

Moving beyond the toolbox: Providing social movement studies with a materialist dialectical lens

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Abstract

Numerous studies within critical political economy try to make sense of the (post-)crisis period by focusing on top-down analyses of capitalist hegemony. They appear to ignore the proliferation of social movements that emerged in that period. In contrast, social movement studies tend to lack a theory of capital and thus, missing the class struggle, inadequately addresses questions of the state, power relations, and what movements may mean for our current capitalist conjuncture. To provide an analysis that can benefit from both traditions, we propose to re-embed methods employed by key social movement scholars such as Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow into a critical social theory centred on class struggle, by a non-dogmatic use of a materialist dialectical lens. Consequently, cognitive, relational, and environmental mechanisms are repurposed as cognitive, organizational, environmental, and institutional dynamics. This reformulation focuses on processes and relations rather than inputs and outputs (failure/success), or static categories, which tend to dominate social movement studies.

Keywords: Dialectics, methodology, social movements, historical materialism, critical political economy

Über den Werkzeugkasten hinausgehen: Soziale Bewegungsforschung aus einem materialistisch dialektischen Blickwinkel

Zusammenfassung

Es gibt viele Ansätze in der kritischen politischen Ökonomie, die versuchen die (Post-) Krisenphase zu erklären, indem sie auf Top-Down Analysen der kapitalistischen Hegemonie rekurrieren. Sie ignorieren dabei oft soziale Bewegungen, die durch diese Periode entstanden. Im Gegensatz dazu analysieren Studien der Sozialen Bewegungsforschung Proteste tendenziell ohne auf Theorien, die sich mit kritischer Ökonomie und Kapital beschäftigen, zurückzugreifen, wodurch sie den Staat, Machtbeziehungen und die Bedeutung sozialer Bewegungen für die aktuelle kapitalistische Konjunktur unzureichend darstellen. Um eine Analyse zu ermöglichen, die von beiden Traditionen profitiert, wollen wir Methoden, die von zentralen Autoren der Bewegungsforschung wie Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam und Sidney Tarrow angewandt werden, mithilfe einer non-dogmatischen dialektischen Herangehensweise in eine kritische soziale Theorie fokussierend auf Klassenkämpfe, einbetten. Dadurch werden kognitive, relationale und umweltbedingte Mechanismen als kognitive, organisierende, umweltbedingte und institutionelle Dynamiken reformuliert. Mit dieser Umformulierung kann eine Fokussierung auf Prozesse und Beziehungen, anstatt von Input und Output (Erfolge/Niederlagen) erfolgen.

Schlagwörter: Dialektik, Methodologie, Soziale Bewegungen, Historischer Materialismus, Kritische Politische Ökonomie

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1. Introduction: Between critical political economy and social movement studies

Over the last decade we have seen a return to Marxist analysis in the field of economics and international political economy (IPE) to understand the (ongoing) crisis of 2007/8. Within these studies there is a strong focus on the state, institutions, and hegemonic practices while the struggles against such processes have been neglected (for a detailed overview see Huke et al. 2015). During the same period, and particularly following the Arab Spring and Occupy movements, social movement studies, as a separate field, has focused its attention on forms of collective contestation, but has left institutions and deeper theoretical questions over what these struggles mean for our current economic and political conjuncture somewhat out of sight. Troublingly, there is a limited crossover between social movement studies and critical IPE even though collective agency – or potential class struggle – should be critical to Marxist analysis and conversely a theory of capital centred on class struggle could offer a lot to social movement studies (a notable exception to this is *Marxism and Social Movements*, edited by Barker et al. 2013). Where critical IPE emphasises class and forgets struggle, social movement studies emphasises struggle but eliminate class. To provide an analysis of *class struggle*, we propose that the study of social movements must be recontextualised in a critical social theory; we suggest that a non-dogmatic use of materialist dialectics could be beneficial.

This article develops the argument that struggle (or movements) cannot be understood separately from the economic and political processes they respond to, and vice versa. For example, policies aimed at further liberalising the labour market are both a reaction to, and a provoker of, collective struggle. Our current social reality (institutions, politics, and norms etc.) is the condensation of previous struggles and it is always in process. Following a historical materialist argumentation, there are some generalisable tendencies specific to the capitalist mode of production, but how they play out remains somewhat contingent in that they are always mediated by human activity (Wood 2016: 2). This is not a question of how structures influence agency or vice versa – with each seen as exteriorities – but how they inform each other in the process of emerging. Thus, struggles and political economic processes are a dialectical relation, or two entry points to the same social whole.¹

¹ This is, following Bakker/Gill (2003), a social ontology based on process and human agency.

In arguing for a theory of capital centred on class struggle to be integrated into social movement studies, we must outline what we mean by this. Developing the claims made above, capitalism is a social relation; the realisation of its processes cannot occur outside the social or cultural sphere, meaning that it is always a practice mediated by social relations and marked by human activity (Bannerji 2005: 149). Struggle is critical as the development of capitalism was never a natural or peaceful process (Marx/Mandel 1992). Central to this is the relation between labour and capital – those who appropriate surplus value and those who produce it – and it is through this constant struggle that classes emerge.² Class, therefore, is a lived social relation produced through struggle and the ways that people experience their determinate situations rather than a static position.³ However, drawing on the work of social reproduction theory (SRT), this is an open conceptualisation of class struggle (rather than a mono-causal view of orthodox/industrial focused Marxism), expanding possible sites of struggle as well as class actors (Bhattacharya 2015). The hope is that this stretching of Marxist terms pushes a framework that can allow for solidarity or articulation across struggles, as well as capture the interlinkages between and within struggles.⁴

This has implications for theory and method; requiring an update of certain methodological tools so that they better reflect and capture the shifting material

² ‘To put it bluntly: classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle. On the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness’ (Thompson 1978a: 149).

³ People hold a specific position in relation to the means of production; this alongside their culture and expectations can create tensions and experiences, i.e. there is some degree of determination shaping the social experience in class ways, yet it is only through these experiences and struggle that class formations or a class for itself emerge (class needs an agent and is relational in the same way that, to paraphrase Ellen Meiksins Wood, you cannot have love without lovers) (Wood 2016: 82).

⁴ For example, it may be the same person on the front of a strike as organising against the privatisation of essential services in their communities. As such, theoretical divisions between the labour and environmental movement, or old and new, do not capture this relationship.

conditions they aim to study.⁵ We argue that certain social movement methodological tools can benefit from being embedded in an explicitly historical materialist frame. There are clearly strands of social movement studies that are not compatible with our underlying ontological and epistemological positions. However, the work of Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam has two advantages: it goes beyond the division of old and new social movements, discussing collective action together as contentious politics, and secondly, that they begin to develop analytical tools that are process- and actor-centred. These, we propose, are compatible with a historical materialist approach.

The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, we outline the limitations but also potentialities of contemporary social movement approaches, focusing specifically on the work of Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam, and Sidney Tarrow as an example of more progressive US social movement studies.⁶ Next, we outline how an explicit engagement with a materialist ontology and a dialectical lens may provide a useful entry point to studying social movements, allowing for potential political and critical goals to manifest. Finally, we return to Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam to outline how their concept of mechanisms, if approached from a materialist dialectical lens, could be better thought of as dynamics. In this way, our proposal seeks to build upon and fill the gaps in existing social movement studies through an explicit and feminist engagement with Marxist ideas. What we propose is not new, but rather continues in the tradition of those who understand social movements as moments of collective contestation or potential class struggle working in, against, and mediated by the material conditions of their existence, whether they

are exclusively anti-capitalist or not.⁷ This is a critical theory of social movements that approaches social movements in relation to their longer field of struggle, context i.e. time and space, actors, and social relations. A position that we have found enlightening is that of SRT. This acts as our starting point in rebuilding – or re-tooling – the dominant social movement concepts and method within a theory of capital. This article is largely a theoretical contribution aiming to provoke discussion between critical IPE and social movement/labour studies. We draw on some examples to illustrate our theoretical arguments, but these should not be seen as exhaustive; more empirically underpinned texts based on our respective case studies will be developed in other articles.

