The circulation of anti-austerity protest

Book section

Chapter 2

Situating the Circulation of Protest

> the development of new means of communication vital for the smooth flow of capital's circuit [...] also creates the opportunity for otherwise isolated and dispersed points of insurgence to connect and combine with one another. The circuit of high-technology capital thus also provides the pathways for the *circulation of struggles*.
> (Dyer-Witheford, 1999: 93 – emphasis in original)

This chapter presents the book's the conceptual framework. The aim is to theorize the way in which meaning and protest circulate through society. I propose the notion of a *Circuit of Protest* which is inspired by the cultural studies model of a Circuit of Culture in order to make sense of the variety of ways in which media and communication facilitate or mediate social movements, their protest events and the social change they aim to achieve.

The Circuit of Protest framework relates to and includes 1) the production of movement discourses and the discursive construction of a collective identity, (2) the internal and external communicative practices enacted by the movement, 3) mainstream media representations of the movement and 4) the reception of the movement and the media discourses by non-activist citizens. The process of mediation is seen, conceptually, to connect the inter-relations among several dimensions including the symbolic nature of a political struggle and its material aspects, alternative media practices and mainstream media representations, and the production of a movement discourse and its reception by those external to the movement. Furthermore, approaching mediation as a dialectic process also enables a consideration of both agentic opportunities and structural constraints and their dynamic inter-relationship. Mediation is thus understood as a 'fundamentally dialectical notion' which

> requires us to understand how processes of communication change the social and cultural environments that support them as well as the relationships that

> participants, both individual and institutional, have to that environment and to each other. (Silverstone, 2005: 189)

In chapter, media and communication are positioned theoretically first within some of the traditions in social movement theory. Second, social movements are considered in relation to theories in the media and communication studies field. Following this I outline the Circuit of Protest and justify the methodological choices that were made in the empirical part of my research on the UK's anti-austerity movement.

2.1 Positioning media and communication within social movement studies

Despite the pivotal roles of media and communication in contentious politics and in the emergence, development and sustainability of social movements, their importance is often downplayed and, as argued by Koopmans (2004) and Downing (2008), also undertheorized. This is not to say that social movement scholars ignore this area; there are some notable exceptions to the view that attention within social movement studies to the role of media and communication processes in relation to contentious politics is lacking (see a.o. Gitlin, 1980; Snow and Benford, 1988; Gamson, 1992; Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; Melucci, 1996; Ryan, 1999; Scalmer, 2002; Rucht, 2004; and Johnston, 2009).

In the context of theories that aim to make sense of the phenomenon of the social movement, there are several approaches, each emphasizing different aspects and focusing on various levels of analysis. My review is not exhaustive by instead is designed to highlight four of these which are important in order to position media and communication within the social movement theoretical tradition:

1. resource mobilization;
2. political process;

3. cultural framing;
4. network approach.

Some of these approaches start from contradictory assumptions or stem from a reaction against or a dialogue with another approach, but they each add insight. I suggest that, in their different ways, they contribute substantially to the understanding of the role of media and communication in contentious politics, but on their own they are insufficient.

2.1.1 Resource Mobilization Approach

The Resource Mobilization (RM) approach is concerned not only with why social movements emerge, but also, and especially, with how and in what way they are manifested. Unlike earlier approaches to collective behaviour (Blumler 1951; Park and Burgess 1966 [1921]), the RM approach does not consider social movements as a symptom of a sick society or as deviant and irrational responses to a set of grievances. Scholars within the RM tradition such as Oberschall (1973), McCarthy and Zald (1973) and Freeman (1979), argue, instead, that societal conflict and tension are a normal state of affairs rather than an anomaly that disturbs an otherwise harmonious society.

Social movements are positioned in this approach as rational actors pursuing shared and collective interests. It is argued that the existence of a set of grievances is, itself, not enough for collective action to emerge. The ability of movements to mobilize a variety of resources, such as financial capital, people's participation and their gifting of time, the availability of charismatic leaders, skills, knowledge, information, popular support, etc. are deemed to be much more important than the mere existence of grievances (Freeman, 1979). As a result, the RM approach focuses principally on the internal processes within social movements, on the ways in which movements are able, or indeed fail, to mobilize these resources. The main emphasis is on the organizational structures, on the quality of leadership and on the potential costs of participation.

In the RM approach to social movements, media and communication are primarily regarded as one (relatively important) resource amongst many others. As a tangible resource, communication infrastructures are essential to communicate internally; thus, they are treated as organizational resources, but they also regarded as enabling communicative practices with a view to disseminating the aims and demands of a movement and facilitating the mobilization for direct action. Taking the example of UK Uncut which was outlined in the Introduction, the use of email and social media to coordinate direct actions and to mobilize is often examined, as well as, for example, the production of leaflets and flyers to outline demands.

Intangibly, media and communication practices are deemed to be particularly relevant to mainstream media representations and, above all, to the influence that the media and mediation processes are considered to have over public opinion, which is considered to be an indispensable intangible resource. A RM approach tends to stress the importance and possibility of developing a well-thought through media strategy that could potentially have a positive influence on public perception of a movement. Thus, an effective media strategy is said to enable a movement to punch above its weight (McCarthy and Zald, 1973). Although a relatively small group of activists, for example, UK Uncut managed to attract a great deal of mainstream media attention by creating protest spectacles and targeting high street brands, thereby succeeding in highlighting aggressive tax avoidance by big companies. Similarly, the student protests and Occupy LSX received ample, albeit not always positive, media coverage.

One of many critiques of the resource mobilization approach is that it neglects or, rather, downplays, many macro external factors influencing the success or failure of a movement (Buechler, 1993). The ability or inability to mobilize resources, on its own, it is argued, is not sufficient to explain the rise or fall of a movement. There is a political and economic context outside a movement that has a considerable impact on the nature of the opportunities for, and constraints on, the movement's ability to mobilize and to achieve social and political change. There are also cultural and ideological factors that need to be

recognised. Thus, social movements are part of a broader political process which influences their success or failure to achieve the social change they desire.

2.1.2 Political Process Approach

A Political Process (PP) approach emphasizes precisely these crucially important external processes that are understood to be situated outside the control of social movements. In this approach, these processes generally refer to the political momentum, the opportunities or the existence of external factors favourable to the aims and tactics of the movement, but it also refers to the structural constraints impeding social change and protecting the status quo (Tarrow, 1994; Gamson and Meyer, 1996; Koopmans, 1999). Within the PP 'structuralist' approach, the external context, which may be economic or political, or a combination of the two, is called an opportunity structure. Thus, primarily in this approach there is an attempt to explain which structural aspects of the external world affect the development and success of a social movement.

