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Another Modernity is Possible?

The Global Justice Movement and the Transformations of Politics

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Abstract:

Using and expanding upon the conception of 'successive modernities' that has recently been developed within social theory, this article offers an interpretation of the political aims, ideas, and practices of the 'global justice movement' and argues that this contemporary social movement is best understood as an expression of the tensions characterizing the prevailing configuration of Western modernity in our own time. Social movements have often simultaneously challenged, changed, and sustained the institutions, norms and habits of modern societies. Placing the global justice movement in this historical context, the author elaborates how the notion of the creative capacities of social movements has hitherto been discussed in several major theories about social movements and modernity. The article argues that the movements mobilized since the 1990s in response to issues related to globalization should neither be seen as revolts against the demise of 'organized modernity', nor as heralding a new type of Western modernity. Instead, the critique and political claims of the global justice movement are, according to the author, better interpreted as expressing a will to realize a 'third modernity' in an alternative way that stresses the values of participatory democracy, democratization of international economic institutions, and the strengthening social equality on a global level. Thus, the movement should foremost be seen as articulating a crisis in the forms of politics and democracy during our present epoch of modernity.

Keywords:

social movements; modernity; global justice movement; participatory democracy; successive modernities; critique; crisis; globalization; individualization

Social movements have played an ambivalent role in our common understanding of historical changes during modernity. At times, they have been thought dangerously subversive, a threat to modernity as such; at other times, they have been portrayed as the necessary prerequisites for a sustainable and flourishing democracy, the very actors that make possible modernity's unfulfilled emancipatory promises. This ambivalence runs through many theories about social movements. Social movements are either understood as historically significant actors, enforcing and defending important political and social rights through means such as mass demonstrations, strikes, and civil disobedience. Or alternatively,

both movements, and the types of political action associated with them, have been regarded as unconventional, confrontational, and disruptive—sometimes even seen as non-democratic, and the activists dismissed as disrespecting procedures of politics based on rational argumentation in an open and polite dialogue.¹

To understand the importance of social movements for politics and social change during modernity, however, it is necessary to take both these aspects into account.² Many times, social movements have simultaneously challenged, changed, *and* sustained the institutions, norms and habits of modern societies. As will be taken as a premise in this article, their actions cannot simply be regarded as *either* anti-systemic *or* as contributing to the progression of a specific set of institutions believed to be intrinsic to modernity. Using the conception of ‘successive modernities’ that has recently been developed within social theory (Wagner, 1994; Arnason, 2005; Carleheden, 2006), in what follows I will discuss the aims, ideas and practices of a contemporary social movement—what within social movement theory is often termed ‘the global justice movement’ (della Porta, 2007)³—in the context of the values and institutional practices more generally characterizing our ‘epoch’ of modernity. Moreover, I will argue that such an interpretation must take into account not only the differences, both *within* and *between* the different epochs of modernity regarding their dominant values and institutional practices, but also rest on a conception of what constitutes modernity more generally. This discussion about the role of social movements in society will take as its starting point Peter Wagner’s theory of modernity (Wagner, 1994; 2008; see also Wagner, 2008), which both stresses the changes within and the continuity of modernity, while maintaining an emphasis on its ambivalent nature. Furthermore, in Wagner’s theory, the epochal shifts of modernity are seen as periods of ‘crisis’ in which the forms of its concrete realization are contested and renegotiated. Even though the social movement concept as such does not occupy a central place in Wagner’s theory, he frequently

¹ Even though it is today quite difficult to find theories that explicitly see social movements *per se* as anti-modern, or as a threat to the modern project, it is important to note that the ideas of Gustave Le Bon and other ‘crowd psychologists’ of the late 19th century—which primarily saw movements as threats to modern society—had an impact on those theorists that up to mid-20th century tried to conceptualize social movements, and became important for later theorizing on social movements, such as, for instance, the sociological Chicago school (even though they did not necessarily share the idea of the dangers of collective behavior) (Wennerhag, 2008: 67 ff.; cf. Borch, 2006). For a critique of more recent theories, and their dismissal of social movements as being non-rational or threatening the democratic processes, see Young (2001).

² Since this article primarily deals with the specific period of modernity of recent decades, I do not here take sides with respect to the different proposals for designating the date of the advent of modernity, e.g. with the emergence of the capitalist world system during the 15th and 16th century (Wallerstein, 2004), or with the Enlightenment and the political revolutions of the late 18th century (Koselleck, 2004).

³ Other names that have been used for this movement context are ‘the anti-globalization movement’, ‘the movement of movements’, ‘the globalization movement’, ‘the alterglobalist movement’, etc. (Wennerhag, 2008: 221–6).

focuses on the role that social movements have played during these periods of contestation and renegotiation.

Drawing on the above mentioned periodizing and interpretative approach, this inquiry asks how one can understand the wide-spread protests that since the late 1990s have been directed toward what is today often seen as the most contested terrain of modernity's contemporary configuration: 'globalization'. The following analysis draws partly on my own empirical research on the global justice movement⁴, i.e. the wave of protests that was brought to public attention in 1999 by the demonstrations against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, USA; and which since that time have been associated with critical discussions and activism targeting both the problems and possibilities of economic and political globalization. During recent years, this diverse and many-faceted movement has attracted much attention amongst social movement scholars.⁵ To date, however, this research has not sufficiently addressed the over-arching questions of how these types of mobilizations can be understood as a part of modernity's contemporary configuration, nor how they might be thought in relation to the notion of 'successive modernities'.

This article argues that there are good reasons to discuss the specific case of the global justice movement within such an analytical framework. For example, prior research has shown how the values of global justice movement activists are characterized by a commitment to participatory or deliberative democracy, as well as a critique of the democratic deficit of supranational bodies and social injustices on a global scale (della Porta, 2007; 2009; Agrikoliansky and Sommier, 2005; Smith, Karides et al., 2007), all of which can certainly be regarded as central aspects of our epoch of modernity. Nevertheless, the movement has many times been labeled—both in the media coverage and by its opponents—as 'the anti-

⁴ My empirical research concerns the Swedish part of the global justice movement, and is part of my doctoral thesis in sociology (Wennerhag, 2008). In the thesis, I analyze interviews with Swedish activists as well as survey data for 1,066 activists from three local social forums organized in 2004, in the main metropolitan regions of Sweden. Moreover, in the thesis I also use secondary survey data to make international comparisons with activists from other parts of Europe, and in some cases from the US, Australia, India, and countries from Latin America and Africa.