2. Choosing different entry points to research social movements

Although we have issues (some more than others) with some of the strands of the social movement literature, in particular how the *movement* is conceptualised and approached, many analytical tools and especially those studying the micro level and internal dynamics of the movement are useful and should not be done away with. Yet many of these approaches do not explicitly engage with a theory of capitalism and class struggle and, therefore, tend to conceptualise the object of study – the social movement – as a distinct (and at times closed) entity rather than as an entry point to unpack the complexity and dynamics of the post-crisis conjuncture (for example Diani et al. 2012; della Porta et al. 2010; Rucht 2016). Most of this research delivers in-depth and useful, although largely descriptive, pictures of the move-

⁵ For example, the ‘newness’ of new social movements and their distinction from labour movements does not fit with what we see in the recent (post-)crisis struggles across the globe.

⁶ We recognise that social movement studies are a broad and somewhat heterogeneous field. As such, we limit our critique to the US approach and the authors Tarrow, McAdam and Tilly who we have found most useful from this school. The US approach, such as resource mobilisation theory and the power resources approach, is becoming increasingly dominant in studies of the post-crisis period, in contrast to the new social movements and largely European school (Chester/Welsh 2010).

⁷ Even reactionary or right-wing social movements may be understood through a social theory of capital. Where recent movements such as those in the USA may appear as purely racist, or white nationalist, they are also pushing key social questions such as redistribution, unemployment, power, and highlighting a democratic deficit. Conversely, labour struggles that best encapsulate the traditional notion of class struggle may be inherently racist or sexist (one only need look at many of the trade union struggles in Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century which mobilised against Asian migrants and women workers). We argue that there is no ideal or static progressive social movement actor, but that the dynamics of collective struggle can mobilise actors in politically progressive ways in the search for solidarity and can thus be applied to both regressive and progressive movements to draw out (any existing) potentialities.

ments and how they change, yet the processes and relations behind these changes are rarely explained or analysed. The limitations of such a descriptive approach may be better explained using the analogy of a volcano: such studies explore the moment of eruption, the lava flow, and its temperature, but what is happening below the surface and the processes or tectonic shifts that led to the eruption are not captured.

There are, however, some studies such as *Dynamics of Contention* (Tilly et al. 2001) and the subsequent *Ballots and Barricades* (McAdam/Tarrow 2010) that attempt to go beyond the moment of eruption, unpacking different forms of contestation and how they can feed into one another. Importantly, Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam attempt to include state institutions in their analysis as well as link multiple forms of collective contestation from strikes, demonstrations, revolutions, or occupations in their term ‘contentious politics’ (Tilly et al. 2001: 9). This is an important distinction from the other rather descriptive literature, as they show a certain flexibility when it comes to ‘collective nouns’ such as ‘movements, identities, governments, revolutions, classes’ and do not see them as ‘hard, fixed, sharply bounded objects, but observers’ abstractions from continuously negotiated interactions among persons and sets of persons’ (Tilly et al. 2001: 12). Significantly, Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam attempt to drag what is understood as politics out of mere institutional practices while likewise bringing collective action into, and simultaneously expanding, the political arena (ibid.: 7–8). In this they have made an important move away from the distinction between old and new social movements as well as begun a movement towards more relational and processual analytical tools.

Despite these analytical developments, we stumbled across some problems when applying *Dynamics of Contention* (2001) to our own analysis. Firstly, the authors’ conception of the state and concurring political institutions as a set of practices and structures (ibid.: 7) does not grasp the power relations inherent to such institutional forms. Secondly, they approach the social movement as the endpoint of analysis, rather than as the entry point to develop our understanding of the current social, political, and economic conjuncture, meaning we have different goals for our research. Thirdly, the authors try to extrapolate some general mechanisms from the 18 case studies outlined

in *Dynamics of Contention* – covering ‘social movements, nationalism, revolutions, and democratization’ (ibid.:13).⁸

Their underlying motivation to develop a general theory of ‘contentious politics’ across space, time, and constellations of power relations is problematic from a historical materialist epistemology that emphasises the specificity of time and space to any analysis, as it is only possible by extrapolating the object of study – in this case the social movements/contentious politics – from its social context (Wood 2016: 5).

Despite moving towards a more relational and dynamic framework, Tarrow, Tilly, and McAdam fall short of fully embracing such a methodology that could allow the object of study to figure in a different way. We suggest that this in part stems from the historical roots of the sub-field of social movement studies; although many have sought to break away from and challenge it, it remains linked to behaviourist histories that originally sought to explain collective action as problematic, or as a challenging irritation to functioning established social orders, i.e. as negative processes (Burawoy 2014).⁹ An underlying goal of the American school of thought in the 1950s and 1960s, which later evolved into the resource mobility theory (RMT), was how the structure of societies can be maintained or upheld, rather than

8 Although the authors declare that their ‘emphasis on recurring mechanisms and processes does not mean that [they] intend to pour all forms of contention into the same great mould, subjecting them to universal laws of contention and attending them into a single two-dimensional caricature’ (Tilly/Tarrow 2010: 13), their following analytical claims show the contrary, one page later (ibid.: 14) they write that they aim to find:

Parallels in order to find widely operating explanatory mechanisms that combine differently and therefore produce different outcomes in one setting or another. [...] To discover mechanisms of competition and radicalization in both the French Revolution and in the South African freedom movement is not to say that the Jacobins and the African National Congress are the same [...] partial parallels in search of mechanisms that drive contention in different directions.

9 It primarily developed as a distinct area of study in the United States; as such the US approach is what dominates the general field. Within this there is a tendency to emphasise how these sub-fields are distinct from other areas of sociology or politics rather than looking at links between them. In Europe, the experience has been somewhat different as the study of social movements or collective action has remained prevalent across disciplines, and is only more recently starting to shift towards a segregated sub-field common to the US (Chesters/Welsh 2010).

critiqued and transformed (Chesters/Welsh 2010: 6). From this position, collective behaviour that seeks to challenge society – a supposedly naturalised and thus normal state of being – is abnormal (ibid.). Emerging as a response to the post-1968 movements, RMT sought to move away from the idea of deviancy towards how movements are organised focusing on *how* movements emerge because of contexts and available resources; what they look like, whom they include, and how they are maintained (McCarthy/Zald 1977). Critically, questions of *why* movements emerged were pushed aside in favour of questions about *how* and *what* (Chesters/Welsh 2010: 7). In moving beyond deviancy narratives (an important and necessary move), the social movement became an object of analysis isolated from its context, and no alternative social theory was used to fill this gap – capitalism and class struggle disappeared. This was encouraged by the shift in social studies, particularly in America, towards positivist empiricism and the pursuit of the production of objective and generalisable knowledge of social phenomena. Hence, since the 1990s we begin to see language talking of rational choice and opportunity costs being applied to social movements (see for example Klandermans 2004; Opp 2013).

