationship with equality.

Secondly, by conflating proximity with equality, the Self occupied the fragile position of a subject faced with the impossible task of dismantling structural inequalities through personal relationships. On the one hand, this positioning was tainted by constant reminders of the

insufficiency of the Self. As Sue argued, despite the enormous effort put in by the activists to establish "moments of equality," it was still easier to "identify conflicts and power inequalities… problems in… decision making… responsibility… inequalities." As Max argued, HSP was structured around an "inherent disappointment with how things are going and what we do about it" and the necessity to "recognize that there is so many limitations that [activists] always encounter … [that] there is so much … and … so little [one] can do." Constituting the Self as the subject meant being faced with the (impossible) task of dismantling structural inequalities in one's personal life. This marked one element of the limits of HSP, as the existence of the project depended on the Self's personal strength, desires, and needs (Chapter VI). On the other hand, the positioning of the Self and her imaginaries of proximity with the Other as the primary site of dismantling relations of power also narrated the self as a universal transcendent subject capable of not only making but also "unmak[ing] the border between the self and the other" (hooks 1992b, 24; Ahmed 2000a, 124). On the flip side of the "inherent disappointment" was the narrative of "remaining hopeful" (Max), believing that despite the difficulties it was nevertheless possible for the Self to find those moments when "it doesn't matter what is … [one's] background" (Sue).

Imaginaries of the Self as universal transcendent subject transpired from narratives from varying perspectives. Eli acted as universal transcended subject by announcing that one's background does not matter, in the moment when *she felt* that the (constructed) difference and structural inequalities between the Self and the Other do not hinder (*for her*) the possibility of carrying out a practical project. Laura 'unmade' the border by announcing that by subverting convention she single-handedly changed the relations of power "completely." Even Sue, who most openly recognized the fragility of such a fantasy, remained "hopeful": her ambition to create more equal meetings was satisfied by those *moments* when *she felt* that the structural difference between herself and those being marginalized was "put in the back seat." By acting as a universal transcendent subject, the *Self and its personal life were conflated with equality* (Ahmed 2000a). The authorization of the Self and its personal life as equality—read together with activists' invocation

of the personal as political (Chapter III)—formed one of the core paradoxes of HSP. Within these narratives, the personal was both inherently marked as political and elevated to a level where it was imagined to no longer be tainted by the workings of power structures. Thirdly, proximity as togetherness was strictly linked with, made possible by, and further reproduced by how inequality and difference were configured in the activists' narratives. On the one hand, the activists approached inequality and marginalization as a structural problem (Chapters III, IV). On the other hand, they located equality in common humor and ways of speaking, shared music, routines, jokes (Sue), practical work (Eli), accepting gifts, and the subversion of conventions (Maya). They depicted equality as happening in the moments when constructed difference did not matter *(for the Self)*, with such difference being in one's skin color and language (Eli), background (Sue), or location in the structures of power (Maya). These narratives thus equated inequality with constructed difference. This definition was at best an underdeveloped critique and at worst a reproduction of those discourses that insist on constructing and translating difference into inferiority.

Furthermore, they framed (in)equality as residing in the ways in which the individual Self reacted to what was constructed as different than the Self, obscuring the socio-economic and political underpinnings of inequality and reinforcing the centrality of the Self. By proclaiming the establishment of equality in moments of shared mundane practice (listening to music (Sue), cutting vegetables and moving things (Eli), or exchanging jokes (Maya)), the activists not only reproduced the fantasy of Western universal transcendent subject, but also created the impression that inequality is a result of the fact that some people are considered unable to carry out those practices according to hegemonic discourse. This interpretation dangerously echoed imaginaries of Western superiority by positioning the Self as able to discover that the Other, unlike what hegemonic discourses argued, was actually similarly agential to the Self: able to move things, make jokes, collaborate in projects and thus, able to prove to the well-meaning Self that the constructed

difference does not hinder the possibility of togetherness. As Eric argued, reflecting on his meetings with the migrants:

> "People have this image of refugees as this horde, masses, but a lot of people [who] come… are regular people, who have their friends, like to listen to music… I really felt like I could just sit with people and discuss, play… share with each other a bit about our different cultures."

Within such narratives, the Other was subject to the discovery of the Self. Similar to Sue, Eli, and Laura, Eric 'granted' the Other recognition and agency ("they are regular people") while simultaneously mobilizing exotic representations of the Other as embodying what was imagined to be cultural difference. The persistence of narratives of difference and the ways they merged with narratives of togetherness in mundane, casual practices disclose the slippages between narratives of proximity as carrying counter-hegemonic potential and narratives of proximity which serve to domesticate the Other, translating those who are in the hegemonic discourses constructed as "different" into predictable and familiar (Huggan 2001, 14).

By intertwining narratives of difference (that does not matter and yet persists) and those of proximity and mundaneness as a space where the Self and the Other become "we" (Sue), HSP was positioned along the continuum of multicultural and cosmopolitan discourses. Yet, unlike in the liberal multicultural discourses that activists were critical of,[101] in HSP the inclusion of the Other was not located on the level of *society* and narrated through imaginaries of diversity. Rather, as already discussed in detail, HSP positioned the inclusion of the Other in the *individual Self*. This shift from society to the Self, while seemingly critical in its rejection of the notion of 'society' as the primary imagined community, in fact further reproduced multicultural discourses that take as their focal point narratives about the hegemonic Self and the ways she engages with the (constructed) difference (of the Other).

[101] In my interviews, activists never used the language of multiculturalism and diversity. Within the critical paradigm in which they operated "multiculturalism, with its apolitical celebration of cultural diversity" was not seen as a "satisfactory model […] for an ethical encounter with difference" (Vrasti 2013, viii) (Introduction, Chapter II).

Inclusion located in the Self was facilitated by imaginaries of shared humanity. This shared humanity was inscribed in both open fantasies of engaging with "human beings" (Diana) and in subversive narratives that imagined the reversal of hegemonic discourses, including liberal ones, as a way of (re)establishing equality. For example, Agne argued that she was able to establish closeness with the migrants *because* she rejected political correctness. As she explained, when "a human being… tells me about his culture and his city … I love it … I really don't think about it [being politically correct]." To think too much about it would make her unable to be "instinctive" and natural with people. Thus, instead of being careful about the way she spoke, she preferred to be "*politically incorrect together* [with those marginalized] … make… fun of politically correct norms … break… the norms together… make… fun of each other's cultures." Proximity as togetherness was thus located in the *Self's* rejection of politically correct language as constraining and limiting ("too rigid" as Agne argued) for *her experience* of the encounter with the Other (according to her desire to be natural and spontaneous). Within this narrative, the Self is once again reinforced as mobile, flexible, and adjustable, freed from the constrains (also of liberal discourses). It fantasizes that its subversive strategy challenges structures of power, while in fact obscuring them. In the narratives that conflated proximity with equality, the Self took a central position while the Other was a vanishing point—her voice was either subsumed under the imagined "we" that the Self was invested in creating (Sue), silenced (Eli/Laura) or further narrated as the different Other (Eric, Agne). This is not to claim that the marginalized people with whom the activists engaged had no possibility of challenging these relations of power, either by subverting conventions or asserting that categories did not matter. But it is to argue that access to subverting conventions and/or refusing difference was not equally distributed between activists and those they came in "solidarity" with, marking the crucial inequality in access to power between activists and those being marginalized. Within these unequal relations of power, the Self more often occupied the position of being able to decide how much the relationship could transgress dominant discourses: from those which were liberal and politically correct to those which were xenophobic and

exclusionary. In summary, narratives of proximity as togetherness (in collaboration, mundane practices, casual encounters, and subversion of convention) reinforced the centrality of the Self by 'granting' the Other access to shared humanity. This domesticated difference in a manner that made it "comprehensible" (Huggan 2002, 14) ("we are all different" (Eli)) without at the same time removing its "capacity to surprise" (Huggan 2002, 14) ("a human being… tells me about his culture and his city… and I love it" (Agne)).

4. Proximity and difference as experience

So far, I have shown how activists' narratives around proximity reinforced the centrality of the Self and were implicated in the construction and domestication of difference. In this section, I further argue that proximity was mobilized and imagined in activists' narratives as an *experience*. this experience was often presented by the activists as the Self's exposure to the (constructed difference) of the Other and employed in activists' narratives of self-development. The invocation of proximity as experience is closely connected with and further develops the analysis from Chapter 4 where I discussed the activists' invocation of "selfish reasons" as their motivation for joining HSP. Proximity as experience discloses continuity between the activists' critical search for proximity and the neoliberal imperative of self-development. Thus, proximity as experience helps to further illuminate the interconnectedness between activists' critical aspirations and the articulation of neoliberal subjectivity.

Kate argued that she didn't become an activist only "to help people, or… to contribute to the more equal society." While those were values that she identified with, they were not her "main drivers." Instead, what "kept [her]… going" were "selfish reasons": the desire "to learn, to challenge… [her]self" and, most importantly, to "go out of… [her] comfort zone." It was common among activists to list their desire for self-development and the need to challenge one's comfort zone as reasons for their engagement in the project. If narratives of proximity as knowledge and as equality took the relationship between the Self and the Other as their focus, narratives of proximity as an experience fundamentally shifted the focus to the Self. In Kate's narrative,

proximity referred to the distance (or lack thereof) between HSP and the personal benefits that activists derived from the project. As she argued that if she did "something that… [was] completely for the sake of somebody else" than she would be able to "help with a couple of things, but… [she] wouldn't… [do] that for a couple years." In order for activism to be sustainable for her in the long-term, she needed to be personally invested in the project, not merely because of someone else's well-being but because of what the experience of the project gave her. Learning, challenging herself, and going out of her comfort zone were the main motivations, echoing the narratives of most of the activists I talked to. As Eli said "what makes [activism] interesting" was that it allowed her "take… [her]self a bit out from… [her] bubble… to put…[her]self out of [her] comfort zone" and to learn something in the process. Similar views were shared by Jess, who argued that it is "really nice to just leave… [her] comfort zone" and that activism allows her to do that.

The activists' openness about their personal motivations can be interpreted as a purposeful, critical strategy aimed at showing that they were honest about their personal motivations and aware of their participation in neoliberal capitalism. Striving for honesty in this way can be interpreted as an articulation of the artistic critique of capitalism: an expression of discomfort with partaking in capitalist structures "while hypocritically invoking morality" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 23). It can be also interpreted as a way of subverting conventions and refusing to frame the Other as a recipient of help and pity. While marked with the desire to subvert conventions, these narratives were also in line with the features of the great man, who, while working towards the imaginaries of the common good, only engages in those projects in which he not only gives but also takes (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 13). The imaginaries of learning and challenging oneself inscribed in these narratives thus fit neatly with the neoliberal imperative that self-development is the most crucial "personal project underlying all others," part of the justification of capitalism under its neoliberal spirit. (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 111). Thus, in explaining their participation in the counter-hegemonic project, activists often used the same logic of justification (self-development) inscribed in neoliberal discourses, blurring the difference between hegemonic and the counter-

hegemonic projects (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 111). The shift towards the Self and its self-development also created a possibility for discontinuing participation in the project if it no longer fulfilled the Self's need for self-development. In other words, the subversive strategy of claiming that one engages because one can develop herself also allowed activists to justify their disengagement when the project no longer offered "attractive, exciting life prospects" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 24).