⁵ For some of the works published in recent years on this movement context, see for instance della Porta, Andretta et al. (2006); della Porta (2007; 2009); Agrikoliansky and Sommier (2005); Smith, Karides et. al (2007); Chesters and Welsh (2006); Olesen (2005). One could of course question whether such a diverse social context should be seen as one movement, but given the fact that this context is characterized by a common identity (expressed through shared political aims, the identification of similar adversaries, and feelings of solidarity), a predominance of extra-parliamentary forms of political action, and a network structure (of both individuals and organizations), it can easily be said to fulfil the criteria often attributed to social movements (della Porta, 2007: 6 f.). In addition, it is important to note here that such heterogeneity also characterized previous social movements, as for instance, the early worker's movement (Calhoun, 1993), or the 'new social movements' of the second half of the 20th century (Peterson, 1997).

globalization movement', at times even being described as antithetical to the core values of contemporary modernity or accused of wanting to return to a less modern stage in development (Wennerhag, 2008).

One can indeed find earlier examples of theorizing the role of social movements in relation to the epochal transformations of modernity. Both the worker's movement and the 'new social movements' of the 1960s and 1970s were often interpreted as agents heralding and causing a rupture in the prevailing forms of modernity, or at the very least contributing to such a development. In the article, however, I do not wish to argue that such an analysis can simply be superimposed on the recent case of the global justice movement, effectively proposing a modified version of a traditional conception of social movements, but rather, basing what follows on the notion of 'successive modernities,' I argue for a theory of modernity that stresses the consequences of its inherent ambivalence for political action.

In the parlance of the dominant social movement theories of recent decades, one could perhaps say that my approach partly focuses on the central aspects of the 'political opportunity structure' (McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1994) of a society, i.e. the political context of certain societies which facilitates or constrains the emergence, expansion, composition, and possible success of social movements. However, my analysis will not be restricted to politics in a narrow sense, but also take into account the wider context of 'the political,' i.e. the social and cultural structures in which political actions become meaningful. Thus, it would be appropriate to see my approach as also elaborating the 'cultural opportunity structure' (e.g. Wahlström and Peterson, 2006) of a society. In addition to focusing on these issues, the approach taken in what follows also gives prominence to the structural conditions that determine the tensions within and between the different epochs of modernity—and the limits placed on the realization of individual and collective *autonomy*—as a way of interpreting the political action of social movements.

The globalization protests and the ambivalence of modernity

In contrast to the more common way of defining modernity as a specific set of institutions (Wagner, 2001b), the fundamental premise of Peter Wagner's theory of modernity (1994) is that the cultural self-understanding characterizing modern societies rests on a condition of human beings considering themselves to be agents of their own destiny, equipped with the capacities to rationally cope with such a condition. During modernity, the foremost principle characterizing society is that of the right of collectivities and individuals to govern themselves, i.e. to freely and together with others establish and elaborate different forms of autonomy, or self-government. If autonomy means the freedom to create new rules for society, however, it also often carries restrictions to freedom, since rule-making in itself

implies the creation of new boundaries and new forms of mastery. Consequently, Wagner considers the unsolvable tension between liberty and discipline—or between autonomy and rational mastery—as the foundation for the cultural self-understanding of modernity (Wagner, 2001d: 4 ff.).⁶ It is out of this tension that new institutions and new forms of knowledge are created, as well as new forms of political decision-making instituted. As such, modern forms of self-government may be perpetually elaborated and criticized for not sufficiently furthering individual or collective autonomy.

If one were to expand Wagner's conceptual apparatus, it seems reasonable to place social movements among the type of agents that during modernity have been active in elaborating the forms of autonomy, i.e. the self-government of society.⁷ When the structural premises for the tension between autonomy and rational mastery have been challenged and renegotiated, resulting in a renewed configuration of modernity, social movements have often played a prominent role. How would the global justice movement appear in light of such an approach, which gives prominence to the elaboration of and striving for new forms of self-government?

To give the reader a more general background of the global justice movement, it emerged during the final years of the 20th century out of, on the one hand, a critique of the negative social and political impact of economic globalization, and on the other, a desire to make globalization more socially sustainable and democratic. It has emphasized not only a critique of the democratic deficit of the supranational bodies and global institutions that have grown in importance during recent decades, but also a critique of the market-oriented policies of these institutions—often labeled 'Washington consensus', or simply 'neo-liberalism'—the argument being that they have led to deepened social inequalities in both developing countries and developed welfare states. Protests against these practices and policies have often been carried forward during mass demonstrations organized at top summits of global institutions like the WTO, the G8, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Moreover, by organizing so-called social forums on different geographical levels (most notably the World Social Forum), the movement has sought to create what might be seen as transnational counter-publics, insofar as they are aimed at constructing forms of popular deliberation that would be democratically more legitimate than the global institutions that are criticized by the movement. A central characteristic of the global justice movement has been that it is organized across national borders, and can therefore be said to have challenged

⁶ In other writings, Wagner (2001c: 4) partly attributes this to Cornelius Castoriadis' notion that Western societies are characterized by a 'double imaginary signification': on the one hand, they are based on the idea of autonomy and democracy, on the other, on the regime of rational mastery central for capitalist production.