One outcome of this academic development is a divide between those who seek to study social movements as empirical units of analysis on their own (more common), and those who see social movements as more symptomatic of, and thus need to be studied in conjunction with, wider social phenomena (Chesters/Welsh 2010: 19).¹⁰ The study of social movements from the former perspective cannot go much further than mere description as there is no room for critique when systems and societal structures such as capitalism and the state are taken as immovable or at most reformable, and are understood as naturalised social structures.¹¹ The RMT and subsequent approaches have ‘an essential methodological flaw’ meaning that the gap between

social movements as isolated phenomena and the social conditions under which they appear cannot be closed by just adding more ‘context’ to the case (Saraçoğlu 2017: 16). Although they attempt to break away from the problematic elements of such approaches, Tarrow and McAdam (2010) still retain some of this lingering positivism within the field, where what is observed is taken to be measurable, understood, and in that sense naturalised (Hay 2006). Their attempt at developing a general theory, and emphasis on decoding social movements, represents this. What is required instead is a reformulation of their useful tools within a critical framework centred on class struggle.

In McAdam and Tarrow’s self-reflective paper *Ballots and Barricades* (2010), written ten years after *Dynamics of Contention* (2001), they reflect on their analytical category ‘mechanisms’ and where gaps still lie in their approach. It is from this reflection and their use of mechanisms that we push their approach towards a more relational frame, whilst separating it from the wider goal of developing a general theory. In *Dynamics of Contention* the authors develop some general mechanisms drawn from their 18 cases that can encapsulate the dynamics, opportunities, framing, and reasons how a movement continues to exist or has impact. In the later *Ballots and Barricades*, they narrow down their tools to three main mechanisms: cognitive, environmental, and relational (McAdam/Tarrow 2010). The cognitive mechanism refers to the interpretative processes and framing used by the movement, the relational mechanism captures coalition building as well as networks across and within movements, and the environmental mechanism refers to the external variables (political threat and opportunity structures) that the movement operates in (ibid.: 331).

This is an impressive attempt at developing a general theory of social movements, but it is this attempt at generalisation and extrapolation from the specifics of the conjunctures of the cases that is problematic. Furthermore, though hinting at the need for a more dynamic and desegregated analysis, their proposals still fall back into the trap of dividing causal factors rather than exploring their internal relation. This is because, even though McAdam and Tarrow are critical of the current social movement methodology, they do not explain *why* it is necessary to move away from static structures and categories and turn to more flexible forms (McAdam/Tarrow 2010). Furthermore, these mechanisms treat the social movement as the end result to be understood, rather than as an entry point

10 Cox and Flesher-Fominaya’s article succinctly summarises some of these underlying issues we have with the US-led school of social movement studies, when they state that these approaches are useful in studying the ‘micro-scale but [they are] incapable of dealing with the macro-questions [...]’ (2013: 2).

11 The shift away from Marxism or critical theory should also be understood in the context of the Cold War, when it became incredibly hard to hold on to any academic position whilst holding or promoting a critical theoretical position in the US.

to understand the wider social reality. While we refrain from embracing categories that claim to explain social movements across time and space, when used as lenses such mechanisms begin to give justice to the processuality and specificities of each movement. Therefore, we argue that by embedding them in a theory of capital and class struggle that highlights historical contingency and the importance of internal relations such *mechanisms* can be revived as *dynamics*.

The aim of our theoretical approach, therefore, has a slightly different starting point and research goal than that of Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam: we want to understand social movements as an entry point to the open and dynamic social whole that they shape and are shaped by, highlighting the specificities of the movement and its economic, political, and cultural context but also reflecting on what this may mean for deeper tendencies that cut across our social whole. This has political implications in the sense that by learning from past struggles, and drawing out a fuller understanding of capitalist social relations, the potentialities for class struggle and shift from class character to class consciousness could emerge. Historical change is lived and mediated by human activity, thus movements will have different characters but the force of capital (its institutions, expansionary logic, and representatives) allows for a common antagonism and potential solidarity. In this article, we outline how these mechanisms developed by Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam could be revitalised for our current conjuncture, by embedding them in a more explicit materialist ontology and a dialectical lens.

3. Towards a materialist dialectical framework of social movement studies

To begin the process of re-embedding such mechanisms into a deeper social theory, and one based on materialist dialectics, we need to explore the foundations of our theoretical claims. When we think of social movements they are, at their most simplistic, a form of collective struggle reacting to (an) antagonist(s) from within a certain social environment; they change the context and relations that they operate within as much as this context shapes them. But what is this social whole that we assume social movements to be operating within? The social whole proposed is based on a deep ontology, outlined by critical realists in opposition to positivist arguments, where we claim that one cannot readily access everything that is presumed to exist; there are some underlying tendencies and struc-

tures that are not immediately visible but nevertheless are still there and have influence (Gallas 2016: 205; Sayer 1995). As such, there is always an epistemological limit; by claiming a social whole, it is not presumed that we will ever fully comprehend and be able to explain the totality of this whole but rather by utilising different vantage points we can build up a fuller if incomplete explanation. However, to refute that such a whole – or systemic logic – exists both limits our ability to name capitalism (as system and also antagonist) and replicates segregated analysis that obfuscates the relations between things (our critique of many social movement studies),¹² thus breaking down opportunities for solidarity. It can produce ‘a compartmentalizing way of thinking that ruptures the formative, complex integrity of the social whole and creates segments of spheres of “the economic,” “the political,” and “the cultural” which are in reality ontologically inseparable’ (Bannerji 2005: 148). There is a narrow line between a claim of some mediated social whole and opening yourself up to criticisms of determinist reductionism, yet not to name capitalism is politically dangerous as it potentially precludes emancipation.¹³

Dialectical materialism lies at the heart of our approach, drawing on the related concepts of a non-aggregative social whole, contradictions, and internal relations. Although materialist dialectics as a decidedly non-linear method is hard to explain in a linear fashion, we attempt to outline how we approach these concepts both independently and in relation to one another. It is these concepts that are the foundation of our revitalisation of Ballots and Barricades (McAdam/Tarrow 2010) and how we seek to provide a way for-

12 See the divisions between labour studies that look only at ‘economic’ or workplace struggles, and the rise of the new social movements that focus on so-called recognition politics.

13 Ellen Meiksins Wood (2016: 2) describes this problem in quite an acerbic tone in relation to the intellectual turn towards post-modernism and post-structuralism:

What better escape, in theory, from a confrontation with capitalism, the most totalizing system the world has ever known, than a rejection of totalizing knowledge? What greater obstacle, in practice, to anything more than the most local and particularistic resistances to the global, totalizing power of capitalism than the de-centred and fragmented subject? What better excuse for submitting to the force majeure of capitalism than the conviction that its power, while pervasive, has no systemic origin, no unified logic, no identifiable social roots?

ward beyond mechanistic and naturalised accounts of social phenomena such as social movements.

3.1 Materialist dialectics: a lens without dogma

From a materialist position, we believe that there is a world outside and apart from us, which might or might not have an influence on our thoughts and behaviour but at the same time can be contested, questioned, and changed by human beings through collective action. Capitalism is not unfolding in a mechanistic manner, but developing through real historical process and is mediated by human activity (Thompson 1978b). To paraphrase the oft-cited quote from Marx, people make history but not in the conditions of their own choosing; as such, materialism is not a determined position, but one that shapes us and is also shaped by human agency and ideas (Harvey 2010: 113–114).¹⁴

Our materialist *dialectical* approach is linked to the claims of John Bellamy Foster (2008: 70) that one needs both materialism and dialectics because without dialectics materialism becomes an abstract empiricism and mechanism and without materialism dialectics falls into a Hegelian idealism.¹⁵ We employ Bertell Ollman's interpretation of Marx's dialectics as a guide to do this (Ollman 2008a). This is not a dialectics based on a claim of determined historical change unravelling through each contradiction with the totality of capitalist society embodied within it (as some read Hegel and dialectics to be), but rather dialectics as a way of seeing phenomena as internally related and historical (Thompson 1978b: 346). In contrast to a logical claim, where thing A can only be A and not B and definitely not A and B at the same time, dialectical

thinking re-embeds these logical claims in time and space, so that we see the relations between A and B.¹⁶ When we look at complex social phenomena such as social movements, we cannot only describe them as thing A. The term *movement* itself already suggests this: it is connected to space and time and our analysis must reflect this. For example, movements against austerity, such as we saw in Greece, could be seen as successful in that they organised large demonstrations, social centres, and strikes, but this can quickly change depending on which vantage point they are analysed from. In 2015, the Greek movements looked as though they could institutionalise their power when the left-wing party, Syriza, entered government. At this point the movement seemed to have won, but soon after this position radically disintegrated when the Syriza government opted for further austerity measures under pressure from the Troika (Bosco/Verney 2016: 398). An abstracted and linear perspective that only focuses on the single event or moment of eruption may miss these nuances and shifts.