The notion of an economic and/or political opportunity structure is contextual and spatial. This tradition seeks to accounts for different historical and political trajectories, for various protest cultures and for the distinct contexts in which limits and constraints on protest and social movements operate. In this view, the costs associated with different forms of protest and contestation are expected to vary from one locality to the next and to change dynamically over time. Here, the intrinsic link between opportunity structures and repertoires of contentious action is a particularly noteworthy feature of the theoretical framework.

Activists are understood to select their tactics and strategies from a broad repertoire of contentious action (Tilly, 1986). The metaphor of a repertoire points as much to the possible and the imaginable as it does to what is considered impossible, or to the constraints imposed on activists by both state and corporate actors. In different contexts, the repertoire is expected to vary

and, over time, to change as new forms of action present themselves or are closed down. Thus, opportunity structures also are expected to influence the nature and the extent of the repertoire of contentious action that is at the disposal of activists.

Within the PP approach, media and communication are regarded as part of the broader political opportunity structure, but they can also be seen as facilitating a repertoire of contentious action and even potentially to constitute new repertoires. The mainstream media and their ability to influence public opinion, are considered to be a very important external factor for social movements and to have a significant impact on their success or failure (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; Oliver and Maney, 2000; Koopmans, 2004). Mainstream media resonance is deemed crucial for a movement's efforts to mobilize political support, to increase the legitimacy and validation of its demands, and to enable it to widen the scope of conflict beyond the likeminded. As Ryan (1991: 27-8) asserts, 'mass media remain a crucial arena in which social movements must vie for influence under difficult conditions and uncertain results'.

The centrality of the media's resonance to a social movement's aims in this approach has led to the recognition by some scholars of a distinct media opportunity structure, denoting the interplay between the agentic opportunities offered by and through the achievement of mainstream resonance and the structural impediments to achieving (positive) media resonance (Crossley, 2006: 31). In the case of the anti-austerity movement, mainstream media resonance was mixed, as will be shown in Chapter 4 which examines mainstream media representations of the UK's anti-austerity movement.

Alongside the mainstream media, however, consideration should also be given to self-mediation practices of activists. These communicative practices enacted by activists have to contend with an external context that creates opportunities, but also imposes constraints on the activists. The state, whose pivotal role is emphasized frequently within the PP approach, is understood to

act quickly to disrupt the production, distribution and accessibility of media and communication technologies, for example, through regulatory interventions or by licensing laws (Mansell and Raboy, 2011). Historically, states have attempted to regulate the content that circulates on and through the media, using pre- as well as post-publication censorship regimes, for example (see, among others, Darnton, 1982; Warf, 2011).

In addition, private companies, inventors and designers, that is, those developing and making available new media and communication technologies, are also relevant actors in this context. At the same time, however, the users of these technologies have a degree of agency too in shaping media and communication technologies to fit their needs and everyday routines (Mackay and Gillespie, 1992; Silverstone, 1999a). One of the first things that activists, such as those of UK Uncut and Occupy LSX, do, for example, is to set-up blogs or Facebook accounts, although these platforms are not typically designed for protest per se, and susceptible to surveillance strategies.

Every new and emerging media and communication technology that has become available, whether print, audio recording, telecommunication, broadcasting or the internet, has been appropriated by activists to achieve various goals and aims linked to their struggles. In recent years, the internet and social media have caught the imagination of many scholars. This internet imaginary (see Mansell, 2012) has led many researchers to refer to a new digital, electronic or internet-action repertoire of contentious action (Costanza-Chock, 2003; Rolfe, 2005; Chadwick, 2007; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have called attention to the emergence of a connective action repertoire which they characterize as combining a lack of clear leadership, weak organizational structure, predominantly personal action frames and the centrality of network technologies. It is argued, also, that the technologies and the algorithms that drive applications of these technologies are important factors in shaping collective action. In this regard, Milan (2015: 2) refers to cloud protesting as:

> a specific type of mobilization that is centered on individuals and their needs, identities, and bodies. It is grounded on, modeled around, and enabled by social media platforms and mobile devices and the digital universes they identify.

The PP approach to social movements has been critiqued over the years especially because of the extent to which it emphasizes structural constraints and tends to neglect agency. Although it tends to emphasize process, it assumes that too many variables are static, leading to Jaswin's apraisal that the PP approach should 'live up to [its] name' (Goodwin and Jasper, 2004: 29). It has been argued, also, that the PP approach does not give sufficient acknowledgement - especially in its early incarnations - to the importance of culture, meaning making, and emotions in the constitution and sustenance of social movements. The PP approach relies, it is suggested, too much on rational 'cold cognition' to the detriment of 'hot' emotions and passions, which, more often than not, are the impetus for social movements and why people become active in them (see Ferree and Merrill, 2000).

2.1.3 Cultural Framing Approach

One of the early frameworks in which the role of culture and cultural factors in social and political struggles was acknowledged within social movement theory was a Cultural Framing (CF) approach. Introduced into sociology by Goffman (1974) frames were conceived as 'interpretative schemata' and framing strategies proved to be useful conceptual tools to highlight and analyse meaning making processes and discursive practices enacted by elites, by activists, and by non-activist citizens who shape the framing process (Gitlin, 1980; Snow and Benford, 1988; Gamson, 1992).

The CF approach is interactionist and constructivist and is intended to bridge the processes internal to a movement and those external to it. Meaning making, it is argued, operates simultaneously internally and externally to the movement, and is treated as a complex process in which a variety of actors are active. The CF approach implicates media organizations, journalism,

representation and communication generally, considerably more directly than the other approaches discussed so far. The way in which 'media discourse' on social movements and on the issues they want to address shapes and influences 'public discourse' on those movements and issues is foregrounded in the CF approach (Gamson, 1992).

However, in this approach, it tends to be assumed that media discourse is typically not fair or positive in its representation of social movements. Most often, mainstream media is expected to be adversarial, ideologically opposed and highly negative, focusing on violence and internal divisions rather than on the issues the movement wants to address. Gitlin's (1980) study of the 1960s US student protest movement is a case in point. Not all media is negative about these movements and media representations can shift over time from positive to negative or from negative to positive coverage (see Cammaerts and Jiménez-Martínez, 2014 for an example in the case of protests in Brazil) and this suggests a weakness of this approach.