The configuration of proximity as a way of pursuing self-development was further coupled in activists' narratives with the imaginaries of constructed difference. Jess suggested that coming together with migrants was important for "society as a whole" because it held the promise "to reduce hate" by allowing people to "learn about other cultures." She continued by saying that this proximity was also important for her personally because thanks to it she "learned so much… developed so much… changed [her]… views … opened." This personal process of change was closely tied with the construction of the Other as different. As she argued: "If I only keep my European friends, it is so easy, so smooth, so unexciting." Juxtaposing her "unexciting" European friends with the HSP project, she argued that that HSP offered a much greater "variety" of cultures. It was thanks to this variety, she asserted, that she did not "need to travel much" in order to encounter a diversity of cultures. As she said:

> "We can stay here [in the EU] and become so much more rich [through the encounter with migrants] … It's small things, like learning [from migrants] how you live in another country or … trying [different] food, it's nice to share…"

In her narrative, proximity with the Other, both on the societal and personal level, echoed multicultural narratives in which the constructed difference of the Other was to be consumed in order to enrich the life of the Self (hooks 1992b). These imaginaries of proximity with the Other were no longer depicted part of critical, counter-hegemonic struggle. Instead, they were mapped onto hegemonic narratives of self-development and the exotic construction of the Other, in that proximity with the different Other was employed at the service of the hegemonic Self.

The multicultural fantasy of consuming (constructed) difference blended with neoliberal imaginaries of self-development in such a way that constructed difference emerged at the core of activists' narratives of self-development. Recalling her experience of volunteering in one of the refugee camps, Diana argued that she was taken aback by "how amazing people [migrants] are to each other, how much they support each other, how giving they are… even when they have nothing." Being there only for a month, she recalled that she "learned so much," just by being there and talking to people. As she said, "it gave … [her] a life lesson that … [she] deeply needed." In her narrative, the Other was exotified as poor and kind, serving as a source of inspiration. Proximity with this exotified Other was necessary for the Self to experience and appreciate what she did not know before: for example, the fetishized communal life of the Other. I heard similar imaginaries of difference holding promise for enriching the life of the Self in Eli's narrative. She described one of the crucial reasons that she enjoyed being an activist as being able to meet various people and learn from these encounters. As she said, whenever she got "a bit bored … [felt] comfortable too much" she knew that "something …[was] wrong" and that she needed to "to hang out with people … [she didn't] know, who … [didn't] speak the same language." It was because, as she argued, "that's the people you can learn something from." The constructed Other was fetishized into one that was 'fuller' and thus able to fill a lack on the side of the hegemonic Self. These narratives where in line with what hooks problematized as the "contemporary longing for the 'primitive' […] expressed by the projection onto the Other of a sense of plenty, bounty, a field of dreams" (hooks 1992b, 25).

These narratives that merged imaginaries of difference and self-development disclosed the fragility of proximity as equality and the fantasy that difference "doesn't really matter" (Eli). The flip side of the imagined erasure of difference was a narrative in which constructed difference was *exactly* what mattered. The narratives of proximity with the Other took part in the "the exoticist production of otherness" which involved both constructing and domesticating that difference (Huggan 2001, 14). As such, the narratives of proximity allowed for the marginalized Other to be

"structured in a way which makes […] [it] comprehensible and possibly predictable' […] (Foster 1982/3:21), while at the same time maintaining its "capacity to create surprise" (Huggan 2001, 14) so that the Self can challenge and enrich herself contact. The "unmaking" of the border between the Self and the Other, as analyzed earlier, was closely tied with the construction of such borders. Constructed difference was in fact a quintessential feature of the Other. It was through contact with and consumption of this difference that the Self was able to go through the process of change. Thus, activists' stories resonated with "contemporary Western culture […] imbued with fantasies of becoming"—one of which being, as Ahmed further argues, a narrative where "becoming is offered as a narrative of proximity to strangers" (Ahmed 2000a, 119–20).

Proximity with constructed difference likewise allowed the Self to avoid being "bored" (Eli) or having a life that is "unexciting" (Jess). These statements echoed hooks' argument that "difference can seduce precisely because the mainstream imposition of sameness is a provocation that terrorizes" (hooks 1992a, 23). On the one hand, striving to disturb the "mainstream imposition of sameness" can be read in line with the critical consciousness' desire to challenge the hegemony of the privileged subject, the "aporetic repetition of sameness" (Braidotti 2014b, 181). Yet, when such a challenge to sameness is evoked by privileged subjects through narratives of self-development, the Other is reproduced as different and sameness is not destabilized. Rather than 'including' the Other by challenging the sameness, the Self constructs the Other as different and marks it as a space that, through the practice of proximity, can be visited in order to enrich the Self. Likewise, as the Self ventures into the margins as a way of challenging her comfort zone, she continued to hold access to deciding on the scope of the possible proximity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that narratives of proximity were mobilized by the activists as a necessary element to pursue imaginaries of equality and justice, both by sharing information with and about those being marginalized and through daily practices of establishing physical and emotional closeness between the Self and the Other. I complicated the reading of this proximity

as only critical. I showed the slippages between critical imaginaries of proximity as a means of challenging the redistribution of power and information and listening to situated knowledges, and hegemonic imaginaries of proximity as a tool for developing local representations, collecting information, and developing networks (as inscribed in neoliberal capitalism). Within this framing, proximity was authorized as knowledge. I also showed the slippages between narratives of proximity as a way of establishing a sense of togetherness between the Self and the Other and narratives of proximity that reinforced the hegemonic fantasy of the Western Self as a universal transcendent subject capable of (un)making the difference between the Self and the Other through the invocation of shared humanity. In these narratives, proximity was conflated with equality. I also argued that these narratives of proximity as a way of striving towards equality related to the narratives in which proximity with the Other was mobilized by the Self as means of challenging one's comfort zone and self-development. While undertaken with a desire to subvert conventions, this type of proximity rested on the construction and sustenance of the Other as different and the alignment of the Self with imaginaries of the neoliberal great man, for whom self-development configured as most important life project. Thus, the narratives of proximity made up a space of the possible slippage between critical investments in social justice (with proximity serving as a tool in the struggle for equality) and the hegemonic goal of reproducing one's position within the structures of power (with proximity serving as a tool for self-development and accumulation of informational capital). The continuities between these critical and neoliberal underpinnings of proximity meant that activists acted simultaneously as critical consciousness and as the great man, showing the entanglements of the activists' political subjectivities.

One of the important arguments of this chapter is that narratives of proximity disclosed and further (re)produced the centrality of the Self and its personal life as a defining element of the activists' political subjectivity. The Self was configured as a central figure of both the counter-hegemonic search for equality and the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism and its imperative for self-development. The chapter also introduced the question of redistribution of

resources, visible in the activists' investment to redistribute information and the question of affect, visible in the activists' investment in establishing togetherness between the Self and the Other. The centrality of the Self, the question of affect, and activists' investment in redistributing resources are the focal points of the final chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter VI. Between care for the Other and care for the Self: (Re)distribution of resources

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze the contours of the activists' political subjectivities as reflected in their narratives pertaining to the (re)distribution of resources, including basic resources, knowledge-based resources, privileges, and affect-based resources.[102] In their narratives, activists simultaneously recognized and critiqued people's unequal access to resources and expressed an investment in sharing their own resources with those affected by the unequal (re)distribution (without setting conditions for receiving support). They also recognized and negotiated their own access to resources and (re)production of their positioning in local and global hierarchies of power. The chapter shows that the activists' articulations of the (re)distribution of resources (and the value attached to them) was constituted by and further reproduced neoliberal privileging of the Self vis-à-vis collective struggles. This privileging was possible due to a series of slippages and continuities between the activists' counter-hegemonic investments and their hegemonic positioning.

This chapter is divided into 4 sections. In section 1, I analyze narratives in which the (re)distribution of resources was part of structural critique of social inequalities. I analyze the activists' problematization of housing and mobility as two unequally distributed resources and argue that this problematization reflected the activists' sensitivity towards both local and global articulations of neoliberal capitalism. I also analyze the activists' rejection of conditionality, which, while critical in its outset, also partook in the reproduction of the neoliberal aversion towards institutions and social responsibility. In section 2, I analyze how the activist privileged the (re)distribution of knowledge-based resources over basic resources. This both challenged

[102] This grouping is analytical rather than a reflection of distinctions made by the activists. In practice, there were many continuities and tensions between the ways that activists presented, valued, and/or criticized resources which belonged to different (or the same) group(s).

hegemonic distributions of power and contributed to the (re)production of the neoliberal imaginaries of the self-sustaining subject and further weakening of collective struggles. In section 3, I analyze the activists' understandings of 'privileges' as resources to be mobilized for the support of the Other. I show the continuity between the language of privileges and how the activists' articulation of these privileges contributed to neutralizing social inequalities in the activists' narratives as reflecting broader discourses of neoliberal capitalism. In the section 4, I analyze the activists' investments in providing marginalized groups with affective resources. The activists' narratives established affective continuity between the Self and the Other as the basis of the solidarity struggle. At the same time, the (re)distribution of affect between the Self and the Other was facilitated through narratives of self-care, a therapeutic technology of neoliberal capitalism (Illouz 2007), and blurred the boundaries between narratives of self-development and embracing one's privileges. As I will outline, these narratives eventually authorized the activists to withdraw from the solidarity struggle and allowed them to reproduce their advanced positioning within hegemonic structures of power. Thus, I show the slippages between the invocation of affect as a critical tool for establishing solidarity (care for the Other) and the mobilization of affect as a tool to authorize the Self's withdrawal from the solidarity project (self-care). Furthermore, the chapter draws continuities between the neutralization/(re)production of privileges and narratives of self-care, linking these with the narratives of self-development which I analyzed in Chapter V. I argue that narratives of self-care lie at the continuum of narratives of self-development and self-benefit—mediating the activists' positioning within the existing structures of power.

I interpret the activists' narratives around the (re)distribution of resources against the backdrop of the shift towards the Self as the primary site of political struggles (chapters III, IV, V) and the aversion to formal politics (chapter III). The activists' narratives reflected and amplified the consequences of locating counter-hegemonic struggles in the personal lives of subjects positioned high in local and global structures of power and outside of formal politics and institutions.

1. Structural critique and the rejection of conditionality

An important element of HSP was the (re)distribution of resources, which activists approached on both theoretical and practical levels. In line with their broader investment in developing systemic critiques of social inequality, the activists argued that people's unequal access to resources was structural, rather than a matter of personal (mis)fortune. At the theoretical level, the activists (re)distribution project was structured around two propositions: they saw housing and mobility as crucial resources and, when practicing (re)distribution themselves, they rejected setting conditions that would define who was eligible for support or how such support was to be used.