The point is to break down and denaturalise given categories, situating them in their historical processes and conditions, rather than trying to squeeze everything into neat dialectical categories that propose to explain and predict history. We attempt to avoid a totalising ontology which links – and thus limits – possible tendencies to one contradiction (that of labour and capital) in society (which shapes and determines all others) (Bruff 2009).¹⁷ From this perspective, we can seek to comprehend the social whole that is anchored in capitalist relations¹⁸ but may never fully grasp it; rather, from different vantage points, time periods, and levels of abstraction we are better placed to comprehend the tendencies and contradictions that have led to our present and may shape our future. Furthermore, this may highlight the way that actors (in the movements) make sense of, navigate, and activate such contradictions.

¹⁴ For example, Harvey in his *Companion to Marx's Capital* draws this interpretation:

Marx here accords a vital role to mental conceptions, to conscious and purposive action and this contradicts one of those arguments so often attributed to him, namely that material circumstances determine consciousness, that how we think is dictated by the material circumstances in our life. Here he (Marx) clearly says, no, there is a moment when the ideal (the mental) actually mediates what we do.

Harvey goes on to explain this relation as a metabolic and dialectical moment where ideas do not come from nowhere, but at the same time ideas have a transformational capacity (Harvey 2010: 113–114).

¹⁵ This also reflects Harvey's more nuanced interpretation of Marx's claim surrounding the relationship between the material and ideal.

¹⁶ An example here is thinking of the riddle of what came first, the chicken or the egg? From a logical claim the chicken is not the egg or vice versa as neither can co-exist at the same time, yet with a dialectical argument that introduces time we can see that the answer is 'the other': the egg and chicken are part of the same process, and are not analytically separate or ontologically distinct (Ollman 2015).

¹⁷ Ian Bruff makes a valid critique of both open Marxism and Foucauldian power analyses along these lines (2009).

¹⁸ The concept of the social whole is explained further in the following section of this article.

There are numerous and heated debates that surround the use of materialist dialectics as an ontological and methodological approach. These critiques, again broadly speaking, tend to:

1. Understand dialectics as a claim to an overall determining mechanism (see debates over Stalinist interpretations and implementation, Havemann 1964).
2. Turn to voluntarism and declare that every paradox is a dialectical contradiction (discussed by Lindner 2013).
3. Use the term ‘the whole’ as the determining ‘singular constitutive source’ and end up in ‘epistemological austerity’ (Bruff 2009: 333).

Although being aware of these critiques does not mean we are able to fully avoid these traps in this text, our goal is to engage with rather than avoid such debates in the hope of recovering the utility of a dialectical lens.

We have found the work of Robert Havemann useful in developing this position against the often deterministic and highly problematic interpretation of materialist dialectics pushed for during the soviet period. The East German scientist Robert Havemann lost his position at the East Berlin university after holding a lecture about dialectics, which was published later as *Dialektik ohne Dogma* (‘dialectic without dogma’, 1964). In his approach, the world is not a machine where everything is in its right place and just has to be decoded and repaired to work accordingly – where dialectics is used to justify a rigid and predetermined path (Havemann 1964: 103–4). Instead, Havemann proposes that tendencies, as non-calculable factors, always influence causality chains (ibid.: 97). He wrote that it would be naive to believe that we would be able to develop a method that could uncover the complex social reality in its entirety and without any problems (ibid.: 108). Along this line, it is not possible to develop a dialectical lens only in the abstract; rather, it requires concrete interaction with our case, allowing for the specific contradictions and tendencies to become visible (ibid.: 136).¹⁹ This can be a problem with Ollman as he, apart from the rare exception, remains at the level of pure theory rather than any empirical application;

¹⁹ To some degree this reflects Bruff’s claim, when he writes that ‘human social practice is multifaceted yet nevertheless anchored in the material basis of existence’ and that ‘much more work needs to be undertaken in order to develop further conceptualisations of the complex yet nevertheless particular nature of human activity in capitalist conditions of existence’ (Bruff 2009: 334).

this gap and how we could operationalise these claims is what we attempt to do in bringing dialectics as a lens into relation with the middle-range analytical tools of Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam.

A materialist dialectical lens regards its object of analysis as always in some form of flux in relation to space and time. Critical to this position are key concepts such as contradictions that are inherent to capitalist relations of production and can be a motor behind its (r)evolution; internal relations as an ontological claim of how objects are co-constitutive; and the social whole that is open and dynamic rather than a closed, or totalised, totality. We suggest that these dialectical concepts reflect certain claims found in the term ‘mechanisms’ put forward by Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam. However, the study of social movements from this position insists on more than a description of its form and requires a reformulation of these analytical tools. As a reminder, the three mechanisms outlined in *Ballots and Barricades* that we take as our starting point are: environmental, relational, and cognitive. To begin, we suggest that from a dialectical position the term dynamics rather than mechanisms is more appropriate as it does justice to the processuality of this concept – the *dynamic rather than static* processes that lead to the emergence of movements. Dynamics are understood as being dependent on space, time, and context as well as being recursive – meaning that they are affected *by* social movements as well as having an effect *on* them. Building on the previous linear model, this framework now builds up and out becoming more than one-dimensional. These concepts and how we employ them in the process of reformulating Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam’s mechanisms will be outlined in the following section.

3.2 Contradictions and the Cognitive Dynamic

The first of Tarrow and McAdam’s mechanisms that we repurpose as a dynamic is the ‘cognitive mechanism’. The way they employ this is similar to that of framing in the mainstream social movement theory. This limits their application to the study of *how* issues are framed by movements, and how they interpret the existing threats, opportunities, and political landscape, focusing primarily on the internal cognitive processes of the movement.

We propose that this mechanism can be extended when brought into relation with the term ‘contradictions’. In Marx’s method, contradictions capture the

visible and latent tendencies within the broader social whole; they create conflict, and can be temporarily resolved, but always contain struggle driving the (r)evolution of capitalism.²⁰ Contradictions, linking back to our ontological claim of a deep ontology, do not need to be visible for us to presume they exist. Contradictions can become sharpened by particular capital accumulation strategies and it is often moments or waves of contestation – social movements – that bring such contradictions once again to the surface. By making them visible, through cognitive frames and mobilisation, a social movement can contain a class character and, potentially, class consciousness may emerge. However, in opposition to dogmatic dialectics, we do not believe that there is one main contradiction that determines and holds the key to everything as Bruff ironically describes in his critique of open Marxism: ‘There is one way to know the world, and that is through an understanding of the contradictory essence of capitalist social relations. Nothing else is necessary’ (Bruff 2009: 337). Numerous contradictions underpin capitalist materiality, and can appear in various ways; not all of them will immediately usher in the appearance of class struggle (Harvey 2015). It rather depends on social actors and their ability to link their struggles to such contradictions, these *cognitive processes*, making them visible and conscious of such underlying relations.