Alongside the media discourse in the mainstream media there is typically an activist discourse which relates to how social movement actors frame what their movement is about and articulate the nature of their struggle, how they discursively construct a 'we/us' or a collective identity as well as a 'they/them' with regard to their (ideological) enemies. By imposing moral and ethical frames, the social movement identifies the problem that needs fixing, solutions are presented, other related struggles are implicated and people are mobilized. Hence, the framing practices of activists and their social movements provide the rationales for people to become politically active, to join the movement, to do something actively, and to help the movement with its struggle in a variety of ways, but they also are understood to create a sense of belonging (Snow, et al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988; Benford and Snow, 2000).

The construction of a collective identity, of a 'we', arguably, is one of the most important aspects of movement framing in the CF approach. This is treated as a process of producing 'an interactive and shared definition [...] concerned

with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities' of a movement is dynamic and the result of a struggle between competing movement aims and how to reach them (Melucci, 1996: 44). As such, the construction of a 'we' is regarded as an open-ended and multi-layered process implicating emotions and the affective dimension (Goodwin *et al.*, 2001). However, many scholars working within this approach argue that as a result of more complex personalized and fragmented political identities that are less and less tied to strong ideological identifications, it has in recent decades become more difficult to construct such a shared definition (McDonald, 2002; Saunders, 2008; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Social media are expected from the CF perspective to promote this fragmentation, which, in turn, is expected impede the capacity to sustain a collective identity or, alternatively, to make it obsolete. However, others argue that collective identity remains a useful concept and that new forms of cohesion can emerge from more diverse and heterogenous identities; this is apparent, especially for example, in the case of the Indignados/anti-austerity movements (see Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Gerbaudo and Treré, 2015; Kavada, 2015).

The final, but often neglected, actor in the CF approach is the 'ordinary', non-activist citizen, whose views of the movement and its aims are regarded as being crucially important for achieving social and political change. Media discourses, which rely heavily on elite discourses and, to a lesser extent, mediate activist discourses, constitute and shape a broader public discourse, which is seen as an important resource for citizens to form their political opinions. This is by no means their only resource, however, since personal experiences and peer attitudes matter, as does public wisdom, which can be designated as hegemonies or as common sense (Gamson, 1992).

Some of those working with this approach argue that the cultural meaning making process, framing practices and interactions between the discursive strategies of political elites, media elites, activists and citizens amount to a discursive opportunity structure which channels and organizes discourse and, thereby, affects the prominence and salience of particular discourses and frames (Ferree *et al.*, 2002; McCammon *et al.*, 2007). In relation to the UK

anti-austerity movement and in response to the 2008 financial crisis, issues related to unfair taxation, increasing inequality within western societies and perceived democratic deficits would be expected to constitute the discursive opportunities at the core of their struggle within the framework of this perspective.

The CF approach is also problematic in several respects. Some suggest that it does not take structural impediments faced by activists as seriously as it should. Following this line of argument, culture cannot be separated from societal and political structures. It is an inextricable part of these structures because culture co-shapes these structures and plays a pivotal role in how they are justified and maintained as well as contested (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). The cognitive antecedents to the framing approach, position meaning making too much at the level of the individual and represent it as a relatively stable process. The meaning making process is, however, inherently dynamic and conflictual and it is enabled and, simultaneously, constrained, by discourse. In line with the post-structuralism perspective, it is also profoundly relational and embedded in subject positions and networks of social interaction among elites, movements and publics, each impacting on the other (see Steinberg, 1999).

2.1.4 Network Approach

A network approach to understanding social movements has been proposed to make sense of a range of movements that do not conform to the characteristics of earlier movements such as the workers' movement pre-1960s. Those so-called 'new social movements' exhibited very different more informal and less hierarchical organizational structures, they also had more non-materialistic demands (Melluci, 1980). The network metaphor seemed relevant to social movement scholars since it precisely emphasized the relational links and inter-connections between the various nodes in a movement, that is, among the often disparate and diverse organizations, groups and individuals that make up a social movement.

The network approach to understanding social movements emphasises the networked nature of social movements, that is, the formal as well as the informal relational features that are linked to collective action. These relational connections are also regarded as being relevant in the context of the conflictual nature of a social, cultural and political struggle and the construction of a shared collective identity (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 20). In this approach the strength and extent of activist networks are expected to be expressions of social and activist capital, understood here in Bourdieusian terms (Diani, 1997). This activists' capital is relevant both internally to the movement and externally with regard to other actors. A network approach to understanding social movements argues that the constitution of movement networks is not always rational and it also departs from an emphasis on 'causal attribution' in its search for the determinants of the success or failure of a social movement (Diani, 1997: 132). Rather, the impact of a movement on the fabric of society can be detected in this approach in many aspects of network relationships including the bonds and affective relations that are established through collective action and which are likely to have long-term consequences (Diani and McAdam, 2003).

Recognition of the relevance of media and communication in the analysis of contemporary social movements served, initially, as a critique of claims made by proponents of the network approach that the relational should be central in the analysis. Critics of this claim pointed out that studies of mediation suggest that the use of the media and communicative relations can enable weaker or latent network links (Jasper and Poulsen, 1993). Analysis of the proliferating use of communication technologies by activists, has provided contradictory evidence of the ability of these technologies to disseminate ideas and motivational frames beyond close-knit social networks without the need for strong ties and face-to-face contact (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). In this sense it has been suggested that media and communication defy traditional time/space relationships. Within social movement theory, the phenomenon of movement spillovers (Meyer and Whittier, 1994), is sometimes seen as being stimulated by mediated relationships as a result of the circulation of movement ideas, protest tactics, slogans and symbols amongst activists and

their movements and this is not always associated with the strength of personal contacts (Haythornthwaite, 2002).

It is the internet, above all, which has been the focus of much attention by those developing the network approach as a framework for making sense of social movements. This is not surprising given the networked nature of the internet which connects a multiplicity of nodes and which has arguably transformed resistance movements considerably (Castells, 1997). The internet as a convergent technology facilitates both private and public forms of communication, but also enables asynchronicity and immediacy in communicative practices. It is seen as facilitating the horizontal, less hierarchical movements to which Melluci (1980) referred and which could also be found in the cases of the Anti-Globalization or Global Justice Movement. This movement has also been described as a meta-movement, a 'movement of movements' (McDonald, 2002; Mertes, 2004). Initially, the internet has enabled what Juris (2012: 266) calls a 'logic of networking', fostering the construction of 'horizontal ties and connections among diverse, autonomous elements'. Later, with the emergence of social media platforms, it has been found to enable a 'logic of aggregation', denoting 'the viral flow of information and subsequent aggregations of large numbers of individuals in concrete physical spaces' (ibid). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) describe this logic of aggregation as connective action; that is, more horizontal and decentralized structures, which, at times, are leaderless, networked and bottom-up, implicating and connecting a wide variety of people, tied together by personal ties and respect for diversity rather than by ideological congruence or formal membership.