⁷ When discussing social movements, the use of this word should not be conflated with specific social movements use of the term autonomy, such as within the Marxist oriented groups and traditions of *autonomia*. See e.g. Katsiaficas (1997).

traditionally nation-state based forms of politics. Furthermore, in contrast to many of the summit meetings of the global institutions, the World Social Forum has been organized in different parts of the Global South and in Latin America, in particular. Under the slogan 'Another world is possible', these social forums, and the movement more generally, have been bringing together a diverse blend of political groups: from environmentalist groups and recently formed organizations such as Attac, to trade unions and other organizations from the Old Left, as well as groups that emerged out of the protests of the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

In many respects, the global justice movement can thus be understood as a contemporary case of a social movement that both actively elaborates new forms of autonomy and addresses a critique to the prevalent forms of rational mastery in relation to the developments and conflicts characterizing our epoch of modernity. In many accounts, these developments of modernity are frequently described as expressions of, on the one hand, a general 'globalization' that submits politics, economy and culture in all parts of the world to a singular and uniform logic, and on the other hand, a radicalized 'individualization' that increasingly 'disembeds' individuals from traditional belongings and collectivities, leaving them on their own to cope with various 'abstract systems' (see e.g. Giddens, 1990; 1991; Wagner, 2001a: 165). The merits of accounts such as these notwithstanding—such concepts do indeed describe important overall societal developments—they sometimes have an inclination to picture these overall tendencies as developments that have gradually been radicalized during all of modernity, and which are understood to be at a peak today. Similar to the 'modernization theory' of the mid-20th century (Nolte, 2001), the prevailing institutional configuration of a specific society is regarded as the one measure to which all other societies are converging, through a single form of 'modernization'. Thus, such accounts tend to leave little room for more complex analyses of how modernity is realized and interpreted during different historical epochs, in which dominant values vary. From within such perspectives, it also becomes difficult to understand political claims pointing towards a wide range of possible modernities, as in the case of the global justice movement, for instance, boldly stating that 'another world is possible'.

In contrast to accounts such as those described above, the notion of 'successive modernities' implies a conception of modernity, not as a linear evolution and refinement of a predefined set of institutions, but rather as a cultural condition that periodically experience crises about how its fundamental characteristics are interpreted and realized in institutions, norms, and conducts of life. According to Wagner, the crises of modernity can be understood as 'periods when individuals and groups change their social practices to such an extent that major social institutions and, with them, the prevailing configuration of institutions, undergo a transformation.' (Wagner, 1994: 31). In his theory of modernity, Wagner identifies two major

crises in Western societies. The first stretches from the middle to the end of the 19th century and is followed by the major reconfiguration of social organization that occurred during the first two decades of the 20th century (a period, that also marks the step from what he labels 'restricted liberal modernity' to 'organized modernity'). The second crisis emerges in the 1960s, and since then has fueled the debates on whether we are witnessing a new or different modernity, (a period that has sometimes been characterized by concepts like 'postmodernity', 'post-industrial society', or 'late modernity'). In Wagner's terms, this second crisis expresses a transition to what he labels as 'extended liberal modernity', an epoch that is considered to be not yet fully realized. Irrespective of whether one considers this 'third modernity' of Western societies to be fully realized, it can be analytically valuable to trace the contours of our epoch of modernity, and thus to contrast its main characteristics to those of its previous epochs (cf. Carleheden, 2001: 103). The characteristics that would be relevant to this article, which is concerned with a social movement criticizing political and economic institutions, are in particular the contemporary political and economical configuration of modernity. Thus, when discussing concepts like 'globalization' and 'individualization', the relevant question is how the contemporary meaning of these concepts can be said to differ from earlier epochs of modernity, and—in our case—how we should use them to interpret the ideas and practices of a contemporary social movement.

In order to further develop this question concerning how the aims and actions of the global justice movement should be interpreted in relation to the political, social, and cultural specificities of our epoch of modernity, something more general should first be said about how social movements can be conceived in relation to the notion of 'successive modernities', which will be followed by a brief discussion regarding the relationship between the three epochs of Western modernity and earlier social movements.

Social movements and the succession of modernities

It is not far-fetched to claim that social movements have often played a privileged role in the temporal successions of different types of modernities. Occasionally, this role has consisted in a direct opposition to the prevailing configuration of modernity and has aimed at transgressing it. Considered more broadly, social movements have contributed to processes of cognitive reorientation during the various 'crises of modernity.' It is often within these movements that the primary conflicts of these crises have been conceptualized. Many times social movements have been crucial for creating solutions to such crises, drafting utopian projects, producing social experiments, and bringing forward new values and forms of action. Even when the correspondence between the actual social changes and the ideological aims of the movements have been low, their influence being mostly indirect, one can find many examples of new social and political forms having their origin in the

practices and cognitive universes of particular social movements. Thus, by focusing on the relation between movements and emerging social forms, the main tendencies in these major shifts within modernity can be highlighted, particularly when it comes to changes and developments in the realization of both collective and individual autonomy.

Within social movement theory and theories about social movements, the notion of movements playing a privileged role in the transformation of society has a long history. The foremost example would be that of the worker's movement of the late 19th and early 20th century, and the impact it had on how 'the social question' was conceptualized and believed to be solved, through various institutional arrangements as well as general social and political reorientations. Already in the mid-19th century the originator of the social movement concept, the German historian Lorenz von Stein (1850), connected the emergence of *the* social movement—i.e. the worker's movement—with a prognosis of a profound restructuring of the state and the economy; specifically, the transformation of the non-interventionist liberal state into an intervening social state.⁸ Within the early sociology of the turn of the last century, Werner Sombart (1905) discussed the role of the worker's movement in similar terms, seeing proletarian identity as something that would facilitate a transition to a more collectivist-oriented mass society.

The emergence of 'new social movements' during the 1960s and 1970s inspired similar theories. An illustrative example is Alain Touraine's (1969) theory of the 'new social movement' (a concept he coined). In Touraine's theory, the traditional role of the worker's movement is overtaken by the 'new social movement', which is seen as the most important social actor during the demise of 'industrial society' and the transition to 'programmed society'. This focus on the creative capacities of social movements can also be found, in more or less moderate forms, amongst a group of social movement scholars and social theorists of later decades, especially regarding the role of 'new social movements' in contemporary society.⁹

Within the historically oriented sociology that has proposed the notion of 'successive modernities', one can also find a discussion about the historical roles of different social

⁸ Of course, despite the fact that he very rarely used the concept 'social movement', von Stein's contemporary Karl Marx ought also to be mentioned here as an important intellectual who entertained similar, but more politically revolutionary, ideas on the role of the worker's movement for the transformation of society.