Contradictions are always present within capitalist social relations whether latent or otherwise; however, the struggle inherent to their (temporary) resolution is not always experienced or clearly linked to a systemic issue. Social movements struggle and are provoked by such tendencies, but also within movements – and their antagonists – there is a constant struggle and learning process over how these issues are framed, and linked to other issues or capital relations. Movements do not just react to these contradictions but activate and experience them; they are thus intrinsic to the development of

contradictions. The idea of the *cognitive dynamic* is to say: this is not a process from outside of the movement, but a conscious act by the actors of the movements to take up these issues and thus build the contradiction further – no actor in the movement comes out unchanged. This can also be linked to class struggle, i.e. shifts in the cognitive dynamic through the understanding of certain contradictions can potentially move actors towards class consciousness. The temporary resolution of one contradiction might uncover or sharpen the next, provoking new struggles, but critically the outcome of these movements is not predetermined or mechanistic.

Social movements of all kinds develop because of these contradictions; and in the movement from a growing quantity to a new quality they become visible, often appearing as a sudden outburst rather than as the outcome of historical processes. Yet in seeing social movements in relation to contradictions, they become much more than the moment of eruption and instead are situated as one part of a longer historical narrative and broader system of social relations. Critically, people have little difficulty in finding themselves inside or reflecting a contradiction – this is the difference between an immovable structure (singularity) and the potential for agency to tackle or push forward certain contradictions: ‘practice, here, becomes an extension of the contradiction itself as well as of the theory that comprehends it, just as the theory, in so far as it becomes part of people’s consciousness, enters into their practice as a guiding force’ (Ollman 2015: 22). This is the reason for stressing the link between contradictions and the cognitive dynamic. To perceive contradictions, to lay them out, and mobilise around them, while at the same time understanding the motivations of your antagonist, is an important tool and pushes movements further in learning processes that sometimes translate into and across struggles. This also impacts on the way that people on the fringe or inactive parts of society learn about the movement and underlying conflict. This can be seen in shifts in electoral politics, participation in protests and so on. However, from the converse vantage point it can also be observed in how the (class) antagonist(s) learn in struggles and shift their tactics and strategies in an attempt to resolve the contradiction in their favour.

With the cognitive dynamic, it is possible to look at the inner and external processes concerning social movement networks. We can explore the internal beliefs and motivations of the movement as well how it

20 For example, the wage relation can be said to be a contradiction, as in its beginning (the beginning stages of proletarianisation) it provoked resistance; the theoretical contradiction reflected the lived experience and was cognised and struggle ensued as to how this was to be resolved. However, now that wage labour is effectively normalised, people do not always rebel, and wages are seen as the dominant and normal way of providing for our subsistence. This is not to say that the wage contradiction has been resolved, but rather that it has been normalised or stabilised but remains contingent as there may still be potential for conflict to re-emerge.

shapes those outside the group (the hearts and minds, so to say). This is reflected well in Rosa Luxemburg's (1906) statement on the mass protests in Russia:

The most precious, lasting, thing in the rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its mental sediment: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat which proceeds by fits and starts, and which offers an inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle.

The internal cognitive dynamic may shift over the course of the movement as certain programmes and ideas might change during the process of action and during discussions among activists, networks, parties, protest platforms, and so on. On the other hand, the external cognitive dynamic might affect the societal mediation of a certain demand or issue that the collective action is referring to (McAdam/Tarrow 2010: 531). How are they changing the political landscape? What influence can their demands, ideas, and programmes have on the state through elections or policies? Is there a change in behaviour or discourses that can be linked to the movement? Or is the movement becoming anti-systemic? Both internal and external cognitive dynamics are interwoven, and influence each other as, for example, an election result – an external dynamic – will influence activists, their strategies, and programmes.

3.3 The social whole and the environmental dynamic

This leads on to the concept of the social whole and our second repurposed term: the *environmental dynamic*. Tarrow and McAdam use the 'environmental mechanism' to explore the threats and opportunities that emerged or pre-existed within the context that social movements are operating in. This dynamic can be understood as existing *before*, but also *during* and *after* the movement and depending on how they are approached such 'environmental' conditions will push or limit the strategies available (McAdam/Tarrow 2010: 531). Opportunities can be for instance political schedules like general elections that movement activists might understand as a space to gain special attention for their case. Threats encapsulate the fear that a certain sociopolitical situation might last or even worsen (Giugni 1998). Problematically, this remains somewhat of a static conceptualisation of context, where movements act in – but not on – their environment.

Thus, this mechanism can be extended by embedding it in a dialectical conceptualisation of the social

whole. Building on these dialectical claims, the environmental dynamic can be used to explore the relations between the social movement and social whole, based on the ontological claim of internal relations. To briefly explain what we mean by these terms, internal relations explores the relations between all objective and subjective factors, thus actors cannot be understood exclusive of their structure and context, and vice versa; this is what Marx implies when stating that capital 'is at the same time the capitalist' (Marx/Mandel 1993; Ollman 2015), meaning that a dialectical study does not prioritise actors or structure, but looks at the *internal relations* – the processes that inform and are informing each other. Thus, as Ollman argues (2015: 10), we should reject the philosophy of external relations that is at the heart of capitalism as:

In contrast, the philosophy of internal relations holds that what others take to be a 'thing' that may or may not undergo change and may or may not have relations with other things is itself a 'process' and a 'relation' (though some of these may take time and special efforts or instruments to uncover).

Internal relations can be comprehended at the micro level of internal relations within the subject, but also at the macro level between the relations of production and social reproduction within the social whole (McNally 2015).

A dialectical understanding, and one based on internal relations, presumes some form of mediating systemic logic or social whole. The whole (or totality) for external relation theories (such as that which underpins the logic of capitalist accumulation), is only the sum of its parts, whereas for one based on internal relations, its relational parts are different vantage points on the whole – one side from which to enter the field (Ollman 2015: 10). As such, the whole is non-aggregative. Contradictions cannot be resolved without some transformation of the social whole (of capitalism) as any resolution/evolution between either constitutive parts or between parts and the whole will alter the whole and vice versa. What was a thing, or static object within an ontological assumption of external relations becomes instead a relation evolving over time – it is always dynamic and in the process of becoming.

This whole, however, is not a totalised and closed totality, but rather the means by which to claim a common social relation (stemming from the capitalist mode of production) that co-constitutes and mediates other social relations within it (Wood 2016: 2). Overcoming capitalism cannot occur without eliminating

class; class struggle, therefore, is perhaps this mediating relation and that which binds the whole together. As Bannerji succinctly describes, this social whole is not a claim to an all-determining and mechanical base and dependent superstructure, but that 'All activities of and in the social are relational and are mediated and articulated with their expressive and embedded forms of consciousness' (Bannerji 2005: 147). There is a common and expansionary logic maintaining this open and dynamic social whole, yet how these tendencies play out remains somewhat contingent as they are activated and lived through human activity.

Going somewhat deeper, this social whole that our study takes as a starting point is not economically reductionist. Problematically, and a key limitation of his analysis, Ollmann's reading of Marx's dialectics suggests that those relations presumed outside of the capitalist relations of production remain outside the dialectical method of unpacking capitalism; thus issues of society or problems that existed before capitalist relations (such as patriarchy) do not necessarily have a place in such an analysis (2008b: 17). However, in recent years there has been a return to some insightful and convincing dialectical arguments from SRT around how capitalism functions as a social system beyond the public or purely economic realm (see Ferguson 2015, 2016; Bannerji 2005; Bhattacharya 2015; Federici 2004, 2012; and Roberts 2016). Whilst broadening our understanding of capitalist social relations, this position also argues that there is some systemic logic – a social whole – mediating such relations; the myriad of oppressions that capitalism often makes use of to divide the working class are mediated by each other but also by the underlying capitalist logic.²¹ As such, each microcosm contains the macrocosm and 'every aspect or moment of it (the social) can be shown to reflect others' (Bannerji 2005: 146).