While housing policies were not a focal point for HSP, the activists often mentioned them as a crucial element of a systemic approach to the question of marginalization. As Olga argued:

> "We [activists] were always concerned about city planning, gentrification. [We wanted to] demonstrate that something is wrong in the city when the city builds houses that you can't…rent, only flats that you can buy… When it's destroying old buildings that are still good and you could renovate them and rent really cheap…"

As she further elaborated, only by having secure access to housing could a person overcome the conditions of marginalization. She emphasized the continuities between marginalization, lack of affordable housing, and gentrification, and questioned a profit-oriented approach to resources, reflecting activists' proximity with leftist thinking. By drawing a connection between the (re)production of social inequalities and the state's administrative decisions, she articulated what was absent in many activists' critiques of the state-capital nexus (Chapter 3): the role of the state in regulating the profit generation practices of neoliberal capitalism.

While activists described housing as a state responsibility, they approached mobility as a global resource that was unevenly distributed between people across borders. They argued that unequal access to mobility was further linked with unequal access to other resources: education, job markets, and welfare structures. Critical of this inequality, activists saw mobility as a matter of global justice and postulated that everyone should have equal access to mobility and settlement regardless of political, social, and/or economic status. This approach on the one hand reflected

the activists' awareness of the global dimensions of neoliberal capitalism and on the other hand reflected their embeddedness in neoliberal discourses aimed at facilitating mobility.[103] Indeed, the activists' understandings of housing and mobility disclosed ambiguities around state versus global imaginaries in the activists' counter-hegemonic stances.

With regard to the second proposition, in order to ensure that their own practices were in line with their broader systemic critiques, activists structured their (re)distribution practices around a rejection of conditionality. This rejection differentiated them from humanitarians (Chapter IV) and included refusing to set conditions that defined who could participate in HSP and who was eligible for support as well as conditions around how support was to be used by recipients. As Iza argued, HSP was open for everyone to join. She also emphasized that activists refused to abide by the hegemonic differentiation between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' recipients. Reflecting on the logic behind (re)distribution of information, she argued:

> "[Our project] was … highly politicized because we were giving legal advice to people who would otherwise be ignored by other NGOs. We did not care if people were criminals etc.; we just gave them the best legal help we could."

This approach was part of the solidarity struggle, which she explained "means I fully support [migrants'] struggle for wanting to start their life here, I do not care what is the reason for that, economic, or political." Similar refusals to evaluate people's 'deservingness' of were present in Beth's and Eli's narratives. As Beth argued:

> "The idea [behind HSP] is to not distinguish so much between the groups … the goal is to approach the groups that don't … get help from the government, … that have … the worst position and are outside the system. And that is often refugees or people without papers. But it can also be [Roma populations]."

Eli, who provided marginalized groups with legal support as well as information about housing and employment possibilities, asserted: "We really try to give knowledge… equal for everyone." Activists presented their rejection of conditionality as part of their critique of the

[103] On the study of ways in which critical investments in mobility overlap with the imaginaries of the speed and mobility inscribed in neoliberal capitalism, see for example: (Hoofd 2005; 2012).

system. They argued that having a criminal record, an experience of homelessness, and/or lack of legal documents etc. were often already effects of the existing structural inequalities. Using these factors to reject requests for support meant (re)producing the discourses that framed some people as ineligible for protection in the first place. The activists' rejection of conditionality aimed to destabilize hegemonic eligibility discourses that controlled, excluded, and disciplined marginalized groups. It also aimed to show the inclusiveness and openness of HSP—part of activists' desire to create a sense of togetherness between people across political and social categories.

The activists also refused to set expectations regarding how (re)distributed resources were to be used. Differentiating between activists and humanitarians, Jane argued that:

> "They [humanitarians] say: 'I will give you the resources, but I will also tell you how to live, how to be, I will make priorities for you.'[104] We don't do that to people... if I think positively … what we are doing [is] giving people resources without telling them how to spend them."

These narratives reflected activists' alignment with critical consciousness' desire to "shift away from hegemony" and "live up to the challenges of diversity multiculturalism" (Braidotti 1994, 5; 2014b, 181)—to imagine a socio-economic and political organization of life no longer based on marginalization and exploitation for the benefit of those in the center of power.

At the same time, the lack of conditionality they articulated echoed hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism. Firstly, it corresponded with imaginaries of the great man who "renounces exercising any form of domination over others […]" and who "[does] not impose any rules or objectives" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 122). Instead of imposing authority, the great man incorporates others into his own networks by "inspir(ing) in others their own dynamism, […] awaken(ing) them to themselves […] by making them collaborators and authors" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 122). As I analyze in detail in section 3, while activists did not create explicit conditionality, they nevertheless were vocal about the favored outcomes of their (re)distribution practices.

[104] I analyzed this quote in Chapter IV in relation to the activists' self-differentiation from humanitarians.

Secondly, the imaginaries of non-conditionality not only applied to those who were marginalized but were also extended to activists and EU subjects in terms of who could participate in HSP. Laura, for example, argued that while she would like to see more EU citizens joining HSP, she was also very "cautious about assigning political agency to people." As she explained, "if someone wants to be political that's awesome. But … not everyone can engage, have mental space for it. Maybe because you have shitty story yourself. You don't have capacities." Following a similar line of thought, Eli argued that one of the advantages of HSP was its flexibility and openness with regard to who could join. This flexibility and openness applied to both members of marginalized groups and to the more privileged participants (i.e., activists). As she explained:

> "People…can just come… [to the organization] to help, for two, three hours, and that's it. As soon as you come…you are an activist because you are helping us …. Even if you just come and bring us a cake, I call you an activist because you are contributing to the movement and I think that is very important, that everyone can be an activist."[105]

The reluctance to impose expectations on 'privileged' subjects corresponded with the activists' aversion to institutions and formal politics (Chapter III). In their reluctance towards authority, activists were aligned with imaginaries of the great man who avoids being "trapped by institutions, with all the various obligations that entails […] [or] entangled in a web of responsibilities" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 122). Reluctance towards any imposition of authority worked to sustain the neoliberal imperative of mobility and flexibility.

This approach also contributed to framing social justice as a matter of one's personal decision, rather than as a matter of more collective responsibility. It furthered the centrality of the Self, marking the extent of engagement in the counter-hegemonic struggle as a personal decision. This shows one of the paradoxes of HSP, namely way the project simultaneously recognized the systemic underpinnings of social inequalities and yet located the solution to those inequalities in individual practices and decisions. Activists were able to develop systemic critiques (Chapter III)

[105] This flexibility did not mean that everyone who joined had equal access to decision-making processes and/or sensitive information.

but struggled to imagine systemic alternatives that, through the imposition of authority, would limit the freedoms of an individual. Locating the individual and her freedoms at the core of the activists' political imaginaries aligned HSP with neoliberalism's prioritization of individual freedoms vis-à-vis formal institutions and authority. It likewise reproduced the fantasy of the Self as a universal transcendent subject capable of transcending hegemonic discourses (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000a). This approach obscured the fact that socio-economic and political systems are not 'simply' external conditions that can be transgressed by an individual, but rather shape and constrain one's material conditions and political subjectivities.

2. "To give people tools": The (re)distribution of basic and knowledge-based resources

Alongside developing structural critiques of the unequal (re)distribution of resources, activists were also invested in concrete (re)distribution practices. The activists (re)distributed both basic resources (food, clothes, toiletry, money, housing) and knowledge-based resources. Depending on the context, activists had different access to and were differently engaged with the (re)distribution of basic resources (chapter 3), yet regardless were united in framing the (re)distribution of basic resources as less valuable than the (re)distribution of other resources. The devaluation of basic resources was not an open dismissal of their importance, but rather a value-driven assertion that other types of resources were *more political* (i.e., more critically valuable (Chapters III; IV)). As Max asserted: "we [activists] … realized that … political [activism] might be in the longer term more important than giving out donations, which is what other organizations are already doing." Activists attached value to the (re)distribution of basic resources when this (re)distribution could be understood as a political act—or as means, rather than the end goal, for HSP's greater political project. As Olga argued: "it's important [for us] that we don't… become [a] humanitarian organization that just gives food, that's not what we want… there is more [to the organization] than just food." As activists often explained, a pure focus on basic resources ran the risk of dehumanizing marginalized groups and subjugating them to the power of the state-capital

nexus by framing them as eligible only for the relief of their basic needs (rather than for example access to power). As such, a focus on basic needs alone deepened those groups' dependency on relief, which was in turn further mobilized by the state-capital nexus to discredit and exclude those who were marginalized.

The activists' reluctance towards (re)distributing (only) basic resources went hand-in-hand with a focus on (re)distributing of knowledge-based resources. As Kate argued "giving food is one thing… giving advice, information, is another thing…. when you give information, you take a very big responsibility for someone's life." Filip praised activists for "actively helping people who are in the asylum process or went through the process and not got accepted" by providing them with legal support, as well as information about various support groups, job opportunities, and housing networks. Sue, an academic who was researching migration, recalled:

> "We tried to open academic platform to people who usually don't have access to it, so we did a lot of lectures, seminars, research… conferences, together with those with the experience of being undocumented."

Opening this academic platform allowed migrants to share their experiences of marginalization and questions to and challenge academics working on the migration-related topics. Knowledge-based resources encompassed information, access to networks, and access to platforms within the academia-activism nexus through which marginalized groups could reach broader public. Implicitly, activists also framed the very possibility of participating in HSP and becoming an activist as a resource. Activists saw the (re)distribution of knowledge-based resources as challenging the hegemonic (re)production of marginalization (Chapter V) by allowing the Other to advance their positioning within structures of power, rather than 'simply' alleviating immediate suffering. In Chapter V, I complicated the reading that the activists' focus on sharing information was (only) critical by showing its correspondence with how information, networks, and connections configure as a crucial form of capital within neoliberal capitalism. In this chapter, I further complicate the activists' focus on knowledge-based resources by showing that this redistribution of knowledge was linked with their investment in spreading HSP's beliefs and values,

which in turn resonated with neoliberal imaginaries about self-sustaining subject—thus shaping the subjectivities of the marginalized in line with the imaginaries of neoliberal capitalism. Activists' narratives around the (re)distribution of knowledge-based resources also allow me to complicate the assumed lack of conditionality within HSP.

While reluctant to exercise authority, activists were invested in imagining and advocating for social change. Eli clearly articulated one strong stance among the activists by saying "we [activists] are spreading… our beliefs and vision." They disseminated their values by building solidarity structures, creating (re)distributive practices, forming alternative lifestyles, and showing that it was possible to form close relationships with people who were designated as the Others in hegemonic discourses (Chapter 5). While activists often identified the need to transform the system and society, my close reading of their narratives reveals that HSP also took part in discourses placed the burden of change on marginalized people (i.e., that the people must change in order to have access to power). HSP's investment in spreading values and believes underlines this—debunking any fantasy that the activists' (re)distribution of knowledge-based resources was neutral in terms of political imaginaries.

Reflecting on HSP's (re)distributive practices, Jess argued that activists didn't want to serve only as facilitators of the (re)distribution of resources. Rather, as she explained:

> "[We want] to find out if [people] want to be engaged and to tell them a bit more about us … if [marginalized groups] want they can just come and get some information and … leave but if they want … they can also help in the organization … get engaged … be a part of something, part of providing for better society."