⁹ Amongst social movement scholars, one could mention Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (1991), with their concept 'cognitive praxis'. Amongst social theorists, one could mention Ulrich Beck (1997) and his concept 'sub-politics', Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992) and their theory of civil society in which social movements are given a prominent role, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000; 2004), whose concepts 'constituent power' and 'the multitude' connects not only social movements but a wide range of contentious politics with the creation of new forms of both political and social autonomy (see also Negri, 1999).

movements during epochal transformations. In Wagner's three-part periodization of Western modernity, the worker's movement is, for instance, discussed as important in bringing about the crisis of 'restricted liberal modernity', as well as in contributing to the emergence and institutionalization of 'organized modernity' in the beginning of the 20th century (Wagner, 1994: 58 ff.). In the account given by Wagner (1994: 142) he also attributes 'an important role' to the new social movements and the events of 1968 'in dismantling organized modernity', even though he later (Wagner, 2008: 62–74) stresses that the outcomes of this process have quite often diverged from the initial critique of the protesters.

For some of the early theorists mentioned above (and among the later, also Alain Touraine), these observations or predictions forced them to conceive of certain social movements as key transformative agents, especially during phases of history when the prevailing configuration of modernity was loosing its grip. Despite their merits, these types of theorizations have a tendency to regard movements as revolutionary agents foremost aiming at fundamental social change. Apparently, not all social movements can be attributed large-scale transformations of this kind. And very seldom are the ones actually affecting transformations the only agents involved in those processes. Many times, social movements express alternate visions of how a certain epoch of modernity *should be* interpreted and realized, primarily by pursuing those visions *within* the interpretative frames of a certain form of modernity. From such a perspective, social movements are better thought of as actors within civil society aiming at both 'political and societal democratization' of a prevailing society (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 492). In other words, they are making it possible for more individuals and collectivities to take part in the collective autonomy of society; for instance, through means of protests and the creation of counter-publics. Thus, at the general level, movements might be more precisely conceived of as both potentially aiming to transgress certain configurations of modernity, and as operating *within* such configurations, expressing other possible interpretations of their core values and conflicts. Of course, these two different aspects of political action—what one could see as its 'utopian' and its culturally embedded aspects—always become intermingled in practice, and are often only possible to separate *post factum*. But if one employs the analytical viewpoint of 'successive modernities', there are clear merits in making a distinction between these two aspects.

If the worker's movement and the new social movements of the 1960s represent cases that can easily be related to the notion of the successions of different epochs of modernity, the global justice movement appears to be a more complex case. Regarding its organizational composition, it consists of actors that can be connected to both the traditional worker's movement (trade unions, Left parties, etc.) and the new social movements (environmentalists, international solidarity activists, etc.), plus new organizations such as Attac, which have been formed since the 1990s around globalization-related issues. In both

mass-media coverage and the accounts given by its opponents, this movement has frequently been labeled 'the anti-globalization movement', and (echoing standard ideas of traditional 'modernization theory') sometimes criticized as urging a return to a less modern stage in development, or simply being anti-modernist (Wennerhag, 2008). Yet, if one's aim is to analyze the conflicts and interactions between different interpretations of certain types of modernities, such descriptions have little to contribute. The question of the specificity of these protests should rather be addressed in terms of how the political actions and goals of the global justice movement can be understood as expressions of the tensions characterizing the prevalent configuration of Western modernity. Should the movement be seen as a revolt against the demise of organized modernity, or as heralding a new type of Western modernity? Or should it—more moderately—be seen as expressing a different interpretation of how the prevalent form of Western modernity, i.e. what can be labeled the 'third modernity' (Carleheden, 2001), should be realized?

In order to give a tentative answer to this question (and before discussing more thoroughly the general characteristics of our epoch of modernity), one must first look back at the relationship between the three epochs of Western modernity, the crises of Western modernity, and earlier social movements. Furthermore, it is necessary to elaborate this question in relation to the unsolvable tension between autonomy and rational mastery that is here understood as foundational for the cultural self-understanding of modernity at large, particularly if we wish to interpret how a broader autonomy was achieved or strived for during modernity's different epochs.

Social movements and the epochs of Western modernity

In his account of the first crisis of modernity, Wagner (1994) shows that many of the conceptions and institutional forms that would become dominant during 'organized modernity', were already present at the commencement of 'the social question' during mid-19th century, and that these forms became increasingly important during the period of crisis that characterized the later part of the century. What came to be central to organized modernity—the creation of the welfare state, democratic citizenship, and the institutions for managing conflicts of interest between labor and capital—were all responses to 'the social question,' and had as one of their main sources the criticism, utopian proposals, social experiments, and alternative modes of life produced within social movements. Such influences became especially important as more institutionally stable forms of organized modernity were established during the 1920s and onwards. Generally speaking, this process was concerned with managing the demands of the masses for inclusion within the social and political order, that is, with how autonomy could be broadened without threatening its depth and how more people could be granted real liberties and rights without limiting

liberty at large. During this second epoch of Western modernity (in most countries from the 1920s and onwards) autonomy was mainly realized through belonging to collectivities—foremost post-traditional collectivities such as class, nation, and nuclear family—and political participation was foremost accomplished on a mass basis through trade unions, class based political parties and, indirectly, through the procedures of universal suffrage and political representation. Through these forms of belonging and participation, political representation came to coincide with social representation. The individual's entry in to politics mainly consisted in having membership in class-based and institutionalized political parties. Membership in parties, trade unions and other organizations not only made possible participation in the political processes, but also produced forms of identification and predictability that structured and reproduced the overall conduct of life of the individual. A further distinct characteristic of politics during organized modernity was that it was firmly structured around the nation-state. In general, during this epoch of modernity both social welfare and political rights were created through firmer state regulations within nation-states, as well as strengthened boundaries between them, hindering the less restricted flows of commodities, capital, and labor that had characterized 'restricted liberal modernity'.