Therefore, although patriarchy or racism existed before capitalism, the way these oppressions are experienced and lived under capitalist relations mean they are co-constituted by one another. Class, therefore,

21 Using the term 'social whole' (although Ollman prefers 'totality') does not presume a totalised whole, but it can instead be approached as an analytical abstraction (if also an ontological claim), where there may be something external to it. Although with the expansion of capitalist relations this externality is further muddled and harder, if near on impossible, to pinpoint. SRT helps draw out these possible externalities, and dual or coexisting logics.

is more than an economic relation,²² it must 'include "race" and gender in its intrinsic formative definition' (Bannerji 2005: 145). Whilst using some of the methods developed by Ollman, such a formulation contests any claim to economic or class reductionism; instead it builds the hopeful theoretical grounds for solidarity across struggles (Bhattacharya 2015). We build on these claims, aiming to bring these arguments into conversation with social movement concepts, in particular how such a position relates to organisational and environmental dynamics.

But what is social reproduction? Marx had less to say on this, yet many Marxist feminists have been able to expand his framework of the circulation of capital to ask how labour is reproduced – what goes into getting the worker work-ready – opening up the so-called private realm to political strategy and analysis. As such, social reproduction is a necessarily broad term encompassing all that goes into reproducing life and labour: it can mean the material means of subsistence and survival including water, food, or housing; the reproduction of the type of labour involved in the regeneration and well-being of others; the commodification of reproductive labour; the body; and the public and social institutions that reproduce social relations. In summary, it is all that goes into reproducing the labour force (Bhattacharya 2015; Katsarova 2015). The first intervention of Marxist feminism was to point out how domestic labour in the household produced labour power and capitalist value and was, therefore, intrinsic to the reproduction of capitalist production systems (Ferguson et al. 2016: 27). This sparked much debate over whether domestic labour produced value, with most concluding that although it did not do so directly, value could not be realised without such work (Vogel 2014). From this standpoint, Marxist analyses and strategy that ignores these spaces and actors, eliminating them from class analysis, fails to grasp a key element of the circulation of capital. Although initially concerned with the relationship between households and workplaces, theorists have begun to extend their analysis to all institutions, relations (or oppressions), and processes through which labour power is renewed. As numerous waves of feminist scholars have pointed out, this sphere and the oppressions included within it (often dismissed as non-economic secondary struggles,

22 Just as racism is more than a cultural issue and sexism more than merely a social issue.

and thus not strategically important (Bannerji 2005)), are central parts of the social whole (McNally 2015).

In contrast to the narrower notion of the spaces and relations incorporated into some orthodox studies of capitalism, SRT critiques have shown the intertwined nature of reproduction and production so that the private sphere is also a 'sphere of relations of production and a terrain of anti-capitalist struggle' (Federici 2012: 97). The overarching claim of SRT is that it is a 'historical-materialist approach to understanding capitalist social relations in terms of an integrated totality' (Ferguson et al. 2016: 25). From this starting point, the division between the so-called private (non-economic) sphere of, say, the household and the public (economic) sphere is problematised. Instead, it is understood that there is a relational understanding of their interdependence; the private sphere, the areas deemed unimportant or immune from capitalist relations are intrinsic to the reproduction of capitalism by producing a ready and compliant labour force, but also to the reproduction of humanity, to life. Social reproduction has this dual character (although not a dual system) of being integral to the reproduction of capitalist accumulation but organised under a separate logic and thus not fully subsumed.²³ Thus, in political terms the split between the factory (or engine room of production) and society is artificial as all social relations are intrinsic to, and mediated to varying degrees by, capitalist relations of production (Federici 2012).²⁴ Hence: 'the social is thus a historically changing, open-ended totality, whose reproductive logic resides in all its parts, even if its parts are not necessarily or purely functional or reducible to the whole' (Ferguson 2016: 47).²⁵

SRT has focused its analysis on certain contradictions that particularly link to the social and reproductive fields, such as ideas of accumulation by dispossession

and the contradiction implicit in the relation between reproduction of labour (and one could extend this to the environment) and the accumulation of capital (Harvey 2014: 213ff.; Moore 2015). As outlined above, social reproduction is itself a contradiction in relation to capitalist reproduction. It holds an uneasy dual character of reproducing humans and society outside of the needs of capital, but also of producing labour power (Katsarova 2015; Ferguson et al. 2015). There is a constant tension or struggle over the attempt to further expand capitalist relations and logic into this sphere, how labour power is reproduced, and who must take on this cost (Ferguson et al. 2016: 30). This modern process can include for example, the dispossession of land, of assets such as pension funds, access to water supply, or credit and debt crises, and is directly linked to the wave of privatisations under neoliberal policies (Harvey 2010: 310). We see this playing out in the increasing number of struggles over social reproductive issues under neoliberalism where the role of the state in providing such services is undermined and pushed onto the individual – now understood as a consumer or client of previously public services.²⁶ As states become less involved in the reproduction of the workforce and workers become recast as responsible for their own self-investment, 'every articulation of the reproduction of labour power has been turned into an immediate point of accumulation' (Federici 2012: 102).²⁷ These strategies have provoked a proliferation of struggles such as peasant movements, struggles over water and common lands, Black Lives Matter, the struggles against foreclosures in the USA, and strikes. These are struggles over who has the right to survive under neoliberal capitalism; there is a class character and thus potentialities for class struggle (Bhattacharya 2015).

23 There is ongoing debate over whether capitalism and patriarchy are two systems that come into contact at certain points, and thus possibly reaffirm each other (the dual systems approach), or whether under capitalism they form a unitary system. This article takes on the unitary system argument developed by Vogel (2014) among others.

24 The term 'social factory' for these spaces has also been used to highlight the productive and necessary role that social reproduction (spaces and relations) plays in the reproduction of capital.

25 Social movement unionism intuitively makes this link. For example, in the (post-)crisis period the dockworker unions in Portugal and many unions in Ireland actively participated in anti-austerity struggles such as those over housing and water.

26 Tied to our earlier claim of certain contradictions becoming more pressing under different accumulation regimes, it appears that the contradiction of social reproduction and capital accumulation is particularly sharpened under neoliberalism (Harvey 2010: 304ff.; Marx/Mandel 1992). The state has become the manager of the economy, governed by the search for economic growth, where the market is what facilitates prosperity for the few rather than redistribution via state welfare policies. As Nancy Fraser succinctly describes, through 'externalizing carework onto families and communities, it [neoliberalism] has simultaneously diminished their capacity to perform it' (2016: 104).

27 This is particularly clear in the increasing financialisation of private households through debt (see Adrienne Roberts 2016) and the increasing commodification of care services interlinked with migration regimes and care chains (Ferguson/McNally 2014).

Returning more explicitly to the environmental dynamic, the environment is clearly more than just the immediate opportunities and threats that the movement faces. The claim of a social whole, capitalist or otherwise, dictates that we must see and approach the social phenomena under question in relation to their context. Rather than accepting a finished physical entity such as *a movement* as the object of analysis, it is the relations and processes that produce this subject that are of more interest. From this starting point, the environmental dynamic explores the movement's place in the social whole (including social reproduction) as related to the specificities of time and space: how have certain crises constrained or mobilised, or, on a longer trajectory, have certain accumulation strategies or state policies increased vulnerability or frustration to the point of action?²⁸ A dialectical understanding sees the future and past as intrinsically related to the present; however, within contemporary social movement theory the present is walled off from the past and future, it is alienated from its context (Ollman 2008b: 14).