At the same time, it is argued that the internet has not diminished the need for and importance of strong ties in the offline world as well as mutual trust in the context of collective action. This applies especially in cases of anti-systemic resistance and contention where the cost of participation is high (Calhoun, 1998; Diani, 2001). The critique of an over-emphasis on internet-mediated weak ties suggests the need to take a nuanced view of the hyperbolic claims of the 1990s and early 2000s regarding the revolutionary and so-called game-

changing potentials of the internet as a means of mobilising for and constituting collective action. The anti-austerity movement illustrates the dynamic interplay between strong and weak relational ties which underpin collective action.

Another aspect which the network approach foregrounds as a result of its emphasis on activists' capital understood in a Bourdieusian sense (Diani, 1997), is the importance of skills. When media and communication are considered, the required skills that are sought within a social movement network are expected to include knowledge and expertise in art and design, connections with journalists, internet skills, social media skills, and other related capabilities. In this regard, lay-knowledge and 'background knowledge' (Reckwitz, 2002: 249) of how media, journalism and technology operate have become more commonplace amongst political activists (McCurdy, 2012). Once activists have an awareness of how media production works and which content is likely to be catchy and visually appealing, they can play with journalists' expectations, feed the media and engage in counter-spin. These media skills can lead to a 'playful awareness' (Liebes and Katz, 1990) amongst activists such that 'mediated visibility' becomes 'a weapon in the struggles they wage' (Thompson, 2005: 31). Thus, one critique of the network approach is that it pays insufficient attention to the symbolic, and over-privileges the relational and organizational.

All four of the approaches discussed here highlight aspects of the study of media and communication that are relevant to understanding social movements and the role played by the media and communication in protest and social change. I argue that they can be used in a complementary way to build a more comprehensive analytical framework for the empirical analysis of social movement which will be developed in section 2.3 of this Chapter. Before presenting the framework it is important to consider how the study of social movements has developed as a subfield within the media and communication field of scholarship.

2.2 Positioning social movements in media and communication studies

The study of social movements, of resistance and of social change, is a growing sub-field within the field of media and communication studies. One of the first manifestations of this was the analysis of mainstream media representations of protest and social movements. Alongside the rise of the alternative/radical media studies as a subfield, social movement self-mediation practices have become an important object of study (Downing *et al.*, 2001; Atton, 2002). Also informing the study of social movements within media and communication studies are studies which examine the relations and tensions between the material and the symbolic in the communication process (Silverstone, 2002). The materiality of the media and communication technologies, their affordances, and the way they are appropriated and shaped by activists and audiences as well as the symbolic meaning making process and the ability or inability of political and media elites as well as movement actors to influence and potentially shape that process are the focus of research in this subfield. Also explored is the complex relationship between the production of discourse and media content by political and media elites as well as by social movement actors and the reception or consumption of these discourses by non-activist citizens.

2.2.1 Mainstream and Alternative

'The media' – which generally refers to liberal mainstream media and/or to journalism as a discipline – are one of the most important actors when it comes to the meaning-making process.. This is acknowledged in various political and democratic theories (Christians *et al.*, 2009). Within normative models, journalists are expected to be on the side of the citizen, defending democratic values and protecting citizens' interests. They are required to be watchdogs to protect citizens against abuses of power by economic and political elites, to create platforms for debate within society, and to be responsive to civil society (Curran, 2005: 138).

However, getting access to the mainstream media, influencing the public sphere, articulating alternative views and receiving positive exposure by the media is, as briefly touched upon earlier, less straightforward for activists and protest movements than it is for political elites and the government. While journalists fulfil a crucial mediating role in the public sphere, they also have to cope with a set of internal and external pressures that shape the media content they produce (Carpentier, 2005). When producing news, journalists often walk a thin line between these internal pressures related to the processes involved in news selection and its news-worthiness, editorial cultures and expectations of professionalism, as well as external pressures from political and/or market actors.

Few journalists are able to resist these pressures at all times and many do not meet the normative expectations that society has of them. As a result, from a critical perspective, the mainstram media producers are seen by activists, as well as by many critical media scholars, to be more on the side of the economically and politically powerful than on the side of ordinary people. Furthermore, they tend to be biased against social change and against those who attempt to disrupt the status quo. This has been confirmed by empirical studies that highlight a so-called *protest paradigm* in relation to mainstream media representations of contention, dissent and protesters (Halloran, *et al.*, 1970, Gitlin, 1980; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Eldridge, 1995; McLeod and Hertog, 1999). This paradigm is said to be characterized by excessive critique, the demonization and delegitimization of protesters and an emphasis on violence and the spectacular. More recent studies question the rigidity of this protest paradigm; while still relevant at times, it is understood that the media are not monolithical actors and do not always conform to an elite consensus (Hallin, 1986; Cottle, 2008; Cammaerts, 2013). Others add detail and nuance to the protest paradigm framework by proposing a public nuisance paradigm which points to the tendency of, especially conservative, media to 'paint protest as irritating and worthless, and something most would prefer to ignore – a nuisance' (Di Cicco, 2010: 137).

In addition to the production of mainstream media representations, processes of mediation in relation to social change also involve and include modes of self-mediation through (semi-)independent means of communication. It is argued that activists and social movements have always sought to develop their own alternative and independent means of communication to bypass mainstream media. This is reflected in the media and communication research field by the attention given to the phenomenon of alternative or radical media (Downing, *et al.*, 2001; Atton, 2002; Bailey, *et al.*, 2008).

Alternative media practices by activists and social movements include theatre, print cultures, radio and video, and the internet offers activists ample opportunties to communicate independently, to debate internally, to organize themselves and to connect directly with those who are interested in their causes (Downey and Fenton, 2003; Kahn and Kellner, 2004; Cammaerts, 2005). Recognition of the role of alternative media in social and political struggles has a long history and has developed hand-in-hand with technological innovation (Darnton, 1982; Negt and Kluge, 1993; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994). Resarch shows that activists exploit all the mans of communication available to them at a given time, while the state tends to limit, control or close down activists' use of both alternative media and available communication technologies.