The concrete realization of organized modernity gave way to many different models, from the 1920s onwards: in Europe, these models ranged from 'the People's Home' of Social Democratic Sweden to fascism, nazism and state socialism, while in the US one saw the creation of the 'New Deal', and outside of the Occident, various nationalist, populist, and state socialist models began to take shape (in those cases where these parts of the world were not still subject to colonial rule). Despite the significant differences between these models—especially regarding their approach to political and cultural diversity—they can nevertheless be said to contain certain common elements. According to Wagner (1994: 76), the principal characteristic all these models of organized modernity shared was that of 'conventionalization', which he defines as 'a means for reducing uncertainty by limiting the variation of events, actions and interpretations that may take place', through a 'collective effort to establish manageability of the social world'. Here, it is also important to note that these efforts of 'conventionalization' were carried out both from below (by different social movements and mass organizations), and from above (with support, or being forced, by the state and the elites). In terms of 'models of democracy' (Held, 1996), one could say that this epoch—especially after World War II, when some of the less democratic models had been defeated—was characterized by an oscillation between a more meritocratic and hierarchic model of 'competitive elitist democracy', and a more corporatist model of 'pluralist democracy' that was based firmly in the idea of social representation.

What Wagner labels the second crisis of Western modernity, beginning in the 1960s, can however be seen as a departure from the concrete realizations of autonomy that emerged

during organized modernity. As discussed earlier, the 'new social movements' that formed during this and the following decades can in many respects be seen as important for what would become the critique and the transformation of the structures of organized modernity. The new social movements questioned the idea that the representative party structure and its associated institutions were the only means for acting politically, and saw political parties as too hierarchical, too much oriented towards loyalty and too closely connected to the state. Instead, the new social movements advocated political forms that expressed more (or complete) autonomy in relation to traditional institutions, and as such they tended to be more oriented towards values of diversity, creativity, and individual expression. For instance, the New Left and the Feminist movement criticized the boundary between private and public as a way of concealing seemingly 'private' relations of power outside the public realm. Many movements insisted that, in addition to making the state more democratic, other social spheres should be arranged according to the ideals of democracy. Socially, the new social movements were based on social belongings other than class—such as gender, generation, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.—and politically, they articulated questions about the environment, peace and international solidarity.

Considered in terms of autonomy, the critique of organized modernity was based on a desire to both broaden and deepen autonomy. The new social movements put both the essential institutions and forms of legitimacy of organized modernity into question. Criticism was aimed at the hierarchical and static functioning of both the welfare state and its political institutions, which were both considered too patriarchal and too much based on a corporatist system of basic social consensus. However, the critique of the movements did not only concern the state, but was also aimed at the uniformity of everyday life created by mass consumption and industrial society. Taken together, these essential parts of organized modernity were considered incompatible with a notion of autonomy prioritizing diversity, self-fulfillment, and decentralized self-government. In many respects, the target of the new social movements' criticism was the political and social configuration of organized modernity. Originally an answer to the social question, this model was now conceived of as have becoming stagnant, and its institutional and cultural forms were considered to be patriarchal, inflexible, and democratically all too limited.

Similar to the struggles and critiques by the worker's movement in an earlier moment, these movements had both a direct or indirect impact on politics and society at large. For instance, new questions entered the political agenda: political parties changed their mode of organizing, new models of work organization entered industry, and 'post-material values' broadly impacted in society (Kitschelt, 1993; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Inglehart, 1990).

One way of conceptualizing the differences between the critiques made by social movements during these two crises of Western modernity, which also takes into account their different impacts, is to make a distinction between what Luc Boltanski (2002; see also Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) labels 'social critique' and 'artistic critique', which stresses the different interpretations of the meaning of autonomy. According to Boltanski, both forms of critique have historically been essential to social movements, especially with respect to the criticism of the shortcomings of capitalism during modernity. Through social critique, issues of inequality, poverty, and exploitation have been raised, while a mistrust for the kind of individualism that undermines social solidarity and social equality have also been expressed. The emblematic exponent of this type of critique was, according to Boltanski, the labor movement. Organized modernity could undoubtedly be thought of as a response to this kind of critique, specifically as it was articulated through 'the social question'. Artistic critique, by contrast, is understood as traditionally having its social basis among intellectuals and artists who believed that capitalism and industrialization reduced individuals to one-dimensional beings. The ideal of artistic critique was therefore, according to Boltanski, liberation and individual autonomy based on a notion of the unique and the authentic. More precisely, this type of critique was based on resistance to oppression (for instance, the discipline of the factory or the dominance of the market), the uniformity of mass society, and the tendency of social relations to be transformed into commodities, rather than on the problems of unequal distribution that were thought to be of primary concern within social critique.

According to Boltanski, both of these critical stances were central to the protests of the 1960s, but the social changes that ensued during the following decades were more in line with the central premises of artistic critique and were often implemented at the expense of the demands and objectives of social critique. For example, the restructuring of labor organization through the introduction of autonomous 'teams', flexible working hours, and efficiency salaries can be seen as responses to the artistic critique leading to a transformation of working life. At the same time, however, the flipside of these developments was a weakening of those institutions that had been created during organized modernity in response to the earlier forms of social critique, such as redistributing welfare systems, collective bargaining systems giving trade unions a prominent role, and a general ambition to de-commodify labor market relations. During this period income inequality increased, but it was accepted largely because of a widespread perception that the old hierarchies and chains of command had been transformed into the new, and supposedly more just, forms of working life that were emerging. Social critique thereby lost its formerly central role in orienting protests and political claims. In subsequent years, the demands for social equality were downplayed both within social movements and in society at large. Instead, political

demands grounded in artistic critique were elevated, such as the emphasis on individual autonomy, authenticity, and diversity.

If one understands our own time as witnessing the emergence of a 'third modernity', whose dominant forms have been partly established but are still contested and incomplete, the values underlying artistic critique can in many ways be seen as central to it, particularly with respect to society's institutions, norms, and conducts of life (Carleheden, 2006). It is in relation to these developments that we can understand the crisis of representation within the political system, which expresses itself as the crisis of a system built upon social representation through political parties, as well as in the tendency of individuals to increasingly become involved in new forms of political action such as new social movements. However, these developments—often labeled 'individualization'—must also be understood as being part of the transformations widely understood as 'globalization'. The decreased interest in leveling social inequalities, the dismantling of national welfare systems, and the re-commodification of the labor market, are all examples of changes in public policies that have been legitimized as being necessary to the more intense and less regulated competition of the global economy. One could thus say that the globalization of our epoch of modernity differs from the type of globalizing development that characterized organized modernity, in which the nation-state was the supreme node of both political regulation and economic flows. During organized modernity global trade and other economic flows were managed as exchanges between nation-states, and—especially after World War II—regulated through international treaties supervised by international bodies, such as the World Bank and the IMF. However, it was precisely these so-called Bretton Woods institutions that came to have another function from the 1970s onwards: instead of protecting the national markets from the competition of the world market, they came to be central in dismantling these shelters, opening up national economies to global competition (Sassen, 2006: 148–63).