Yet this position also demands that we approach our object of study (the social movement) as open rather than as a self-contained or closed entity. Movement participants may be active in multiple organisations or political groups and they will bring experiences and lessons learnt across such movements with them. At the same time, movements go through several learning processes (linking to the cognitive dynamic) and take inspiration from other movements, such as occupying squares, or turning to general strikes. This is a reciprocal dialogue across movements and their environment, suggesting that when we think of the social whole this could be thought through in relation to scales, from the internal movement dynamics, to translation across movements and spaces or time, and to the global relations of production and reproduction, depending on what was required for the specific analysis. What is important at this point is that the environmental dynamic is historicised and when moving in or out from such scales of analysis the new environmental elements (opportunities, threats, context, actors...) are understood to be also dynamic rather than static categories.

²⁸ A case in point here could be the recent and horrific fire in the Grenfell Tower block of public housing in London, which was the culmination of years of austerity policies and neglect, but acted as a moment of crisis adding acceleration to the growing anti-Tory protests following the 2017 election.

3.4 The organisational dynamic through social reproduction theory

SRT also helps us to repurpose Tarrow and McAdam's 'relational mechanism' as the *organisational dynamic* by broadening the spaces of struggle and highlighting the integral linkages between them.²⁹ Tarrow and McAdam use the term 'relational mechanism' to mean the way that movements build coalitions and networks – referring specifically to the relations within and between movements (2010). Social movements can start as an informal group of friends, activists, networks, and organisations that meet to mobilise for resistance and new coalitions can form from existing networks (Diani 2008). Critically, collective action never develops in a vacuum, but is shaped by already existing protest structures and will shape the structures of movements that will follow.

Building on this, the organisational dynamic explores the way that actors relate to each other in the process of a struggle. This can be the internal relation within movements, exploring the ways that actors experience the movement or build networks within it (reflecting the relational mechanism). Yet it can also be external, exploring the way that issues and movements overlap, cutting across the productive and reproductive spheres, breaking down social movement distinctions (i.e. labour vs. environment or women's movements), and unpacking their intersectionality. For example, this can be seen when looking at social movement unionism, when trade union activists support or also include struggles from the 'private' sphere such as housing, food, and ecological topics, or conversely the current anti-austerity social movements that tackle and link economic issues to reproductive questions. By broadening the social whole (environmental dynamic), SRT challenges static class analysis and breaks down limited distinctions between so-called old and new social movements (or reproductive and productive spaces of struggle), providing the theoretical foundations for alliance building, solidarity, and the potentiality of class struggle. Through the organisational dynamic, we can capture how and why old alliances might break apart, and new groups and links between activists develop in relation to the changing environmental dynamic.

²⁹ We have employed the term *organisational* instead of relational, as we use relational or relations in a different manner.

It may be becoming clearer that although presented separately for ease of understanding, our analytical tools are themselves intertwined and feed into each other. Rather than building up separate building blocks, it is about exploring these relations between the dynamics and approaching the social movement as a moment of collective agency where these numerous dynamics and social relations are entangled and cut across. Thus, the way we use *dynamics* goes beyond the categories proposed by Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam as they are internally related and processual, and although still presented as separable for analytical ease they are a lens rather than fixed boxes to fill. There is a tendency within the social sciences to isolate and study social phenomena segregated from one another, whether implicitly or explicitly, so that each part is 'given an ontological status independent of the whole' (Ollmann 2008b: 9). As Ollmann counters, 'the dialectical alternative, is to start by taking the whole as given, so that the interconnections and changes that make up the whole are viewed as inseparable from what anything is, internal to its being, and therefore essential to a full understanding of it' (ibid.: 10). This is not just an analytical move, however, but impacts upon the radical potential of such analysis as 'the notion of potential is mystified whenever it is applied to a part that is separated from its encompassing system or that system is separated from its origins' (ibid.: 13). Building on this, when the social is understood as 'a dynamic and integral one [...] [y]ou cannot tear this live social way of being and its formational journal into component parts and expect it to live and move' (Bannerji 2005: 151). We hope that by bringing our object of analysis – the social movement – back into relation with the social whole (embedded in time and space), the common tendencies across struggles become clearer, contradictions are activated, and perhaps class consciousness and a platform for alliance building and solidarity across movements may develop (Bhattacharya 2015). For it is in creating a space or framework that allows for struggles and differentiated workers to 'see how their distinct experiences of oppression are in fact internally related, discrete but interconnected parts of a totalizing system' that class struggle in a conscious form may unfold (McNally 2015: 142).

4. Adding a new dynamic: the state

Although the three mechanisms (now dynamics) proposed by McAdam and Tarrow are a good starting point for analysing social movements, they still

say little about the state beyond political opportunity structures and election cycles. Building on our initial goal of bringing social movement studies and critical IPE into conversation with one another, we propose a fourth dynamic based on the state as a relational institution. Although it does not adequately tackle social movements, much of the critical IPE analysis of the (post-)crisis period has a well-formed analysis of the state; conversely, there is a lack of state theory in social movement analysis. As such, the *institutional dynamic* focusing on a relational state theory aims to bridge this gap.

4.1 The institutional dynamic and the capitalist state

Many authors whose research is focused on the anti-austerity protests of the recent period (see for instance Baumgarten/Duarte 2015; Estanque 2015; Stoleroff 2013, 2015) neglect the impact that these movements have had on the state and vice versa, thus overlooking the possible impact (and institutional dynamic) which can be generated by mass protests and strikes. Again, Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam go a step further when they discuss institutional 'contained' politics as referring to parliamentary and party politics in *Dynamics of Contention* (2001), and when in *Ballots and Barricades* they discuss the relation between social struggles and electoral strategies and outcomes (2011). However, this analysis captures just a small part of what the state, in relation to social struggles, actually is and encompasses. Although the state is indirectly included in the environmental dynamic, we propose that the importance of the capitalist state as both a field of struggle and the material condensation of power relations warrants its own dynamic.

We describe the state as a capitalist state, because it represents the artificial separation of political and economic power necessary for capitalist hegemony, and at its core is the institutional support and legitimation for private property relations (Stütze 2004: 9).³⁰ This formation is specific to our period and the social relations

30 It is not important at this point to enter the debate of whether the state emerged prior to or after capitalism, and thus whether the state and capitalism are integral to one another. What can be claimed and is important for our analysis is that the state and capitalism *in our current conjuncture* are integral to one another; the state is a capitalist state due to the power relations that it has developed in and thus this character is retained.

Table 1: Overview of mechanisms vs. dynamics.

Mechanisms	Dynamics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social movement as final object of analysis • General theory • Rejects the artificial separation between 'old' and 'new' movements • 'Output'/'input'-oriented <p>Aim: To understand collective action</p> <p><u>Cognitive mechanism:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning processes of the movements • Framing and interpretation of threats, opportunities, and grievances <p><u>Environmental mechanism:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External and pre-existing factors that influence struggles • Inspiration from other movements • Political opportunity structures <p><u>Relational mechanism:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalitions and network-building through struggle • Growth of and shifts in organisations <p><u>The state:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on parliamentary and institutional struggles • Interrelation between movements and party structures – electoral outcomes and strategy • Detached from 'transgressive' struggles 'outside' of institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social movement as entry point to wider social whole • Focus on internal relations, contradictions, struggle, and reciprocal processes • A historical materialist framework and importance of time and space <p>Aim: To understand the current phase of capitalism through collective struggle</p> <p><u>Cognitive dynamic:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning processes and internal and external perception of strategy and programme • Active sharpening of contradictions • Inspiration from other struggles across time and space <p><u>Environmental dynamic:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social whole (intertwined relation between the reproductive and productive sphere of capitalism) • Internal relations • The co-constitutive relation between movements and their environment <p><u>Organisational dynamic:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalitions and network-building through struggle • Exploration of network building across reproductive and productive spheres • Reproductive side of, and inside, struggles <p><u>Institutional dynamic:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state as a material condensation of social relations • How struggle and class interest is inscribed into state apparatuses • How movements navigate the state beyond election cycles • Tensions between state apparatuses due to (class) struggles and crises

Graphic: Own Source.

of production that underpin the capitalist social whole that we are a part of (Poulantzas/Martin 2008: 308; Wöhl/Wissel 2008: 9–10). The capitalist state is neither a static monolithic bloc that operates in the name of one (capitalist) class, nor a neutral institutional field. It is also not – as the current (post-)crisis shows – a friendly provider of social welfare and there to support the interests of all its citizens. According to the Greek Marxist Nicos Poulantzas, the state is the material condensation of social power relations, and thus its character, institutions, and apparatuses are the result of past social struggles (Poulantzas/Martin 2008). It is not a static institution, but relational, dynamic, and embedded in class struggle. It is, in some ways, a barometer for current class power.