The juxtaposition of "just coming and getting some information" with the possibility of being "part of providing for better society" allocated value in a manner that, without setting conditionality, HSP nevertheless managed to indicate that it is 'better' for marginalized groups to stay engaged with HSP than to 'just' take resources. The establishment of incentives rather than open conditionality resonated with the features of the great man, who integrates others into his networks because he can "inspire in others their own dynamism" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018,

122). The incentive-driven approach also reflected how power is concealed under neoliberal discourses. The lack of openly-stated conditionality did not mean that the Other wasn't encouraged to align itself with the activists' project to avoid further marginalization. Thus, in line with neoliberal discourses, activists 'renounced any form of authority' and instead encouraged the Other to internalize the projects' values.

This was particularly prominent in Eli's story. Explaining HSP's investment in providing marginalized groups with knowledge-based resources, she argued:

> "We want to help … the migrants … but … the first thing we want to do is … to make them activists. We are not like a welfare organization. If we were ... we will try to gather as much money as possible and give it to the people. But … we believe that making [marginalized groups] activists is the best we can do for them. We are having … courses, [once or twice a year] we … gather all the active members of [the group], and we talk about the history of … [the group], we are also doing … workshops about what does activism mean for you, what does the revolution mean for you … so we really try to give knowledge"

Her narrative disclosed what was often implicit: framing participation in HSP itself as a resource and an investment in 'politicizing' marginalized people (according to activists' imaginaries of what being political means). The Other was encouraged to become like the Self, which was framed as beneficial for the Other. While Eli's narrative of becoming an activist was linked with imaginaries of revolution (indicating leftism), my close reading of the activists' narratives reveals that their imaginaries of what's 'best' also resonated with neoliberal discourses, particularly imaginaries of self-sustaining subject. This is not to simply argue that their investment in spreading values or shaping subjectivities was the extent of HSP's activism. Rather, it is to argue that the values that activists hoped migrants would internalize overlapped with values promoted under neoliberal capitalism.

Eli's assertion "making them activists is the best we can do for them"[106] aligned HSP with disciplinary mechanisms of neoliberal discourses. These discourses insist that the individual internalize hegemonic imaginaries and engage in the practice of self-governance under the guise

[106] This assertion was also implicated in establishing a relationship between the Self and the Other in which the Other was constructed as inferior to the Self and thus subjected to Self's imaginaries of empowerment and agency.

of narratives of self-care, self-improvement, and self-benefiting. Thus, in the neoliberal spirit of (social) responsibility being shifted from institutions to the Self, here it was no longer the system but the Other that was to go through a process of transformation. The following narratives further demonstrate that activists' imaginaries over what was 'best' for those being marginalized were often in line with the neoliberal imperative of the individual as an agent of her own change towards becoming a self-sustaining subject.

For example, elaborating on the importance of (re)distributing knowledge, Jess argued:

> "It is so important that [marginalized groups] know their rights because otherwise I will always stay superior. But if they know their rights, I can lift them up and we can be on the same level … It's really nice how people can be lifted and be part of the same context and then we can become friends."

I heard about a similar desire to 'lift' people up in Sue's narratives. Reflecting on some shared artistic and political projects that activists developed with migrants, she listed the benefits that providing migrants with access to knowledge-based resources provided for the project. As she argued, at the start of the project its participants "were… segregated between people who were receiving the support and people who were supporting." Critical of these unequal relations of power, activists were:

> "Trying to create something else … [we had a] discussion about representation, visibility, backing away and giving the stage for people to speak for themselves, giving the tools to give voice."

These practices, as she argued, resulted with the hoped for "moments of equality… when categories are not that important… when the life situations that we don't share are put in the back seat and there are other things, for example this common project."[107] The metaphor of providing tools as a means of establishing equality was also present in Filip's narrative. Describing the ways in which (re)distribution of knowledge-based resources allowed for HSP to challenge inequalities,

[107] In Chapter V, I analyzed this quote with regard to the ways in which HSP operated on the imaginaries that authorized proximity as equality.

he argued that "at the beginning [of the meeting with a marginalized person] you always have this kind of caretaker and cared for relationship." In order to overcome such dynamics:

> "You have to give people the right tools … and … get to know each other a little bit … and then a more friendship like … approach can start … where you don't just talk about where do you need help but you talk about anything and then you can basically ....I mean you exchange experiences."

He also argued that this approach was better than simply providing for people's needs:

> "If … [marginalized groups] don't have the resources and they get resources from the state it doesn't change anything in the relationship between them and the people who are helping them on the ground."

This lack of 'change' (encapsulated by the helping-being helped dichotomy) was seen by the activists as problematic in that it (re)produced the subordination of the Other to the Self (Chapter IV). On the one hand, the narratives of giving tools resonated with broader critical discourses aimed at challenging unequal structures of power. Nikita Dhawan, following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, argues that social equality and "decolonialization is […] about enabling subaltern to access ['master tools']" rather than "simply [about] organizing material goods for the suffering classes" (2013, 157). While driven by this type of critical imaginary, the activists' articulation of 'giving tools' requires careful scrutiny due to its compliance with the broader discourses of neoliberal capitalism. Jess, Sue, and Filip's narratives echoed Eli's earlier reference to facilitating an 'awakening' of political agency in those who were marginalized, shaping the Other according to the activists' political views. I argue that the activists' political subjectivities were constructed around tensions between recognizing the necessity to attend to social inequalities as a systemic problem (rather than individual responsibility) and the reluctance to act as "providers" and take on the role of a "welfare organization" (Eli). This tension can be further translated into a tension between an investment in the counter-hegemonic struggle for social justice and the unavoidable embeddedness in hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism, with its aversion to social responsibility. Confronted with this tension, activists tried to attend to social inequalities by 'lifting' the Other up and providing her with tools, thus supporting her in becoming self-sustaining. As

Sara Rushing argues, within discourses of neoliberal capitalism, narratives of 'tools' aim at "offloading […] responsibilities to [those] vulnerable and dependent […] in the name of self-determination" (Rushing 2016), thus delegating some of the responsibility for social inequalities onto the Other. Any inability of the individual Other to use these tools would in turn establish future experiences of marginalization as no longer only a matter of structural inequality but also a failure on the part of the individual. The provision of tools discourse thus ran the risk of focusing primarily on eliminating discrepancies between the conditions of a *particular* Self and a *particular* Other, rather than lobbying for systemic solutions to broader inequalities. Crucially, prioritizing 'giving tools' also freed the Self from being the one who is obliged to provide support. It allowed activists to simultaneously support the Other and remain free from the "web of responsibilities towards the other people," in line with the features of the great man (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 124). Thus, the flip side of the critical refusal to (re)produce the Other as being "cared for" was the hegemonic reluctance to take on the role of a caretaker both at an individual level and through welfare institutions. It thus corresponded with neoliberal discourses that diminish the importance of collective, institutionalized responsibility over the care and instead attached value to individual freedom from social obligations.

The above narratives also describe a perception of needing to eliminate dependency to facilitate the possibility of friendship (Chapter V). The linking between structural inequalities and affective formations further distorted the relationship between the structural and the personal, allowing activists to partially locate the question of structural inequalities in the affective relationship between the Self and the Other. As I argue in the final section of this chapter, it was precisely narratives of affect and its (re)distribution that later served to mediate between activists' investment in continuing counter-hegemonic, collective struggles and their needs to disengage from the project, either due to psychological 'burnout' or the need to focus on their own career or personal life.

3. (Re)distribution of privileges

Alongside basic provisions and knowledge-based resources, activists also framed privileges as resources to be (re)distributed. The notion of privilege was used among activists to indicate one's critical awareness of the advantages one holds due to her positioning within existing structures of power. This usage resonated with broader critical discourses both in and outside of academia, in which the notion of privilege is employed to in discussions of oppression, with a focus on those who (often involuntarily, unconsciously, and "solely by virtue of their membership" in group (Monahan 2014, 73)) benefits from and sustains oppressive structures of power (Monahan 2014; Rothenberg 2002; Sullivan 2006; Young and Allen 2011; Camfield 2016; McIntosh 2019). Accordingly, activists used the notion of privilege to indicate their awareness of how they were embedded in and benefited from the very structures of power that they aimed to oppose. Kate for example disclosed this awareness by saying: "I am … super privileged, when I say we are all in the same shit I don't mean that we are in the same shit." Jess argued that she was privileged in accessing to mobility: "I have passport and [migrants] don't."[108] Eric disclosed his awareness by arguing that he was able to withdraw from activism due to his access to power and resources. As he argued: "I definitely felt a bit guilty about leaving [HSP] … it came to … [my] mind that I can do that … [I] recognize[d] … [my] privilege." For activists, disclosing an awareness of one's privileges was a necessary part of maintaining a critical stance. Activists recognized their skin color, nationality, and economic status as the most crucial privileges that they held vis-à-vis marginalized groups. Among themselves and vis-à-vis broader structures of power, activists also mentioned gender and/or gender identity and sexual orientation as prominently influencing their access to resources and power. The language of privilege introduced the question of personal accountability for one's positioning within the structures of power, and necessitated countering structural inequalities in one's daily personal practices. This approach resonated with the ways that activists located counter-hegemonic politics in their personal lives (visible in personal as political

[108] By "having a passport" she meant holding citizenship status that allowed easy access to global mobility.

narrative, (Chapter III)) and aligned activists with critical consciousness' investment in joining counter-hegemonic struggle(s) from within the center(s) of power.

While primarily used among both activists and scholars as a tool for counter-hegemonic struggles, the language of privilege also received criticism inside and outside of academia. The criticism emerged mainly from anti-racist struggles and pointed to the ways in which "white privilege continues to place whites squarely in the center of an ongoing racial morality play, where the end result is not so much racial justice, but white moral redemption" (Monahan 2014, 81; Ahmed 2004; Applebaum 2011; Bovy 2017). I join these critical voices to argue that, when articulated by subjects positioned high in global and local hierarchies of power, the notion of privilege framed social inequalities in terms of personal recourses, allowing for their neutralization. While committed to disclosing their privileges, activists often expressed uncertainty with regard to how to act upon them. As Eric argued: "I can acknowledge my privilege but how to handle it? I… don't really understand... I don't know what [is] the right thing… to do." Beth's narrative also reflected uncertainty, discussing her experiences of being an EU citizen living in another EU country:

> "I feel… like the privileges are flashed in [my] face every other day. And, also, privilege is … something I don't know what to do with. What are you supposed to do with it? You can know about it and try to use it in a right way."

These narratives bring to the forefront the question of how a subject invested in a counter-hegemonic struggle and at the same time positioned high in local and global hierarchies of power is to make sense of her simultaneous participation in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects. I argue that the ways in which activists navigated this uncertainty and answered the above question indicated slippages between their political stances and their reproduction of hegemonic discourses.

Describing the ways she negotiated the tensions between her political investments and her own privileged position, Sue for example said:

> "To get rid of my privilege? ... Maybe it was my ambition in specific moments at particular meetings, but I always thought more … *how to use my privileges*. I don't believe that people are able to totally get rid of their privilege. And … me on my individual level try to get rid of

> my privilege? ... that … wouldn't do much difference .... In terms of making political change, it's not best political strategy for the world. So, I think … more … in terms how to use it in a best way …"

Beth said similar things, arguing:

> "I don't see how it would get you anywhere if you overdo[109] the whole privilege thing. Because there is nothing you can do to take away your privileges, or rather there will be in point in it. You can only try to use it in a way that maybe others can contribute from it. And if you do that smart then it is good, and you can do something with it."