2.2.2 Symbolic and Material

Power in the context of research in the media and communication field is often conceived as symbolic power (Thompson, 1995). This implicates not only the power of representation but also the technical skills and resources necessary to produce media content and to distribute information. Symbolic power is frerquently understood as being closely related to the management of visibility which is essential to and feeds the struggle for legitimacy. The management of visibility is linked to the requirement for social movement frames to have a strong presence in the public space so as to visibilize themselves and to develop what Dayan (2013) calls strategies of 'monstration'. This can be achieved either through the representations of mainstream media

and journalists or through self-mediation practices using a range of independent or semi-independent media and communication technologies – from printing presses, radios, and telephones to audio cassettes and the internet.

Symbolicly, activists and social movements care engaged in what Gramsci (1971: LXVI) called a *war of position*. A war of position, such as was fought during the First World War, is a trench-war which is conducted against hegemonic common sense. It is mainly cultural and ideational, and operates such that the educational system, the media and civil society become productive spheres through which to develop and further a counter-hegemony.[1] Today, the war of position, arguably, is first and foremost a symbolically mediated war with very material consequences. The symbolic has the power of constitution and discourse is understood to 'produce' subject positions, relations of power, what is considered to be legitimate knowledge and common sense; it produces a horizon of the imaginable and what is deemed (im)possible (Foucault, 1981).

In terms of protest movements and social change, the communicative practices of activists are relevant in this context not merely on a discursive level or to the symbolic struggles over meaning between social movements and their adversaries. Communicative practices have an important material side. This manifests itself through media and communication technologies and the affordances for as well as the limitations on contention embedded in these technologies, and in the ways these affordances are mobilized through a set of self-mediation practices (Couldry, 2004). When communicative practices are understood in this way, this takes us away from the analysis of the textual and encourages a focus on the materiality of media production and on what various technological innovations offer activists in support of their struggles. This perspective also encourages analysis of the way states and markets are implicated in limiting or thwarting opportunities for resistance that are offered by innovations in communication technologies. Silverstone (1994) emphasised the 'double articulation' of mediation referring to the production of symbolic meaning and media texts and to the appropriation and

shaping of the media and communication technologies in tune with their material affordances.

This interplay between the symbolic and the material is illustrated by the UK's anti-austerity movement's waging of a symbolic and a material struggle – for example, by discursively connecting austerity politics with companies that were not paying what they regard as a fair share of taxes, and also by occupying physical spaces and organising offline direct actions mediated by a wide range of media and the use of communication technologies.

2.2.3 Production and Reception

A final feature that is of central concern in the media and communication studies field, and which is also relevant in the analysis of protest movements, is the tension between the production of meaning and its reception. There is a wide variety of actors that produce meaning in a polity. Social movement activists being one, but, arguably, not the most powerful one. To paraphrase Orwell, some voices are more equal than others. Economic, political and media elites hold powerful positions in societies which enables them to shape political agendas and the terms of debate, to control access to mainstream public spheres and, as Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue forcefully, to 'manufacture consent'. Media elites are seen as indexing the views and debates which prevail among the political elites (Bennett, 1990). While media elites are understood in this research framework to have gate-keeping and agenda-setting powers, these powers are expected to be used in a way that aligns largely with dominant views in society. This gives rise to a mediated environment that is unfavourable to social movement attempts to get their message into the mainstream media which, in turn, encourages social movements to develop a set of independent self-mediation practices.

What often is missing, however, from these pespectives on the power of actors in the political and media spheres and on social movements' self-mediation practices, is a nuanced examination of those who consume the messages produced by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic actors. This is surprising as

political decisions are made and protests organised in the name of the people, publics or audiences. As such, it is argued here that when studying protest and contentious politics, it is crucially important to examine the resonance of the movement's frames among non-activist audiences/citizens in order to understand the precise nature of social and political change. Reception processes and the role of the media's audiences are contested in the field of media and communication studies. While many scholars are attracted by the apparent simplicity of a transmission model of mediated communication, others adopt a ritual or symbolic model (see Carey, 1989).

A common approach to the relationship between political communication and the reception of mediated content focusses on election campaigns (Graber, 2005). Evidence of the political influence of the media is mixed, with some arguing that media campaigns matter and others that election campaigning has limited or minimal effects on voter behaviour (see Semetko, 2004 for an overview). The latter position seems to be most consistently supported by the empirical evidence as it remains very difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the factors which are expected to contribute to any effects of communication strategies of political actors and of the media and journalists who report on the political actors. As McQuail (2010: 527) asserts, 'it is hard to separate out the effects of media change from broad changes in society working both on the media and on political institutions'.

Even if agreement about the influence of the media is lacking in research in the field of media and communications, it is undeniably the case that citizens are increasingly dependent on a variety of media, both mainstream and alternative, for gathering (political) information. However, the role of media in opinion formation varies because citizens are understood to form political opinions based on a wide range of influences including experiental knowledge, peer opinion, societal norms as well as information and news shaped by and disseminated via the traditional and alternative media (see among others: Gamson, 1992; Brewer, 2001; Livingstone, 2006).

The internet and social media are having a profound impact on the the way media audiences are theorised since the ways in which citizens access and consumer information are changed dramatically. This is not to suggest that mainstream media are no longer important, on the contrary, but we can no longer assume that everybody receives the same information (Livingstone and Das 2013). A segmented media offer, catering to a highly fragmented audience, with individuals making very personalised choices about which news sources to access is inceasingly common and this has informed theoretical frameworks for the analysis of the audience.

Having positioned social movements and contestation within research in the field of media and communication studies, I will now present my conceptual framework encompassing the production of discourses and framings, their circulation in society, and their reception. This framework will facilitate the analysis of the mediation opportunity structure and the circulation of anti-austerity protests, which I shall examine empirically in later chapters.

2.3 A Conceptual Framework for the Circulation of Anti-Austerity Protest

Martín-Barbero (1993) positioned popular and mediated culture in a positive light (compared, for example, to the cultural pessimism of the Frankfurt School). He imbued popular and mediated culture with the possibility to disrupt and contest the prevailing culture; mass culture, he wrote, enables 'communication between the different levels of society'. In addition to this, he also highlighted the importance of 'circulation between the different levels' within society (ibid.: 35, emphasis added). This clearly suggests the centrality of the circulation of meaning in any analysis of protest movements.