The capitalist state organises forms of economic, social, and political struggles. As long as the contradictions between capitalist forms of production and pri-

vate ownership persist, classes and fractions of classes are always in struggle. In this struggle, the state does not necessarily serve as an instrument for one class, but is a materialised frame, channelling and shaping movements through law, policy, public spaces, state violence, and so on (linked strongly to the environmental dynamic) (Demirović 2007: 101). These are always contested and due to this they are themselves constantly evolving.³¹ The current form of the state is the materialised form of past struggles and acts as the frame for current struggles. The cognitive dynamic captures the way that past narratives and experiences shape political discourse and develop a common ground for future social movements, whereas the institutional dynamic captures the institutionalised outcomes (in the state)

31 This is somewhat similar to Bob Jessop's notion of strategic selectivities.

of past struggles and their relation to current struggles, and how these struggles may then shape those yet to emerge. The evolution of the capitalist state and social struggles cannot be analysed apart from one another and must be understood as different vantage points on a shared social reality in which they co-constitute each other.

While this approach to the state is less focused on a positive or negative framing of the state, it does not deny its class character and its strong tendency to organise the interests of different capitalist classes through one hegemonic project and disorganise the subaltern classes by breaking their resistance. Poulantzas' state theory and its advancements (such as Ian Bruff 2012; Alexander Gallas 2012; Sonja Buckel 2017; Lukas Oberndorfer 2016; and Bob Jessop 2010) allow for a more nuanced insight into capitalist states and are centred on struggle: tensions inside and between single state apparatuses, where the interests of particular ruling class fractions and some of the interests of the subaltern classes are inscribed, are highlighted, suggesting strategic potentialities. This is reflected through the role of personnel working inside the state apparatuses. A scenario that can appear during a deepening economic crisis is the development of political crises, which are publicly expressed as 'scandals' or 'quarrels' between ministers or other public representatives of the hegemonic bloc (Poulantzas/Martin 2008: 314). During a political crisis, an apparatus can appear left-leaning³² and use the demands of social movements to actually defend their own interests, such as keeping job and career structures, stopping wage cuts or the closure of their facilities (Oberndorfer 2016). While these processes can, for example, deepen the political, judicial, ecological, or social crises, movements can use these as windows of opportunity to push their demands further and even force elections and the abolishment of austerity measures, inscribing themselves in the state apparatus by doing so.

Thus, the institutional dynamic (the state) explores the changes inside state apparatuses that occur in response to direct and indirect challenges by social movements as well as how movements interact with such institutions and the possible historical rationale for such institutional forms (i.e. past struggles) (Poulantzas 1975: 25). The state becomes a necessary dynamic to add

as it is the field of class struggle, often the antagonist of social movements, and is also a valid barometer of existing power relations.

5. Conclusions

We began our paper by problematising the current state of social movement research. For us, this literature lacks a certain political orientation, remaining at the level of a mid-range theory or methodology. This can be linked to the positivist turn in especially US sociological studies that has unfortunately resulted in the study of social movements and emancipatory politics developing in somewhat parallel but isolated traditions. As such, social movement studies tend to lack a theory of capital and class (or theory of the social more generally); it is good at providing descriptions and tackling the questions of how social movements maintain themselves and who participates, but is less adept at moving beyond the internal relations of the movement and asking questions of why, or pushing an emancipatory position – struggle is a finished product rather than a process, and class has been lost along the way. Conversely, critical IPE has often avoided the subject of social movements, focusing instead on questions of hegemony and domination approaches. Social movement studies look at struggle, and critical IPE looks at class, each neglecting the other.

We understand that 'adding' such a foundation cannot rectify certain, more positivist approaches within the social movement field, as they are ontologically incompatible. However, we propose that more critical and relational positions such as those held by Tilly, McAdam, and Tarrow can be embedded into our historical materialist framework and by doing this we push their claims further in a dynamic and relational direction.

Our approach began with the proposition that studying social movements can help us understand our current conjuncture, and the (post-)crisis period. Such studies, if used as an entry point to this wider social whole, can act as counter-studies to the research carried out on the recalibration of capitalist hegemony projects during this period. By going back to our theoretical foundations, we believe that questions of why social movements erupt, how they evolve, and what this means for capital relations can be answered. This is in contrast to much social movement analysis that begins at the moment of eruption, missing the context, dynamics, and contradictions that led to that moment

³² As, for example, occurred in the Portuguese Constitutional Court between 2012 and 2014, during the peak of anti-austerity struggles in Portugal.

or may follow it. We have found a materialist dialectical approach developed within SRT the most useful to analyse our current conjuncture. The SRT conceptualisation of a capitalist social whole allows us to better comprehend capitalist social relations and the spaces they infect and intrude upon (Federici 2012). Contemporary capitalism is premised on continuous atomisation and alienation from the means of production but also one another; we hope that by laying our ontological claims as that of a non-aggregative social whole based on internal relations, we can start to chip away at this logic whilst building an emancipatory alternative; it is a critical way of studying social movements beyond mere outputs and description.

From a dialectical position, we must always look for alternative vantage points; when we argue for struggle to be at the centre, at the same time we must look at hegemonic forces, or antagonist relations. We should never overemphasise (or even fetishise) melancholic economic determinism (Huke et al. 2015) nor fall down the autonomist hole of euphoric struggle analysis. A materialist dialectical study of social movements requires a position in-between the two. This is not a linear framework for understanding social movements; rather, it seeks to work through, and in relation with, the multiple dynamics outlined previously – situating the social movement in an embedded and relational context. The goal is to never lose sight of the whole, how the whole is present in the part, and how they inform one another (Ollman 2008a: 10). Thus, each moment and step in the research process is equally important in informing the others, whilst also being aware that each vantage point provides a particular rather than universal understanding of the whole and moment of contestation. This is in response to the mechanistic methods of studying social phenomena that are dominated by isolated categories, divisions between objects and subjects, static conceptions of mechanisms and a focus on inputs and outputs. The movement (as well as the social whole), as a relational and dynamic being rather than a static naturalness, is always in some degree of flux, suggesting that any claim to a transhistorical determinism of either the why or how of social movements is inherently problematic.

To operationalise this, we have attempted to reformulate Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam's notion of mechanisms as dynamics, adding the state to this analysis. We have linked these tools to concepts of the social whole, internal relations, and contradictions in order to situate them in a dialectical materialist framework

that highlights the importance of time and space. A way to visualise the intertwined relationship between these dynamics – cognitive, environmental, institutional, and organisational – is the movement of cogs: each turn of one will impact the others and is constantly in movement. We hope that by embedding the traditional social movement toolbox within a materialist dialectical framework we can move the study of social movements beyond mere description towards a deeper analysis with emancipatory goals.

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