Sue and Beth's stories show that activists' narratives around privileges were structured around two core elements. First, activists tended to answer the question of 'how to handle' their privileges by mobilizing them for the advancement of a 'right cause.' Second, they saw 'getting rid of one's privileges' as both impossible to accomplish and politically unproductive. As I argue below, the imaginaries over what counts as the 'best way' coupled with narratives of the 'unproductivity' of getting rid of one's privileges allowed for both the neutralization and further (re)production of their positioning.

Reflecting on what a 'best way' of using one's privileges meant for him, Eric gave the example of using his privileges to help his migrant friends access the labor market. He worked in a place that offered "casual work" and was certain "that … [he] … got this work because … [he was] a white male." Upon understanding his privileged access to the labor market, he started acting in a following manner:

> "When people who [hired] me had an opportunity to bring other people to work, the first people I would call [were] my friends who I know [did not] have the same opportunity as I had, that they wouldn't be immediately offered work the way I was. I invited my Arabic [sic] friends, people without [documents]."

Echoing Eric's narrative, Liz argued that using privileges meant "being able to use myself in a way that someone can actually benefit from it." As she further explained, using herself for someone else's benefit "feels good." Within such narratives, privileges were problematized as a personal asset of the Self (that could be used to support the Other). This articulation of privilege,

[109] The notion of "overdoing the whole privilege thing" was used by Beth to refer to those (mostly liberal) approaches that focused on lamenting over one's privileges, marking the Self and her feeling of guilt as the primary subject of discussion.

together with the earlier assertion that 'getting rid' of privileges is politically counter-productive neutralized them because it framed the problem as something given, that should be used not rejected. This is not to argue that the activists' decision to not get rid of their privileges on a personal level was misguided or that they would not give up some of their privileges were the socio-economic system to change. However, I argue that their approach to privileges echoed broader discourses of neoliberal capitalism that dislocate the question of one's (mis)fortune from broader systemic structures and neutralize it as "private." For activists, this approach meant that they were able to neutralize and further (re)produce their positioning as 'privileged' subjects. Furthermore, within these narratives, the best way of using privileges was to employ them in the daily personal life of the Self with an investment in supporting the Other. Widely shared among activists, this approach focused on the ways in which privileges played out in the *personal relationship between the concrete Self and concrete Other*. The focus on personal interaction between the Self and the Other echoed and further (re)produced activists' tendency to locate the Self and her personal life at the center of counter-hegemonic struggle.

Locating the question of privileges in the personal relationship between the concrete Self and concrete Other and linking it with the narrative of 'feeling good' connected the activists' commitment to systematic struggle with the personal fulfilment of the Self. While in the earlier chapters I argued that this personal fulfilment was located in one's access to a more meaningful life (Chapter III) or self-development (Chapter V), in Liz's narrative her fulfilment was further linked with positive feelings. As my further analysis of the (re)distribution of affect shows, linking the systemic struggle and the Self's well-being created space where the discontinuity of political activism was authorized and mediated through narratives of self-care. Centering the question of privileges on the Self also meant that the Self, as the central figure, was authorized to decide on the scope and ways in which she would use her privileges to counter social inequalities. Taken together with the imaginaries of privilege as a personal asset, this authorization meant that in negotiating how to use her privileges, the Self was not only thinking about what's best for the

Other but was also negotiating her own positioning within structures of power. This negotiation transpired from and further authorized the activists' narratives that neutralized privileges. As Kate for example argued, it "took a year for … [her] to not feel guilty" about her privileges vis-à-vis people she supported. "I didn't dare to tell my refugee friends to show them a new dress I bought" she recalled. Yet, with time her "approach to the whole topic changed." As she argued:

> "Privilege/guilt discussion, they are very powerful in a way they drive you forward but I don't think for a long time ... And that are really big negative emotions. And it's also not respectful towards other [marginalized] people."

Instead of marking privileges as something to be guilty about, and thus focusing on her own negative emotions, she decided to accept her privileged positioning. Kate's refusal to fall into the trap of shame and guilt was commonly shared among the activists. Activists narrated this as a critique of what they often problematized as 'liberal' discourses that patronize, disrespect, and depoliticize the Other by framing it as a subject of the Self's pity and guilt. This critique was already present in Beth's earlier rejection of "overdo[ing] of the whole privilege thing." While forming an important resistance to hegemonic discourses, this critique, together with the activists' rejection of formal politics and location of the Self and her personal life as the center of political struggles, ran the risk of displacing the focus from questions of systemic changes to the struggle over critical capital between projects located closely to center(s) of power. It also made the question of privilege a matter of the Self' affective responses. Within this framing privileges were seen as problematic not (only) due to structural conditions that granted unequal access to power and resources, but also, and often rather, due to the ways in which the Self deals with her privileges in her personal, affective life.

The continuity between framing privileges as personal assets to be employed in one's personal relationship with the Other, framing privileges as a matter of affective responses from the Self, and the neutralization of privileges was particularly visible in Laura's narrative. Reflecting on the ways in which she navigated her privileges vis-à-vis migrants she argued:

> "I usually … say … out loud that I am privileged …make a lot of fun of it … [Migrants] sometimes ask if I can buy them house. My usual response is: 'listen, I am from [a rich country], I am very privileged, I have money, I could be in the shopping mall now buying shit or here talking to you. Do you want me to go home and sit on my ass and watch TV or go to ballet, or do you want me to be here? I am here because I am making this choice and I can make this choice because I am very privileged, and you cannot. So, it's up to you, you either talk to me or not'"

On one hand, Laura's narrative can be interpreted as a subversion of hegemonic discourses of guilt and pity—an expression of critical consciousness. By openly stating her privileges vis-a-vis those marginalized and framing the offering of her care, time, and attention as a decision rather than as an obligation, she refused to subscribe to patronizing discourses of help and pity. Instead of patronizing the Other by concealing her own position of power, she treated the Other with honesty and granted the Other agency to decide upon further engagement. Yet while presented as counter-hegemonic, this narrative not only further reproduced the neutralization of privileges as personal assets but also normalized the possibility of using those assets purely for the personal advancement and pleasure of the Self ("I am very privileged, I have money, I could be in the shopping mall now"). This framing resonated closely with the ways in which hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism frame one's wealth and access to resources as personal goods that can but do not have to be shared with others. In Laura's narrative, the Self's decision to employ her privileges was presented as a sign of generosity. The Other was made responsible for recognizing and appreciating this generosity. This resonates with what I analyzed earlier as "offloading responsibility" for social inequalities from the hegemonic Self onto the marginalized Other (Rushing 2016). It also flattens the understanding of structural (in)equalities by obscuring the fact that migrants' access to 'making a decision' and the scope of the decisions available to them was shaped by their condition of marginalization (current and historical).

The slippage between the invocation of privileges as a critical tool to disclose power relations and the language of privileges normalized the possibility of (re)producing one's own positioning within the power structures was even more visible in Agne's story. She talked about the ways in

which she negotiated her privileges vis-à-vis migrants during her work in one of the refugee camps in Europe. She recalled her early days in the camp by saying:

> "Sometimes I was ashamed … of my privileged heritage … there were times I felt bad. Especially in the camp, where everyone wants to go to Germany, and I am like: 'I am flying to Germany next week' and that's all people want to do."

Yet she quickly managed to overcome the feeling of guilt. "I thought 'why would I be ashamed [of my privileged heritage] if I can use it?'" Continuing, she said:

> "For example [I could] travel to [to the center]. Maybe it [did] not make a big difference [on structural level], maybe it was my 'activist truism'… but it made a huge change for me and for them [migrants]…. we learned from each other…. And then I realized, to embrace my privilege status, use it wisely, in constructive way. Instead of criticizing."

While she recognized that her traveling to the camp might not have had a great impact on structural inequalities ("maybe it [did] not make a big difference") she nevertheless authorized it by invoking the benefits that it held for the Self ("it made a huge change for me"), particularly in regard to self-development since she learned from the migrants. These benefits were then projected onto the Other ("huge change for me *and for them,*" "we learned from each other"). This framing authorized her to embrace her privileges.

Thus, on the flip side of narratives of privilege that aimed to critically disclose one's positioning in the structures of power were narratives in which privilege was embraced, neutralized, linked with imaginaries of self-development, and further mobilized not only for the 'right cause' but also for the (re)production/advancement of one's positioning. As Sue asserted:

> "One [always] have to make… a decision… when to use your privilege for others and when for… [one's] own purposes. Which I am doing all the time…. I am living in a very nice apartment for example, every night I go to bed, to a very nice bed. So, I benefit of course [from my privileges], [I am] not only using [them] for … world-improving, purposes."

In her narrative, as in the narratives of other activists, the Self, embedded in both, counter-hegemonic and hegemonic discourses, operated in the overlap between "world-improving purposes" and the (re)production/enjoyment of its privileges. Read together with the activists' refusal to formalize HSP and partake in formal politics (Chapter IIII), their aversion to grand narratives (Chapter IV), their location of the Self as the primary site of political struggle (Chapter

V), and their refusal of conditionality (section 2 in this chapter), the negotiation of their own positioning along this continuum was a subjective decision of the Self. As I argue in the following section of this chapter, this decision was further linked with the (re)distribution of affect and negotiated through the employment of self-care narratives.

4. (Re)distribution of affect-based resources.

The last group of resources that activists (re)distributed can be broadly defined as affect-based resources and encompassed various expressions of care. The desire to provide the Other with care was intertwined in activists' narratives with the recognition of their own affective needs, and thus the narratives of care for the Other were coupled with narratives of self-care, limitations, and reasons for withdrawal from activism. I argue that narratives around the (re)distribution of care facilitated the Self's negotiation of its commitment to the counter-hegemonic struggle and the (re)production of its own privileged positioning within existing structures of power.

The commitment to provide marginalized groups with care was present, explicitly or implicitly, in most of activists' narratives and served as one of the differentiations between activists and other social actors. Eric for example argued that unlike humanitarians' activists "[activists] didn't go around [just] handing out portions of food" without considering people's specific needs. Rather, what activists "were providing was more than just fulfilling the basic needs," they "tried to provide support that felt *comfortable* to people." For example, he recalled that the activists "cooked food… Arabic [sic]… hallah, [food] that would be *familiar* … to people." Thanks to this, as he further elaborated, migrants "could see that there was a *good community*" formed by the activists. He also emphasized that the activists' engagement "was *more personal* than the state's approach" because activists "tried… to make people feel… that they were *heard* rather than … pushed through the gates of the asylum system." The importance of providing people with affective resources was also heard in Iza's narrative. In explaining the importance of meeting with marginalized groups, she argued that through those meetings activists tried to "make people feel that they have *community*, that someone is *interested in their life*." Jess explained the value that these

affective resources carried for those marginalized by saying: "[there are a lot of] unaccompanied minors [among migrants] who commit suicide…. that is… because they [are] paralyzed… they can see no power or hope." As she further argued the hope and power was:

> "Something we [activists] can give by … making [migrants] conscious that not everybody thinks like the [state] agencies … [by] showing that there is a lot of people who don't like the system, who want to *help you as an individual and believe in you.*"

In her narrative, affective formations established between the Self and the Other were mobilized as both counter-hegemonic strategies aimed at challenging the exclusionary discourses of state agencies and as a form of individual support and empowerment achieved through personal relationships between the Self and the Other. In other words, most activists simultaneously configured affect as both structural and personal, resonating with the shift towards the Self as the primary site of political struggle which I have been describing throughout this dissertation. This approach resonated with the "yearning" of critical consciousness—"a common affective and political sensibility […] fertile ground for the construction of empathy ties […] a base for solidarity and coalition" (Braidotti 1994, 2).