I propose that the mediation process which connects the production of movement discourses, the framing efforts of movements, and their circulation and reception, can be deconstructed analytically by taking inspiration from the circuit of culture construct as developed in the cultural studies tradition

(see Johnson, 1986; Du Gay, *et al.*, 1997). The circuit of culture is a conceptual model which enables the empirical study of social and cultural phenomena in a holistic manner without over-privileging structural features or cultural production at the expense of the analysis of agency and audience reception. I discuss the circuit of culture and some of its strengths and weaknesses and then set out the framework for the *circuit of protest* which employ in my study of mediation and its relevance for understanding the success and failure of social movements as well as some of some of the processes of social and political change in democracy.

2.3.1 The Circuit of Culture

In his seminal paper, 'Encoding/Decoding', Hall (1980 [1973]) identified four components of cultural production and reception which he used to explain how dominant culture and meanings circulate and are decoded – 'Production', 'Circulation', 'Use', and 'Reproduction'. Hall contended that dominant meanings are not reproduced passively and uncritically, but can potentially be resisted or, to use his words, decoded differently.

In response to critiques that the encoding/decoding model over-privileges agency to the detriment of structural constraints, and treats the four components as too discrete, the model was revised to render it more dynamic and much more integrated (see Du Gay et al. 1997). The circuit and the circulation metaphor, which originates from Marx's circuit of capital, was appropriated and revised to denote the circulation of meaning. The authors subsequently identified five interconnected moments that make up the Circuit of Culture, namely: 1) Production, 2) Identity, 3) Representation, 4) Consumption and 5) Regulation. This circuit of culture was represented in such a way that each of the five dimensions influenced the others.

The Circuit of Culture stresses the importance not merely of studying the processes of production, but considering them in conjunction with the processes of media consumption or the reception of meaning. Proponents of the culturalist approach, stress the polysemic nature of media production and

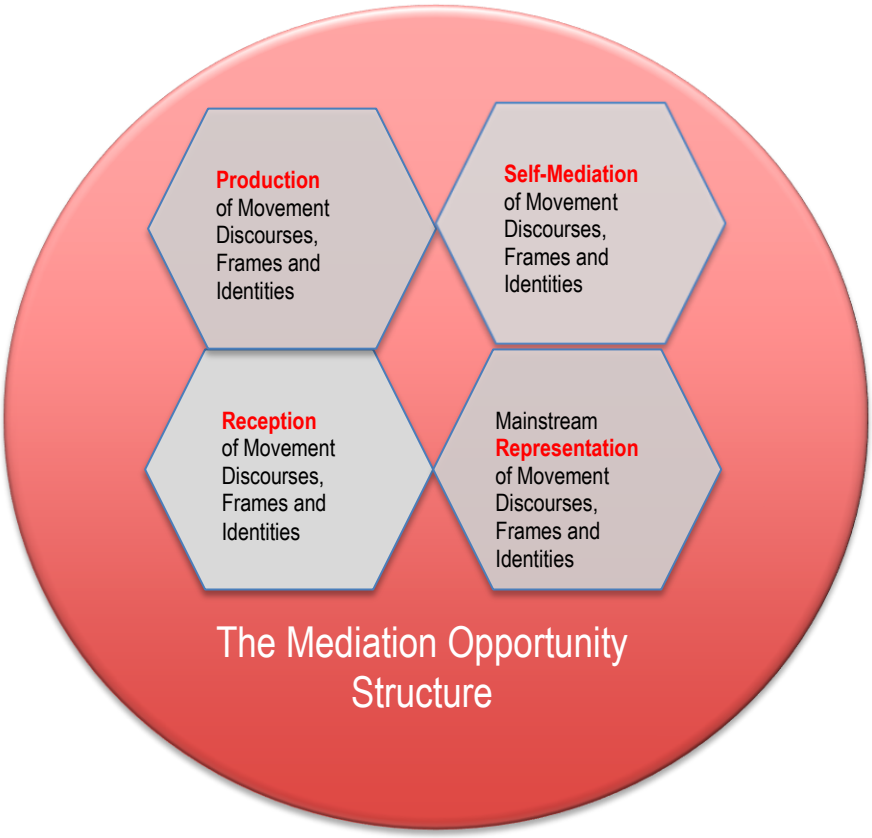
reception while, at the same time, emphasizing the importance of differences in the social status and contexts of those encoding and decoding meaning (Hall, 1997a). This opened a space for the negotiation or rejection of meaning.

This culturalist approach goes beyond the production/consumption binary and affords greater agency to audiences. In conjunction with cognitive social psychology approaches, this gave rise to notions such as the active audience or technology user, both implying less passive actors (Livingstone, 2015).

2.3.2 The Circuit of Protest

I take inspiration from the Circuit of Culture model discussed above to develop a conceptual framework which theorises the role of mediation in the context of political struggles waged by social movements and activists. The *Circuit of Protest* diverges from the Circuit of Culture in being less text based, less cultural industry focused, and more related to collective than to individual actors and identities. Figure 2.1 depicts this articulation of the Circuit of Protest as comprising the following core moments: Production, Self-Mediation, Representation, and Reception. Furthermore, I also articulate a mediation opportunity structure which operates at each of the four moments and represents the interplay between agentic opportunities and structural constraints (see Cammaerts, 2012).

Figure 2.1: The Circuit of Protest



At the level of *production*, social movement actors produce or encode meaning through discourses and frames, whereby the former represents inherent contingency and, the latter, strategic attempts to fix meaning, to establish ideological boundaries and to construct a 'we' that is juxtaposed to a 'them'. At this level of analysis, collective identities and ideological enemies are constructed, solutions to the problems the movement wants to tackle are imagined, and a call to action is articulated.

These movement discourses and frames and the collective identities that emerge from them, are subsequently *self-mediated* through a variety of mediation practices using textual, audio and visual formats, distributed offline and online, locally, nationally and even transnationally. Inevitably, this moves us away from the symbolic and brings in a material aspect. Different media and communication technologies have different affordances that are more or less useful to certain mediation logics relevant to activists. In addition, some

self-mediation practices are more outwardly focused while others are more inward-looking. There is also a temporal and historical dimension to self-mediation practices, potentially influencing similar or different movements elsewhere.

Besides self-mediation, social movement actors, the actions they organise and the various discourses and frames they disclose, are *represented* by mainstream media actors and journalists, situated outside the movement. The cause defended, the political opportunity structure, certain journalistic routines, ideological biases, editorial lines, all have some kind of impact on the nature and tone of those mainstream media representations. At the same time, this prompts social movements to develop strategies to either cope with, adapt to or resist media routines and news values in the effort to manage their public visibility.