Thus, there are good reasons to characterize the 'third modernity' as a global modernity (Carleheden, 2001). This is evident both with respect to the challenges to national welfare systems as a consequence of deregulation and the opening up of national markets, and the global and international institutions that formally or *de facto* transfer political power from national governments and parliaments to institutions on a global or macro-regional level. However, in this transformation one can also find another type of development that expands the space for political action beyond the borders of the nation-state: the emergence of what can be understood as a 'transnational civil society and public sphere' (Carleheden, 2001: 107).

Characteristics of the global justice movement

Having discussed the historical role of social movements during the epochs of Western modernity, it is now possible to return to the principal case of this article: the global justice movement. How can one understand the aims and actions of this movement in relation to both significant waves of earlier protests, and the major transformations of Western modernity? To elaborate these questions, I wish to briefly outline some of the primary characteristics of the global justice movement, drawing foremost on my own empirical research (Wennerhag, 2008), and partly on the research of other social movement scholars (see in particular della Porta, 2007; 2009).

One of the primary characteristics of the global justice movement is its relation to institutionalized politics, both with respect to activist's views on politics in society at large and with respect to their own political activism. While the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s were often characterized as agents creating space for political action in hitherto non-politicized social spheres—rather than taking part in the representative political institutions, or trying to reform or overtake the institutions of the state—the activists of the global justice movement see it as crucial to reform and democratize both national and global institutions. My own empirical research shows that increasing numbers of activists want to build new global institutions, or reform the ones in place today, while only a few want to strengthen national governments. At the same time, these activists consider the institutions of parliamentary democracy as fundamental and important for protecting against the contemporary processes that have weakened the bonds between the states and their citizens. Despite the fact that their level of trust in political institutions is lower than the average among the population at large, most of the activists believe it is important to exert influence on existing institutions, and their participation in general elections is more extensive than that found among the population at large. When it comes to their own political activism, however, there is little difference between today's activists and those of the new social movements of earlier decades. Even though activism today could be described as less focused on creating alternative ways of living than some of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of the activists of the global justice movement also emphasize values such as creativity, extensive possibilities to express one's commitment, and flexible forms of association. In contrast to what established political parties are thought to offer, they prefer activism that is grass-roots oriented and organized in less hierarchical, stiff, and politically limited forms. The value of acting politically outside of established institutions, while at the same time aiming at indirectly influencing them (if often by different means than those traditionally recognized within those institutions), is stressed by these activists in what can be said to be a view of collective autonomy and politics that is oriented towards civil society.

The first characteristic is adjacent to a second, which is the movement's thoroughly global perspective on issues about democracy and social justice. As has been noted, the new social movements of the sixties primarily influenced the political agenda through their 'artistic critique' of both state and market, a form of critique that was manifested in the movements' stress on creativity, diversity and non-hierarchical forms of organization. However, the 'social critique' of the new social movements, i.e. their demands for social equality and social justice, did not have the same impact. Regarding the activists of the global justice movements, the 'artistic critique' is still an important basis for their activism, but the attention they place on inequality and political exclusion on the global level at the same time suggests that the 'social critique' has regained its importance as a result of discussions on globalization. A central notion the activists share and around which the movement coalesces, is found in the critique of neo-liberal politics, attributed to the political decisions of both global economic institutions, as well as nation-state governments during the last 20–30 years. Globalization, however, is not only conceived as a global diffusion of neo-liberal politics, but also thought of as a process that is strengthening the interdependence between people. This interdependence is believed to create a greater mutual understanding of the common global situation, a fact that those involved in the global justice movement consider to be also facilitating a joint articulation of alternatives to neo-liberal policies by activists in different countries across the globe. Thus, one can consider the movement as articulating the social question of our time; what could perhaps be labeled 'the global social question'. If the worker's movement of the late 19th and early 20th century articulated a critique of the marketization of society and how these processes undermined both collective autonomy and its social foundations, the same type of critique can be found in the global justice movement of today, but this time directed at social inequalities and democratic deficits at the global and transnational level. At the same time, this social critique of the global justice movement is still combined with the anti-hierarchic and diversity-stressing notions that have been central to artistic critique.

A third characteristic of the movement is its diversity, regarding both its organizational and political composition, and the values embraced by its activists. While the discussions of the term 'globalization' have been central for the formation of a common identity, and for bringing the different actors of the movement together, these discussions also bind together a variety of different political issues. Furthermore, the common critique made by these activists does not necessarily imply the elevation of a single or specific model for a future society, which has sometimes been the case in earlier social movements. Against what many consider a neo-liberal dogma—that society can only be organized in one way—the activists associated with the global justice movement embrace a pluralistic point of view regarding society's autonomy. Against what is seen as capitalist conformity, they claim the diversity of

society. As in the slogan of the World Social Forum, the activists instead claim that ‘another world is possible’.

A forth characteristic of the movement is its creation of new spaces for political deliberation, and especially the social forums. On the pattern of the World Social Forum—first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001—the social forum has become an important form for facilitating political discussions and political action, at the continental, regional, national, and local level. The social forum can be conceived of as a new kind of public (or counter-public), within which political and social experiences are shared, world-views discussed and common knowledge and cosmologies created. Through these processes a common identity and solidarity is shaped. The forum also makes possible collective action aiming at social and political change, since the forum is used as a space for the creation of common projects and making political statements. Hence, the forum can be considered as a hybrid of a public and a political actor. At the same time, it makes possible creative action and the creation of knowledge. Moreover, the utilization of digital means of communication have contributed to an intensification of transnational intellectual exchanges within the movement, as well as facilitated the planning and realization of common campaigns and other political action. These practices imply a transgression of the national political context that has often been conceived of as the natural space for politics. Through the local social forum, local activism is connected with transnational networks. It makes a globally diffused political phenomenon locally connected.