Though driven by a commitment to provide marginalized groups with affect, activists were cautious about the affective imaginaries they mobilized. They were careful not to invoke language of pity, which they saw as reproducing vertical forms of power and depoliticizing migrants' struggles (Chapter IV). Instead, they mobilized what they saw as more horizontal affective structures such as care, interest, and a sense of belonging (community). These affective structures aimed at challenging hegemonic distinction between a life that is to be cared for (the Self's) and the life that, refused care and consideration, becomes "ungrievable" (Butler 2009) and thus is subject to pity, exclusion, marginalization, and dispossession (the Other's). This approach to affect aligned HSP with imaginaries of critical thinking, particularly the feminist recognition of affect as a crucial for the development of more equal, solidarity-oriented and ethical politics[110].

[110] For feminist reflections on affect and its potential solidarity and justice-oriented struggles see for example: (Butler 2004; F. Robinson 2011; Hemmings 2012; Lynch et al. 2009; Salem 2018)

While critical in their outset, activists' mobilization of the (re)distribution of care also revealed complexities of the activists' embeddedness in and reproduction of the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism. To begin with, the mobilization of affect allowed activists to establish narratives invested with imaginaries of togetherness, *despite* different positionings within existing structures of power. As Jess for example argued:

> "We [activists] … want to help migrants to understand that we can fight together. Because we are not in that different situation. I mean I have passport and they don't but... well… it's maybe egoistic thing that I fight for them because I don't want to live in a world where people are treated this way. It's not like I only want to help them, I really can't stand living when other people are treated so badly. So, it's also for me, to make my world better through making others' life better."

In explaining what the notion of "solidarity" meant for her, Kate argued:

> "Being in solidarity means … that you are in the same shit with people. There is nothing glamorous about it, there are no heroes, it's not you or them, and it's all of us together. It's just that sometimes we are in different situation in our life … I am for example super privileged, when I say we are all in the same shit I don't mean that we are in the same shit."

Both of those narratives established an affective continuity (togetherness) between the Self and the Other. These imaginaries of togetherness were not explained by referring to shared socio-economic and political conditions. Rather, they were located in the personal affective proximity that the Self claimed to occupy with the Other. This affective proximity was established through the self-proclaimed assertion from the Self *that the pain of the Other was in fact also her pain*[111]. Care for the Other was presented as necessary for the fulfillment of the Self's affective (she did not want to live in a world where others suffer), creating a narrative of shared emotional investment that allowed for the imaginaries of "fight[ing] together" (Jess). Yet, this imagined togetherness was immediately disrupted by a clear reminder of the distance between the Self and the Other, embedded in the different socio-economic and political positioning between the Self and the Other ("I don't mean that we are in the same shit" (Kate), "I have passport and they don't" (Kate)). This

[111] For the discussion about the discourses of affective proximity between the Self and the Other see for example: (Berlant 2001; Danewid 2017).

continuity and its disruption once again point to the ways in which activists' counter-hegemonic imaginaries were intertwined with their embeddedness in the hegemonic discourses.

The establishment of solidarity based on affective proximity rather than on (and despite the differences in) socio-economic and political positioning had two consequences. Firstly, these narratives resonated with what Lauren Berlant calls "sentimental politics"[112] which tend to challenge structural violence by invoking the affective commitments of the "classically privileged […] subjects,"[113] obscuring the historical continuity between structural violence and the advanced socio-economic and political positioning of these subjects (Berlant 2001). I argue that in addition to obscuring the historical underpinnings of global inequalities, sentimental politics also resonated with the discourses of neoliberal capitalism in that they dislocated imaginaries of solidarity from structural conditions. They located the shared struggle against structural violence in the affective life of the Self rather than in the protective institutions, resonating with the neoliberal tendency to give primacy to individuals vis-à-vis protective institutions.

Secondly, and consequently, sentimental politics allowed activists to connect the needs of the Other with the narratives focused on the affective needs of the Self. Activists' narratives centered on the investment to care for the Other were intertwined with narratives describing the emotional toll that political activism had on them, which often resulted with their withdrawal from the project. Jess reflected on her experience of providing unaccompanied minors with legal counseling by arguing: "it's really hard emotionally… because they are kids, they have no place to stay… what you really want to do is to take them home." While disclosing her desire to offer almost motherly care, she also argued that this desire was impossible to put into practice as it would mean that she would have to sacrifice her own well-being. "[I] would have twenty people in… [my] place… I can't be mom for everybody…" she argued. Then, reflecting on the impact

[112] Berlant focuses on sentimentality and narratives of pain of the Other within national discourses. I extend her reading of sentimental politics also to solidarity projects beyond national discourses (2001).
[113] While Berland does not define what she means by "classically privileged […] subjects," her text implicates that these subjects are recognized (politically, socially, and economically) as adhering to imaginaries of national belonging in Western societies (2001).

activism had on her and other activists involved in HSP, she said: "we talked a bit in our group that we will all need psychologists to talk to, people's stories are so hard, you… take their traumas." In her narrative, care for the Other was intertwined with considerations over the well-being of the Self, marking care as a resource to be (re)distributed between the Self and the Other. The recognition of the emotional toll that activism took on people was also present in Eli's and Kate's narratives. Eli argued that being an activist "is a hard job… it's stressful, once you put your life to [activism], you wake up in the morning and you think about it, you go to bed and think about it… you talk about it all the time…" For Kate, being an activist was exhausting because "when your brain gets into it, for hours per day you are constantly on, you never go off." The intensity of the experience, as Eli argued, had a great impact on her and other activists' psychological well-being. "After… 'refugee crisis'… I got so fucked up, I never felt that bad in my life, I got totally burned out, it wasn't good at all… and people also stopped … [some] people left organization, they had to go to therapy." For Kate "it took… [several months] to have a fucking rest, to relax" after she was intensely engaged in activism. "I was completely destroyed," she explained, "I was trying to sit back and explain to myself that it is not good that I get into this mood, what should I do about it?"

In statements such as "what you really want to do is to take them [undocumented minors] home" (Jess), "you talk about it all the time" (Eli), "you never go off" (Kate), care for the Other were described as dominating the activists' life, marking the Self's immersion in the solidarity struggle and establishing imaginaries of togetherness. This immersion was further marked by experiences of emotional and physical harm for the Self: "people's stories are so hard, you… take their traumas" (Jess), "I got so fucked up" (Eli), "I was completely destroyed" (Kate). The narratives of the harm experienced by the Self worked in a twofold manner. On the one hand, they created imaginaries of a continuity between the struggle of those marginalized and the activists' experiences, creating a narrative where the violence to which the Other was subjected to was translated into emotional damage felt by the Self. On the other

hand, they affectively authorized the already existing material discontinuity between activists' life and the lives of those being marginalized. The Self's experience of emotional damage served as authorization for the restoration of Self's well-being, either through professional support or a break/complete withdrawal from the project. This meant that the substance of the solidarity struggle was closely dependent on activists' desire and ability to provide the Other with affective investments, with the Self authorized to decide on how she will (re)distribute affect between herself and the Other. It resonated with discourses of neoliberal capitalism that tend to blur the distinction between private and business relationships(Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). While under the logic of neoliberal capitalism this blurring allows to incorporate all aspects of one's life into the logic of networks and profit generation, in the case of activists the blurring between private and political (rather than private and business) created conditions for the discontinuation of the political project as a matter of the Self's well-being. This is not to argue that activists' recognition of people's different capacities to take part in HSP, as well as the activists' acceptance of such limitations, was problematic in and of itself. Rather, it is to argue that when coupled with their refusal to partake in institutionalized politics (Chapter III), their reluctance towards conditionality (section 2 in this chapter), and the problematization of an individual Self as the primary site of political struggle, it made HSP, and in that the struggle against systemic violence, fragile—almost entirely dependent on the needs, desires, and capacities of the Self.

Max's story captured how the (re)distribution of affect was understood and negotiated on the side of the Self particularly well. He described a dilemma he and other activists faced when providing marginalized groups with "the feeling that there are people who care." As he put it, this practice "always creates … [on the side of the migrants] the kind of the expectation that … we [activists] cannot live up to … there are so many limitations that we encounter." Max identified the commitment to showing interest in people's lives coupled with the constant

reminder of one's limitations as a particularly difficult aspect of activism. Thus, he found it important to recognize and accept one's limitations. As he argued:

> "Being completely without any limitations on what you can do and how you can engage is… not good, as then you sacrifice your friends, family, your own well-being. This situation always requires you to know where to start and where to end… To realize that it's important to take care of your own piece of mind."

In his narrative, affect was a resource to be (re)distributed between the Self and the Other. The desire to establish affective togetherness with those marginalized was accompanied by the reminder that to give too much to the Other might result with the damage to the Self, as Jess, Eli, and Kate also indicated. This damage authorized them to disrupt the affective continuity as a form of self-care.

This last point is crucial. Neoliberal capitalism evokes self-care as a therapeutic technology which delegates responsibility for one's own well-being and the governance to the individual. By invoking narratives of self-care, the activists dislocated the question of individual 'well-being' from broader structures of power in which they operated, and thus, fit into the neoliberal desire to diminish the role of welfare institutions. Secondly, narratives of the self-care privileged and further reproduced imaginaries of an ideal subject under neoliberal capitalism: self-sustaining capable of governing herself and having access to resources to engage in self-care practices. Jane's narrative discloses particularly well how access to self-care narratives and practices was connected with one's positioning within the existing structures of power. Reflecting on the reasons for activists' withdrawal from the project, she argued:

> "[As a solidarity activist in the EU] you can always decide when to be in solidarity and when you need to recharge, retreat, gain your energy back and then come back. While some people [belonging to marginalized communities] can't choose it. And that's the reality and it's horrible. That's one of the reasons why people burn out. It's horrible to feel guilt or shame to know that I can go and collapse on my bed when my friend is sleeping in a park. It's horrible."

Her narrative illustrated the meaning of Kate's earlier assertion "when I say we are all in the same shit I don't mean that we are in the same shit." As Jane emphasized, the very access to self-

care practices ("recharge, retreat, gain your energy back") reflected differences between people's positioning within structures of power. It was the Self who held access to the resources to regenerate. For the Self, withdrawal from the struggle would cause a guilty consciousness ("feel guilt or shame") but would not translate into material, social, or political consequences like it would for the Other. Those who were marginalized, as Jane rightly pointed out, couldn't choose when to engage and disengage from the struggle for social injustice.