Another potential influencer of mainstream media representations and political actors in a democracy is public opinion and the way that non-activist citizens react (positively or negatively) to the mobilizations and ideas of social movements. Hence, the *reception* or decoding of movement discourses and frames from the perspective of extending collective identities and enlarging the scope of conflict is arguably crucially important when studying strategies of social change and their mediations. This reveals the process of opinion formation. Non-activist citizens or audiences forming their political opinions are deemed to be influenced by mainstream media content and representations, but not exclusively. Social media also are important, as are their personal experiences and what is considered to be common sense at a given moment in time and in a specific context.

Finally, the *mediation opportunity structure* refers to the power dimension at the level of the production, circulation and reception of meaning. Here, power is understood as productive in a Foucauldian sense, at the same time enabling as well as constraining. The mediation opportunity structure thus relates to the dynamic and complex relationships between agency and structure, between generative and repressive forms of power, between

domination and resistance, between the power to (empowerment), the power over (domination) and the power in (discourse, subject-positions). The mediation opportunity structure balances a potential over-emphasis on the agentic which often characterizes the culturalist tradition, but, at the same time, it does not close down the possibility of agency and change, as some domination theories tend to do. It also implicates power, which is also pivotal in the context of the circulation of meaning:

> the question of the circulation of meaning almost immediately involves the question of power. Who has the power, in what channels, to circulate which meanings to whom? (Hall, 1997b: 14)

By appropriating the metaphor of the circuit and applying it to social movement struggles to achieve social and political change, I am aligning myself also with the Glasgow Media Group, who stressed the importance of analysing 'processes of production, content, reception and *circulation* of social meaning simultaneously' (Philo, 2007: 175 – emphasis added). However, empirical study of the different moments in conjunction with each other is not straightforward and has important methodological implications which are discussed in the next section.

2.4 Studying the Circuit of Protest: Methodological Reflections

In the last section of this chapter, the focus shifts from the conceptual to the empirical. As scholars, we make numerous explicit and implicit choices when conducting research and it is, in my view, important to be self-reflexive about these choices.

The different moments of the circuit require different research methods in order to study and analyse them. This, I would argue, is at once the strength and the weakness of this study. The research presented in this book is rich and thick and aimed at studying the production of discourses and frames by a social movement in conjunction with investigating their various self-

mediation practices, their mainstream media representations, and the way in which these discourses and frames are received and decoded by non-activist citizens. Inevitably, because of the ambitious scope of this study and the diversity of data sets, some parts are stronger and more developed than others.

First, I justify my choice to focus on the UK anti-austerity movement. Second, I describe the data collection methods and types of analysis employed for the different moments of the circuit of protest and the sometimes difficult choices made at each point in time.

2.4.1 Case Study Choice

In order to research all the moments in the Circuit of Protest in one study, I decided to focus on one national context and one specific movement. While it might have been an excellent idea to build in a comparative perspective – that is, to determine how the circuit operates differently in different contexts and within different types of movements and mobilisations, I chose to focus on the UK and the anti-austerity movement. This choice was guided in part by the urgent need for more contemporary studies on media, communication and anti-systemic contentious politics in Western democratic contexts rather than in (semi-)authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, the UK, in particular, is a highly relevant context to study dissent against austerity politics precisely because neo-liberalism has such a long-standing history in the UK, going back to Thatcherism, that the neo-liberal ideology has arguably managed to position itself as post-hegemonic, that is, without a 'valid constitutive outside' (Cammaerts, 2015c: 527). Despite this, the UK's anti-austerity movement precisely represents the most important contemporary *constitutive outside* of and challenge to neo-liberalism in the UK.

The rationale for choosing the anti-austerity movement can also be found in the re-emergence of a politics of redistribution in the wake of the near-systemic collapse, in 2008, of the capitalist financial system. After decades of identity politics and an emphasis on the recognition of difference (Fraser,

1996), a stringent critique of capitalism, its modes of exploitation and its profound inequalities has re-asserted itself in recent years. This book is an expression of this re-assertion.

Finally, I chose to focus on three specific anti-austerity 'organizations', namely the fair taxation organisation UK Uncut, a student protest organization called the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), and Occupy London Stock eXchange (LSX). UK Uncut can be credited with kickstarting the UK's anti-austerity movement. The NCAFC is relevant given that militant student organizations played a major role in the protests against the tripling of tuition fees which politicized of a whole generation of young people. Occupy LSX is more a mobilization than an organization, which brought together a wide variety of actors, organizations, but also individuals, to protest against the financial system, against inequality and to lament the broken democratic system.

2.4.2 Methodological Choices

Table 2.1 provides an overview of the various methods of data collection and analysis used for different moments.

Table 2.1: Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Moments	**Data Collection**	**Data Analysis**
Production	• Desk-Research	• Frame Analysis
Representation	• Content Analysis	• Statistics
Reception	• Survey • Focus-Groups	• Statistics • Thematic Analysis
Practices	• Desk-Research • Semi-Structured Interviews	• Thematic Analysis

This mixed methods design conforms to the category of *development*, whereby the results of one method are 'used to help inform the development' of the subsequent ones (Greene *et al.*, 1989: 260). As such, the temporality of

when certain methods were used is important to explain how the different methods fed into one another. Table 2.1 thus follows a timeline, which reflects when particular methods were deployed in the course of this study.

The movement discourses and frames that were identified subsequently fed into the coding frame used to conduct the media content analysis and into the survey questionnaire design. For the content analysis of mainstream media coverage, newspapers were preferred to television coverage and blogs, although many UK newspapers have a considerable online readership. Two separate content analyses were conducted: 1) content analysis of the mainstream media representation of the 2010 student protests, in which NCAFC was a central actor; and 2) content analysis covering a longer period, focusing on articles mentioning UK Uncut and Occupy LSX.

For the first content analysis, four newspapers were selected on the basis of their ideological leanings, with two newspapers situated broadly on the right of the political spectrum (*Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*) and two centre-left (*Guardian* and *Independent*). A thorough search on *Lexis,* using keywords such as 'protest(s)', 'students', 'student protest', 'tuition', and 'fees', for the period 11 November–23 December 2010, resulted in a sample of 334 articles.[2] A pilot was conducted on 33 articles, after which new codes and variables were added.