The global justice movement and our epoch of modernity

Providing an interpretation of the broader meaning of the above outlined characteristics of the global justice movement necessitates relating them to a more general discussion of the transformations and characteristics of our epoch of modernity. One way of doing this is to focus on the relation between these characteristics and the processes of ‘globalization’ and ‘individualization’—both central to modernity at large—during the third epoch of modernity, i.e. how these processes are expressed in contemporary Western society. Furthermore, to understand the implications of these developments for the role of collective and individual autonomy, such a general discussion has to be done in relation to the concept of civil society, and specifically with respect to different ideas of possible ‘models of democracy’.

First, in connection with the discussion on *globalization*, the significance of the global justice movement can be related to the change in institutional conditions for political action during the last 20–30 years. As previously mentioned, those processes have, in spite of the fact that nation-states have remained important actors in this development, implied a denationalization of political power and a strengthening of global institutions such as the

IMF, the European Union (EU), the WTO and the World Bank. In addition, the policies recommended by these supranational bodies have contributed to the privatization or semi-privatization of many public and welfare arrangements. At the same time, the executive power of many nation-states has been strengthened at the expense of their parliaments. Such transformations have both implied a weakening of the bond between citizens and the state, as well as a blurring of the boundary between private and public (Sassen, 2006: 184–203). Contrary to the aims and critique of the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, this development has not primarily been a matter of making the private political or democratic. On the contrary, the public has been privatized and those processes that were previously public have increasingly been withdrawn from public scrutiny and democratic political influence (Sassen, 2006).

The global justice movement can be considered as a political response to this development in two ways. The first being that the movement draws political attention to the democratic deficit of global institutions such as those mentioned above and the concurrent democratic weakening of the nation-state. The second way the movement responds to globalization is in articulating what can be considered the social question of our time, since it makes growing social inequality, a result of the market-oriented policies of global institutions and nation-states, a political issue. Against the developments of privatization, the activists of the movement uphold the common, as well as express a will to democratize global power.

Nevertheless, the globalization of our epoch of modernity has not only meant privatization, de-politization, and the diffusion of market relations. The global agendas that have guided supranational bodies have also facilitated the production of new political spaces. Parallel to, and sometimes in direct opposition to, these bodies, transnational publics like the World Social Forum have been created. The forum contributes to the formation of identities of global grass-roots politics, and to the creation of demands of global rights and the establishment of transnational publics for political interaction. The local connectedness of the social forums and the local character of activism in the global justice movement also play a role in these processes, since unlike global institutions that command globalization from above, these social actors drive and build it from below (cf. Sassen, 2006: 418 ff.).

Secondly, in connection with the discussion on *individualization*, the global justice movement can be related to changes in the cultural conditions of political action since the late 1960s, i.e. since the decline of ‘organized modernity’. Here, as discussed above, the impact of the new social movements must be seen as a crucial factor for the production of the cultural values being embraced in today’s society. Through the impact of ‘artistic critique’, the values of belonging to post-traditional collectivities—typical of organized modernity—have been replaced by values such as authenticity, creativity, and self-

fulfillment, values which are sometimes designated as 'post-material values' (cf. Carleheden, 2006). In line with these values, political activism has often been based on skepticism towards political institutions, and a conception of 'the political' as something broader than institutionalized politics and parliamentary democracy. As previously noted, the traditional 'social critique'—in contrast to 'artistic critique'—became less and less important in the decades following sixty-eight. Instead the processes of privatization have targeted the claims on social leveling and inclusion characteristic of organized modernity. At times, elements of the artistic critique—e.g. the claims for individual autonomy and decentralization—have even been used against the arguments and gains of the earlier social critique in order to legitimize such developments as, for instance, the 'flexibilization' of the labor market or the transformation of welfare state services into private or semi-private systems (Honneth, 2004; Boltanski, 2002). The result of these developments has often been broader insecurity, social inequality, and marginalization (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; see also Streeck, 2008; Harjes, 2007).

This upset of the balance between social security and individual autonomy could be understood as one of the initial impetuses of the globalization protests. What might be called a revival of social critique has been a central concern for the global justice movement. While the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s criticized political representation for being insufficient, and the boundary between private and public spheres as effectively obscuring the social inequalities outside of the public realm and the state, the activists of the global justice movement have approached these kinds of issues from another angle. While still recognizing the importance of the critique offered by the new social movements, for today's activists, the question of defending the public and political institutions against privatization and de-politization has become more important. As a result, there has been a larger interest among activists to extend political representation and other forms of political autonomy that have been undermined by the economic and political processes connected to the globalization of our epoch of modernity. Thus, they express what might be termed as a will to restore the meaning of the public. More in line with the artistic critique discussed above, however, the importance given to social justice, equality, and the role of the public, has been combined with a focus on diversity, and non-hierarchical and more flexible forms of organization. Moreover, this attitude of openness towards one's own way of making politics is used to politicize, or make public, issues that were formerly de-politicized, as well as to create political communities that remain autonomous from the institutions of the state.

Thirdly, all of these aspects of the global justice movement point towards a conversation concerning *civil society*, in relation to which the movement can serve as an example of the changes in the social conditions for political action. In connection to the discussions on civil

society of later decades, the centrality of social movements for democratization has often been asserted (Cohen and Arato, 1992; cf. Kaldor, 2003; Terrier and Wagner, 2006). This centrality, for instance, was manifest during the 1970s and 1980s, when social movements were considered as central actors in the democratization of former dictatorships, foremost in Latin America and Eastern Europe, as well in the debates on 'global civil society' since the 1990s, as many global institutions have been increasingly thought to be in need of democratization. In terms of existing 'models of democracy' (Held, 1996), one could claim that this shift has meant that the idea of 'participatory democracy' has come to challenge the idea of 'legal democracy' characterizing the contemporary policies of global institutions as well as nation-states. The relation between these models can thus be interpreted as defining crucial differences in how democracy is understood during our epoch of modernity. On the one hand, there is the model of 'legal democracy', based on an ambition to minimize the influence of social interests over the state and to limit political power to enlightened elites. On the other, there is the model of 'participatory democracy', based on a will to create a consciousness of how politics and 'the political' are affected by their social foundations, and a desire to include more actors within the realm of politics while expanding the realm of democracy to more spheres of society. The differences between these two models forces the question of how both the individual and collective autonomy of society should be realized during a time when political power is being denationalized and becoming increasingly transnational.