Alongside being linked with and further disclosing unequal access to recourses, the narratives of self-care also further (re)produced the Self as the primary agent in terms of redistributing resources. They did so by authorizing the Self to decide *what counts for her as 'well-being'* and to act upon it—reflected in Max's assertion that one needs to "know where to start and where to end," when to disengage oneself in order to "take care of … [one's] own piece of mind." While seemingly left for the Self to decide, the imaginaries of well-being (as part of the neoliberal technique of self-governance) were aligned with the greater project of neoliberal capitalism, by equating well-being with imaginaries of a productive, self-sustainable, self-developing Self and by locating the Self and her individual needs as always a higher priority than possible collective struggles.

I argue that the privileging of the Self inscribed in self-care discourses overlapped with neoliberal narratives of self-development (Chapter V) and neutralizing/embracing one's privileges (section 4 in this chapter). This continuity was already visible in Jane's earlier narrative. Her invocation of a "bed" as indicative of structural inequalities ("I can go and collapse on my bed when my friend is sleeping in a park") also resonated with Sue's statement in which access to "very nice bed" was described as a privilege. If in Sue's narrative the Self was to negotiate when to use her privileges for her own benefits and when for "world-improving purposes," Jane's narrative, invoked the affective needs of the Self to further reframe such negotiations by describing them as a possible act of self-care. The continuity between imaginaries of self-care and those of privileges was even more visible in John's narrative, who argued:

> "I don't think … it's right to feel guilty [about your privileges] … [or] that I should deny myself certain things just because of my privilege. This seems … more *self-harming* … not helping. So, what privileges I have I try to share with other people."

In his narrative, embracing one's positioning within the structures of power was mapped onto discourses of self-care, further contributing to the neutralization of privileges. In establishing continuity between narratives of self-care and those of embracing one's privileges, the narratives disclosed how neo-liberal imaginaries of self-care worked to neutralize and justify the participation in and reproduction of exploitative structures and unequal relations of power.

Similar merging was present in Olga's narrative. As she observed, most activists tended to be active in HSP for a couple of years and then they would stop. When I asked her why so many activists disengaged from solidarity practices she argued:

> "Most people stop after some years because it just gets too much. Maybe because there are not good structures, so there is a lot [of pressure put] on individuals and people can't… go on for long time… helping individuals and fighting the system is very [challenging] ... many people get burned out and need to stop. And then there is of course this problem that people are active when they are … twenty until late twenty and then they get kids and they drop out … Maybe it is because the structures are not good enough to support people to have their lives, and kids and at the same time be active on a sustainable level."

On the one hand, Olga explained the activists' withdrawal from the project because of the lack of structures and the pressure put on individuals, thus critically engaging with the establishment of the Self as the central figure of political struggle. Her critique of making the individual responsible for dismantling structural inequalities can be read as an implicit critique of neoliberal dislocation of the individual from collective, marking her as solely responsible for all aspects of her life, including counter-hegemonic struggles. Her recognition of the lack of structures able to support the individual linked the limitations of activism with systemic structures. It established continuity between systemic marginalization and the ways the establishment of well-structured counter-hegemonic projects was systemically hindered. On the other hand, the same centrality of the Self that she criticized became an explanation and legitimization for the activists' withdrawal from the project. The moment of conflict between collective struggle and one's personal desire to "have … life, and kids" was resolved by the

recognition that the Self is authorized to withdraw from the project when the struggle for the Other becomes "too much." What counted as "having a life" and "too much" was left to the personal decision of the Self. As Jules's narrative below shows, "having a life" could also encompass the sustenance and further reproduction of one's privileges. Explaining people's withdrawal from activism, she argued:

> "A lot of … people left [HSP] … mainly [EU citizens] who said ok, I quit, that is too much … most of them maybe because you can't make money out of it? You can't save money. And some people, you know they want to buy a house, they want to have these things. So, I think they were worried, they wanted some money. But then many people also left because they felt bad that they couldn't contribute as much as other people, and as much as they would like to… that gave them bad consciousness."

By invoking the narrative of "feeling bad" and wanting to have money, Jules, like Olga, established continuity between imaginaries of self-care, self-development, and the reproduction of one's privileges.

This continuity was also visible in Eric's and Eli's reflections on the way they themselves negotiated the (re)distribution of care between the Self and the Other. Reflecting on his experiences of weariness during the government-lead eviction of migrants from one of the public spaces, Eric recalled:

> "It got cruel during that time … some long-term volunteers started to drop out because they realized that they were just wearing themselves out… they couldn't continue this way. They left the organization to take care of themselves … That's why I left as well … I was tired … I wanted to see my family … it felt like I need to look after myself so that I can continue to help people. So, I took some time off to recover."

He explained his withdrawal from the project by highlighting his need to psychologically recover, to "look after" himself in order to better help people. His narrative resonated with the earlier narratives in which self-care was presented as necessary for sustaining the counter-hegemonic struggle. Yet his above explanation was further accompanied by another narrative in which he explained his withdrawal from activism in the following manner:

> "I went to see my family and I was … trying to move on with my life a bit and figure out what to do. I started to feel like … I need to get a career … but then it … felt sort of confusing to be back in this very comfortable life and just hanging out with my friends … I … came back [to activism]."

Here, the first narrative of self-care is linked with this narrative of self-development and the possibility of reestablishing the "comfortable life" he left behind. While he himself decided to go back to activism, his narrative disclosed the ways in which self-care was intertwined in activists' narratives with (and often mobilized for the authorization) of embracing and reproducing one's "comfortable life" and self-development. Eli argued that she was considering leaving activism because she had been an activist for long time and she "want[s] to go travel… to move to the countryside." As she explained:

> "Activism. … [means] that you want to create this alternative form of living. When you have these great ideas of how you want to live differently it is always more exciting than when you in practice have to actually live that life. Even when it's ideal and revolutionary it becomes your work and then you always get tired of your work at some point".

My analysis does not aim to question the necessity for individual restoration for sustainable activism. Rather, it aims to highlight that by establishing the Self and her personal life as the primary site of political struggle and prioritizing the Self and her personal life vis-à-vis formal politics, the narratives of the (re)distribution of care between Self and Other always already run the risk of further reproducing one's access to power and resources, thus taking part in the reproduction of hegemonic structures and discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed the contours of activists' political subjectivities by tracing the entanglements of critical and hegemonic imaginaries in activists' narratives and practices of the (re)distributing resources: basic resources, knowledge-based resources, privileges, and affect-based resources. Activists presented their commitment to (re)distributing resources as crucially linked with their critiques of the system and as a necessary element of their counter-hegemonic stance. Yet, my close reading of the activists' narratives revealed that this was also a site where they negotiated tensions in their project. Narratives around the (re)distribution of resources clearly showed activists' embeddedness in discourses of neoliberal capitalism and how the slippages between critical and hegemonic imaginaries made discontinuation in solidarity project possible

under the guise of critical discourses. The chapter brought together many of the themes I analyzed in earlier chapters, particularly, the withdrawal from institutionalized politics (Chapter III), the authorization of the language of selfish reasons (Chapter IV), the establishment of the Self as the primary site of political struggle, and the blurring between one's personal affective life and political investments (Chapter V). By interpreting the activists' (re)distribution practices together with these themes, the chapter showed how different components of the activists' political subjectivities interplayed in their negotiation between their counter-hegemonic investments and hegemonic positioning.

I showed that the activists' critique of establishing conditionality for support was linked with their reluctance towards authority. Their lack of conditionality for the Other was extended to the activists themselves, making their engagement with solidarity struggles purely voluntary. This framing removed any expectations placed on the Self, reflecting the neoliberal dimension of the activists' subjectivity shaped by the reluctance towards authority, institutions, and social obligations. I further argued that activists' privileging of knowledge-based resources over basic resources had two consequences. It contributed to diminishing the importance of welfare institutions and further removed narratives of responsibility from the Self. Knowledge-based resources were described by the activists as "tools" to lift the Other up, and in that partook in shaping migrants' subjectivities alongside neoliberal imaginaries of a self-sustaining subject. I also showed that by framing privileges as resources to be mobilized for the advancement for the Other, activists in fact took part in discursively neutralizing their own socio-economic positioning. By framing one's positioning within structures of power in terms of personal resources, they negotiated between mobilizing their privileges for the advancement of the 'right cause' and the (re)production of their own socio-economic positioning. I also showed how their investment in (re)distributing affect-based resources (care for the Other and care for the Self) served as a space where affective continuity between the Self and the Other was established. This affective continuity was paradoxically often used when activists discontinued their participation in the

solidarity project by invoking language of self-care, blurring the lines between the personal, affective life, and counter-hegemonic struggles as already visible in the earlier chapters.

Finally, the chapter showed continuities between the location of the Self as the primary site of political struggle (and its authorization), the invocation of selfish reasons (Chapter IV), the desire for self-development (Chapter V), the neutralization and reproduction of one's socio-economic positioning, and the language of self-care as a therapeutic technology of neoliberal capitalism. The chapter showed that narratives of self-care mediated and authorized activists' investments in self-oriented practices: regeneration and recovery as well as pursuing career/family life, self-development, and enjoyment of life. In this way, the chapter showed the fragility of the counter-hegemonic project that continues to reproduce the hegemonic neoliberal privileging of the Self vis-à-vis collective and institutionalized struggles.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

In this dissertation I outlined the contours of the political subjectivities of horizontal solidarity activists (non-state and non-humanitarian actors) I interviewed in Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden. The activists I studied pursued horizontal solidarity activism with migrants and other marginalized groups. The project's core was based on disagreement with hegemonic structures of power and the social inequalities inscribed in these structures. At the same time, the activists occupied advanced positions of power within the local and global hierarchies that they criticized. By analyzing these activists' narratives, I demonstrated that their political subjectivities disclosed entanglements between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses: not only conflicts and tensions but also continuities and slippages, which demonstrated the limits of the activists' counter-hegemonic project. By tracing these entanglements, my dissertation showed the complexities of critical, counter-hegemonic interventions enacted under neoliberal capitalism by subjects occupying advanced positions of power within its structures.

I took the activists' counter-hegemonic investments seriously and thus this dissertation did not aim to question the intentionality behind the activists' development of HSP. They presented HSP as driven by a desire to establish a more equal and just relationship between the hegemonic Self and the Other, constructed in the hegemonic discourses as different and subordinated. I systematized the activists' imaginaries over what constitutes equality and justice-oriented activism by employing the figure of critical consciousness (Braidotti 1994; 2014b; 2014a). I located the activists' imaginaries around what constitutes counter-hegemonic struggles within a brand of critical theory which, at the time of my research, formed an important part of the critical curriculum of Western academia and thus offered guidance over how to develop an "ethical encounter with difference" (Vrasti 2013, viii).

I also took seriously the necessity to scrutinize the activists' embeddedness in the hegemonic structures of power and discourses that they criticized and the consequences of this embeddedness

for the articulation of their political subjectivities and their construction of HSP. I identified 'hegemony' in this case to be neoliberal capitalism and its relationship with the nation state, formed under the conditions of global capitalism (W. I. Robinson 2004; Katz 2006b; Boltanski and Chiapello 2018), with neoliberalism referring to an economic doctrine and a spirit of capitalism. Within this context, I identified the activists as belonging to (broadly defined) middle classes within their national economies, and as partaking in the formation of transnational middle class. As such, the activists were hegemonic subjects. In order to problematize their positionality, I employed the figure of the great man, as representative of the idea capitalist subject under neoliberal capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018).