The second content analysis focused on media representations of UK Uncut and Occupy LSX, and sampled articles from six newspapers, which were selected based on a combination of ideological leaning and type of newspaper including the broadsheet market (*Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*), mid-market (*Evening Standard* and *Daily Mail*) and tabloid (*Daily Mirror* and *The Sun*). Using keywords on Lexis, such as UK Uncut, Occupy LSX, and Occupy London, led to a total sample of 1505 articles, 532 of which related predominantly to UK Uncut and 1062 to Occupy LSX. The period of analysis ran from 1 January 2011 to 31 August 2012..[3]

As mentioned above, the discursive and frame analysis also fed into the design of the survey questionnaire, probing the extent to which the anti-austerity movement was supported by the UK population.[4] Besides a set of socio-democraphic questions, respondents were asked to provide their opinion on a set of statements that aligned with or contradicted the movement frames. Second, their knowledge of the three cases was gauged. Third, the main aims of the cases were explained and the degree of sympathy was measured. Finally, respondents' media consumption patterns were surveyed. The survey was conducted via an online panel, creating a relative degree of representativity. I say 'relative' because respondents self-select themselves for online panels and as a result such panels can never be fully statistically representative. In order to mitigate this, somewhat, quotas were used so that the sample reflected gender, generational and geographical distributions in the UK. A total of 1,651 respondents (n) drawn from an online panel were surveyed in the period 12 December 2014 to 5 January 2015. This survey's results have a credibility interval of plus or minus 2.41 percentage points[5].

Three focus groups were held with the objective of obtaining a better understanding of some of the survey results, especially the relatively high levels of support for the movement frames. Since I was interested in understanding better those people who are not particularly politically active, but align themselves broadly with the movement's frames, recruitment of participants for the focus groups was geared towards this sub-category.[6] In the UK context, it is advisable to separate gender and class when conducting focus groups (Morley, 1980). While the focus groups were diverse in terms of ethnicity and political persuasion, they were comprised of participants from the lower middle class (C1) and skilled working class (C2) categories. The first focus-group was held on 1 June 2015 in London with female participants in the age category 18-29 years. The second focus-group was held in London on the same day, with female participants in the age category 29-49 years. The third focus-group was held in Birmingham on 2 June 2015 with male participants aged between 50 and 65 years. The topic guides for the focus groups were developed on the basis of the results of the content analysis and

the survey. A thematic analysis was conducted on the transcripts of the focus group interviews.

The final method employed in this study was in-depth semi-structured interviews with anti-austerity activists. The reason I chose to interview activists last was because I wanted to share the data from the content analysis and the reception study with the activists to elicit their reactions and responses to them. The interviews also served, in part, as validation of the frame analysis and desk research. As such, the interviews were also aimed at gaining a more in-depth understanding of the movement discourses and the activists' self-mediation practices beyond what could be gleaned from desk research. I conducted four interviews with key actors that were active in the media teams of UK Uncut (1), the NCFC (1) and Occupy LSX (2) – in order to protect their identities I anonymized my interviewees by changing their names and sometimes even their gender. The transcripts of these semi-structured interviews were subjected to thematic analysis using themes that emerged from the other methods and conceptual work relating to self-mediation (see Chapter 4).

Conclusion Chapter 2

This introductory chapter positioned media and communication theoretically within social movement studies, and social movements, resistance and contentious politics, within media and communication studies. I introduced the idea of a *Circuit of Protest* as a conceptual framework to connect and integrate: the **production** of movement discourses and frames, and linked to this the construction of a 'we' as well as a 'they'; a set of **self-mediation practices** enacted by social movements and activists to communicate internally as well as externally; mainstream media **representations** of the movement; and the **reception** of movement and competing discourses and frames by non-activist citizens.

The Circuit of Protest thus represents an encompassing model that positions each moment in the circuit as equally important and relevant and implies that each individual moment impacts on the other moments (cf. Figure 2.1). This means that the moments need to be studied in conjunction so as to analyse the interplay between agentic opportunities and structural constraints present at each of these moments. Bringing these together, I argue that this interplay constitutes a *mediation opportunity structure*.

From a social movement studies perspective, the Circuit of Protest enables to highlight and bridge tensions between resources, agentic opportunities and structural constraints. It exposes the mediation processes both internal and external to social movements. It combines attention to the symbolic aspects of protest and contestation with material considerations and a practice-oriented approach.

From a media and communications studies perspective, the circuit emphasises the pivotal role of media and communication in contentious politics, but at the same time it avoids being overly media- or discourse-centric. As Martín-Barbero (1993: 187) pointed out, in relation to the mediation process and circulation, while 'communication has become a strategic arena for the analysis of the obstacles and contradictions that move [societies]', we have 'to lose sight of the "proper object" [i.e. media] in order to find the way to the movement of the social in communication, to communication in process' (ibid: 203).

As such, it is argued here that by studying a social movement through the prism of the circuit, and by implicating mediation as the conceptual glue collating the different moments of the circuit, I can present a holistic picture of a specific struggle since the circuit allows me to highlight and include in a single study an analysis of:

- the aims, goals and messaging of a movement;
- the collective identity of the movement;
- the nature of the connections between different actors;

- the internal organizational structures (or lack thereof);
- the type of (direct) actions and protest events the movement enacts;
- the resonance of the movement in the public/media space;
- the resonance of the movement amongst non-activist citizens;
- the degree of resistance it endures from the powers that be.

This enables a more nuanced perspective on and complex picture of the degree and nature of success of a movement which can be situated at various levels; not necessarily only at the level only of policy or political change in the here and now.

The Circuit of Protest can be applied to numerous movements, but in this book it is used to analyse the UK's anti-austerity movement. Subsequent chapters will theorise the different moments outlined above in more detail and present the analysis of the data that were gathered. The concluding chapter will reflect on the dialectic between opportunities and constraints, between generative and repressive forms of power with regard to the different moments of the Circuit of Protest and assess the failures and successes of the UK's anti-austerity movement.

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End Notes Chapter 2:

[1] Gramsci did not use the term counter-hegemony, but he implied it by referring to the need for 'intellectual and moral reform' (Gramsci, 1971: 132)

[2] The coding was done by the author and the results of this content analysis of the media representation of the student protests was discussed in Cammaerts (2013)

[3] For the second content analysis, 3 research assistants were recruited and trained to help with the coding of the articles, they are Ariel Shangguan, Yuanyuan Liu and Kullanit Nitiwarangkul. Coordination was by Brooks DeCillia.

[4] The survey was conducted by Toluna: https://uk.toluna.com/

[5] When polling an online panel it is not possible to calculate the probability of participation of everyone in the population (N). As a result of this, Bayesian credibility intervals are preferred over and above the classic margin of error. (Simpson, 2012)

[6] The focus groups were conducted by Britain Thinks: http://britainthinks.com/