As we have seen, the attitudes towards politics and democracy of activists involved in the global justice movement are much more in line with a 'participatory democratic' view. Against the de-politization and privatization of the state and political institutions, many of the activists still wish to strengthen representative political institutions. At the same time, they stress that political parties and institutions must be counter-weighted by social movements, and for this reason they give priority in their own activism to grass-roots politics. Thus, the global justice movement can be said to embrace a 'participatory democratic' view of politics, rooted in the institutional transformations created by globalization and the cultural changes connected to the individualization of our time. Given the conceptual framework of this article, there are thus good reasons to conceive the global justice movement as foremost articulating a crisis in the forms of politics and democracy during the prevalent 'third modernity'—specifically questioning how to give room for both individual and collective autonomy in an increasingly denationalized world—rather than pointing towards a profoundly different configuration of modernity based on radically new forms of political participation.

Conclusion

In a sense, the slogan of the World Social Forum and the global justice movement—‘another world is possible’—can be said to elaborate one of the central notions constituting the cultural self-understanding of modernity: given the condition of liberty, it is always possible to alter the forms of collective autonomy. The concrete expressions of this fundamental notion of modernity, however, must always—as I have tried to demonstrate in this article, building on the notion of ‘successive modernities’ and Peter Wagner’s theory of modernity—be understood in light of the political, cultural, and social preconditions (or, if one wants, the political or cultural opportunity structures) given by a certain epoch of modernity. Focusing on the criticism and claims of the global justice movement, I have tried to elaborate how these should be interpreted in the light of our epoch of modernity: as a will to return to the earlier epoch of organized modernity, as a will to transgress modernity’s contemporary configuration, or as asserting another interpretation of how today’s modernity should be realized.

As we have seen, there is little that indicates that this movement should be considered as a nostalgic, regressive or defensive political agent, given the fact that it both embraces many of the cultural values characteristic of the ‘third modernity’, as well as expresses a desire to make the global order more democratic and more socially sustainable, rather than proposing a return to the nation-state order of organized modernity. As we have also seen, there is little support for considering the movement as revolutionary, in the sense wanting to create another type of modernity built upon other types of institutions, norms, and conducts of life. In contrast to, for instance, the early worker’s movement, as well as parts of the movements of sixty-eight, the majority of those involved in the global justice movement do not entertain any grand alternative models of how to organize society in a completely different way. As in the slogan of the movement, it is not claimed that a *certain* other world *should* be created, but rather that another world *is possible*. A more plausible interpretation would then be to see the political claims of the global justice movement as expressions of a will to realize what we have called the ‘third modernity’ in another way. Through the demands for broadened possibilities for political participation and the active use of politics to counter social inequalities on a global level, as well as through the questioning of the de-politization and privatization—and the subsequent inequalities—connected to the forms of economic globalization, the global justice movement articulates a crisis in the forms of politics and democracy during the ‘third modernity’, as opposed to trying to transgress it. To what degree the movement itself will contribute any sustainable solutions to this crisis remains, at least for now, an open question.

As a final remark, one might also ask whether the aims and practices of the global justice movement should be interpreted not only using theories about ‘successive modernities’, but also from the perspective of the theory of ‘multiple modernities’. During other waves of

radicalization, social movements have many times communicated across competing configurations of modernity. One example would be the gap between the two coexisting expressions of organized modernity during the Cold War—i.e. liberal-democratic welfare states and 'state socialism'—and how that gap was bridged by the common characterization of the deficiencies of both systems being articulated during the protests of 1968, in both the East and the West, through the common language of an unorthodox and renewed version of Marxism (Arnason, 2002). Despite the fact that the Eastern European 'state socialist', or Communist (cf. Arnason, 2000), version of organized modernity substantially differed from the Western one, the common language of what in many senses could be seen as a transnational social movement bridged this gap. If one makes an analogy with the contemporary case of the global justice movement, the question is then whether one should interpret cross-continental or cross-regional varieties in the movement's composition, strategies, and impact according to different belongings to 'multiple' versions of the 'third modernity'. In comparison with the Cold War example, however, one must first call attention to the fact that our epoch of modernity is foremost global (Carleheden, 2001). Thus, the extensive economical and cultural exchanges and interdependences, as well as the global structures for facilitating these, give less space for large varieties and regionally competing modernities, and as a result give less weight to such an interpretation today than was the case in earlier periods. Nevertheless, and even under these pressures, both 'globalization' and the 'third modernity' take different expressions in regions that have histories different from those of Western Europe and the US.

Regarding the global justice movement, an important fact is that it has not only had its major mobilizations in Europe or the US, but also, and perhaps to an even larger extent, has taken place in Latin America. Here, parts of the movement have been deeply involved in what can be seen as a social democratization of political power, for the first time in history giving representation to groups hitherto excluded from the firm political elites—e.g. the working class, indigenous populations, etc.—access to the prime political scene (which in some senses recalls the processes of political inclusion during organized modernity in Western Europe). In terms of intellectual influences, one can note that for the World Social Forum, not only the (mostly North American and Western European) ideas of sixty-eight have been important for the development towards participatory ideals, but also other strands of thoughts that were crucial for the resistance against Latin American dictatorships during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. 'liberation theology') (see e.g. Whitaker, 2006). If the global justice movement in Europe has so far primarily influenced the political agenda—e.g. by making *proposals* for 'fair trade', or to cut the debt of development countries, or to reform the global financial structure—the movement in Latin America has had a more *direct* political impact, effecting larger social and political transformations. Thus, a more exhaustive analysis of this development, using the concept of 'multiple modernities', would

most likely contribute to a better understanding of how the spatial, cultural, and political specificities of our epoch of modernity interact with the emergence and impact of a global social movement. But that is the task for another article.

Notes

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