I also employed the figure of the universal transcendent subject (hooks 1992a; Ahmed 2000a), which further facilitated my interpretation of the activists' narratives and, in particular, of their investment in challenging inequalities by establishing proximity between the Self and the Other. The figure of universal transcendent subject systematizes the ways in which the hegemony of the Western Self is sustained not only through the exclusion of the Other but also through narratives that imagine the Self as capable of "unmak[ing] the border between the self and other" (Ahmed 2000b, 124).

By employing these figures, the dissertation was able to demonstrate a series of continuities and slippages between activists' counter-hegemonic stances and broader hegemonic discourses. I interpreted these continuities and slippages not 'simply' as a sign of the project being co-opted by neoliberal capitalism. The binary understanding of social struggles in terms either resistance and co-optation[114], common in academic scholarship, helps to document the ways in which neoliberal capitalism incorporates various struggles into its logic, thus neutralizing them. Yet this approach often treats hegemonic discourses and their critiques as two distinct projects, with the latter losing its critical potential when it becomes part of neoliberal structures. That approach falls short of

[114] On the discussion about resistance and co-optation and then need to move beyond its binary understanding see for example: (Eschle and Maiguashca 2018)

taking seriously the co-constitutive relationship between capitalism and its critiques and the ways in which the logic on which the critiques are built is often already in line with the greater logic of neoliberal capitalism due to capitalism's ongoing incorporation of some of its critiques into its logic (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). Thus, rather than treating the activists' reproduction of hegemonic discourses as a sign of the project being coopted by neoliberal capitalism, I interpreted it as an expression of similarities between the logics on which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses are constructed within the current historical and political context. As such, this dissertation illustrated an example of what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello identify as the difficulty with drawing a "clear separation between impure ideological constructs, intended to serve capitalist accumulation, and pure, utterly uncompromised ideas, which would make it possible to criticize it"(Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 20). The activists' political subjectivities disclosed the complex ways in which the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism might be reproduced despite (as well as through) what counter-hegemonic discourses intend.

This dissertation likewise identified a series of continuities between the activists' counter-hegemonic imaginaries and the imaginaries inscribed in the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism. In socio-political terms, these included the aversion towards institutions, particularly formal politics and the state (Chapter III) and the aversion towards grand narratives (Chapter IV). At the level of the activists' practices, these included the importance of proximity (and linked with it the privileging of personal experiences as quintessential for network generation under neoliberal capitalism) (Chapter V) and the focus on the (re)distribution of information, privileges, and affect. This was linked with the (re)production of neoliberal imaginaries of the self-sustainable subject, embracing one's privileges, and withdrawing from HSP mediated through narratives of self-care (Chapter VI). These continuities formed a backdrop for, corresponded with, and informed one of the main continuities between the activists' counter-hegemonic project and hegemonic discourses: namely, the centrality of the individual Self. This centrality was visible in and facilitated by the way that activists located counter-hegemonic politics in their personal lives ("the personal is political")

rather than in formal politics (Chapter IIII); the invocation of "selfish reasons" (Kate) (rather than grand narratives) as a motivation for action (Chapter IV); centering the solidarity struggle on the Self's personal connection with the Other (through the imperative of proximity); and narratives of self-development (Chapter V). The centrality of the Self was further mediated by narratives of self-care, which formed a continuum with narratives of self-development and embracing one's privileges, facilitating activists' negotiations between their investment in pursuing a counter-hegemonic project and their embeddedness in hegemonic structures of power (Chapter VI).

The activists choosing to center their project on the individual Self had two consequences. Firstly, it diminished the possibility of establishing sustainable, formalized structures for pursuing a counter-hegemonic project and instead put pressure on the individual, leading her to burnout and/or experience a sense of failure. It also put the Self in an impossible position of dismantling systemic inequalities in her personal life. Within this framing, the Self oscillated between the fantasy of a universal transcendent subject who can undo structural inequalities in their personal, daily life and a sense of debilitation and insignificance in face of social inequalities (Chapter IV). I argue that neither of these two positions allowed for the development of a sustainable, long-term counter-hegemonic struggle. The centrality of the Self also disclosed the impossibility of the activists' desire to establish the long-term, community-oriented social structures which they often expressed longing for. Despite their interest in forming collective interests and belonging, which HSP was structured around and strived for, the logic within which the activists operated continued to put the Self at the center of all interests, thus remaining aligned with neoliberal investments in limiting the development of collective, counter-hegemonic political projects. Secondly, by centering their project on the individual Self and connecting it with narratives of self-development, privileges, and self-care, the activists' advanced positions of power within existing structures were reinforced. This occurred because their work with HSP aided them in continuing to accumulate social and informational capital (particularly through their focus on proximity and (re)distribution of knowledge-based resources) and also authorized them to withdraw from HSP at will (through

self-care narratives). By tracing these two consequences, this dissertation showed the interconnectedness between the (re)production of hegemonic discourse and the (re)production of socio-economic conditions for individual subjects occupying advanced positions of power within existing structures.

I do not claim that activism was simply a profitable endeavor which the activists carried out to advance their socio-economic positions. Rather, I argue that the activists' political project, while driven by counter-hegemonic investments, was constructed around imaginaries that did not in themselves pose sufficient challenges to hegemonic discourses and to their own positions as hegemonic subjects. Quite to the contrary, as I have shown, the activists' counter-hegemonic stances coincided with hegemonic discourses. Crucially, this dissertation does not intend to pose a challenge to individual elements around which the activists' political subjectivities, and thus political project, were constructed. Their aversion to institutions and grand narratives, the importance of the political dimension of one's personal life, the focus on proximity with the Other, the investment in establishing affective continuity between the Self and the Other, as well other elements of activists' project were not in themselves inherently at odds with a counter-hegemonic project. Yet, when articulated together by subjects occupying advanced positions of power within the existing structures, these elements constituted a political project which, while framed by the activists as counter-hegemonic, was in fact in line with hegemonic discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

This dissertation contributes to the existing literature on migrant and solidarity struggles in several ways. It further develops and complexifies CMS's (critical migration scholarship) investigations into novel political subjectivities. Firstly, by introducing the figure of critical consciousness, it systematizes the imaginaries underlying counter-hegemonic solidarity struggles. Secondly, by employing the figure of the great man (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018) and the universal transcendent subject (hooks 1992b; Ahmed 2000a), it outlines the imaginaries structuring hegemonic discourses in which those struggles develop. By placing these three figures in dialog

with each other, this dissertation traces the continuities and slippages between the logic inscribed in counter-hegemonic and hegemonic discourses, as visible in activists' narratives. In doing so, it complexifies the dichotomy between the two discourses which often informs scholarly investigations. It likewise highlights the importance of studying counter-hegemonic initiatives as informed by justice-oriented anti-systemic desires and as partaking in the (re)production of hegemonic structures of power. Furthermore, by taking seriously the activists' positions within existing structures of power, it shows how the (re)production of these structures might happen unintentionally. This focus opens up space for the study of shortcomings in existing solidarity struggles, not (only) at the level of concrete practices but at the level of the (often taken for granted) logic and imaginaries over what constitutes a counter-hegemonic project. It also highlights the importance of linking the workings of hegemonic discourses and the lived conditions of individuals who are positioned high within the socio-economic structures of power that those discourses aim to sustain. It brings together an analysis of the workings of neoliberal capitalism on the macro- and micro-levels. This focus helps to further CMS in scrutinizing how marginalization and exclusion are reproduced, by bringing to the forefront of the study the ways in which hegemonic discourses are reproduced and sustained on the individual level by subjects who, while critical of the hegemonic discourses, are privileged within the existing structures of power.

The existing (broadly defined) critical literature on migrant and solidarity struggles tends to approach neoliberal capitalism as an inherently oppressive system and, thus, the struggles against it as inherently counter-hegemonic. This approach often fails to acknowledge the ways in which neoliberal capitalism sustains itself by "put[ting] forth *credible* affective structures" and making "individuals become emotionally invested in neoliberal ideology" (Vrasti 2011, 2, emphasis in original). This is not to argue that neoliberal capitalism is not destructive. Rather, it is to point to the complex ways that neoliberal capitalism sustains itself, ways that cannot be fully grasped through a focus only on the structures and practices that are immediately perceived as in line with neoliberal ideology, such as for example, consumption patterns. By outlining the contours of the

activists' political subjectivities and showing how neoliberal ideology informed their solidarity struggles and facilitated the negotiation between the Self and collective structures, this dissertation joins the emerging body of literature that study political subjectivities of actors at the intersection of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses and the (re)productions of neoliberal capitalism. This occurs through various actors and practices, including those positioning themselves as anti-systemic and critical of inequalities, racism, and various processes of marginalization. Recent investigations of political subjectivities of such actors have been emerging across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, with particularly potent work coming out in critical tourism studies on alternative, independent traveling practices (Lozanski 2010; Korpela 2010), scholarship focusing on lifestyle-based resistance to capitalism (Binkley 2008), volunteering practices (Vrasti 2013), alter-globalist struggles (Hoofd 2012), and academia (Kurowska 2020a). Yet, these studies remain limited in number and rarely enter with each other into a dialog. This dissertation identifies this lack of dialog as one of the gaps in existing scholarship. There would be further research potential in developing an interdisciplinary analytical lens to study how subjectivities are shaped at the intersection of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, anti-mainstream, critical discourses.

By shedding light on the subjectivity formation of subjects positioned high in local and global hierarchies of power and invested in pursuing counter-hegemonic activism and alternative lifestyles, this dissertation also contributes to the study of class formation/(re)production under global and neoliberal capitalism. As I discussed in the introduction, the study of transnational class formation and classed practices and subjectivities tends to focus on spheres that are most immediately recognized as partaking in the (re)production of neoliberal structures, such as education, the labor market, and consumption patterns. This focus, while crucial in highlighting emerging transnational class structures and practices, remains silent about how less immediately recognizable practices and expressions of middle-classness reflect and partake in neoliberal stratification.

This dissertation took as its primary focus the subjectivities of actors who were recognized within the socio-political spheres they operated in as full members of the dominant socio-political community. My research could be further developed to encompass actors who took part in solidarity struggles from other standpoint (e.g., who were not recognized as full members of socio-political community in which the struggles developed, such as migrants and other marginalized groups). Such further study, moving beyond the problematization of marginality as always already carrying counter-hegemonic potential, could analyze together the imaginaries and subjectivities of hegemonic and marginalized actors, also taking into account the latter's pre-migratory class positions, embeddedness in local structures of power, and socio-economic aspirations. This type of future study could additionally facilitate understanding of the basis and dynamics for the establishment the sense of togetherness between the Self and the Other that HSP aspired to. Likewise, it could be further developed to examine the particularities of different activists' positions within structures of power, and thus, vis-à-vis each other, how differences play out between activists' articulations of their political imaginaries. This type of research would further shed light on subjectivity formation within solidarity practices.

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