

Summary

Throughout the 2010s and 2020s, social movement activity has been a major factor in global political life and civil society, unfolding in a historical context shaped by the ramification of the 2008 financial crisis and the broad “crisis complex” it induced. Alongside widespread pro-democracy or anti-austerity protests, these decades have seen a rise in activities from movements contesting core contradictions within capitalist society—particularly capitalism’s relationship to non-capitalist spaces and populations. The period has seen a resurgence of *climate justice activism*, emphasizing the links between climate change, colonialism, and capitalism; the emergence and transnational diffusion of *the Black Lives Matter movement*, along with the related instantiation of other anti-racist/anti-colonial movements; as well as the re-activation and expansion of *Palestine solidarity activism*, contesting Western governments’ and transnational corporations’ complicity in settler colonialism and imperialism in the Middle East. This thesis argues that to fully grasp the significance of these movements, we must fundamentally rethink the concept of global civil society—not as a liberal-democratic space of consensus and governance, but as a fragmented, antagonistic, and conflictual terrain of global struggle shaped by shifting hegemonies in the post-2008 conjuncture.

This thesis therefore seeks to theorize this conjuncture of social movement activity and, in doing so, to develop an updated conceptualization of global civil society within this context of crisis. With this focus, it reflects on what social movements reveal about the crisis of contemporary global capitalism—what characterizes the period’s conflicts, what drives and sustains action in it, and what critiques of global capitalism can be fostered from it. In short, it examines the historical and political *meaning* of this period of movement activity. More concretely, it offers an exploratory theoretical inquiry through case studies on the three aforementioned movements’ engagement with global civil society, using these to both analyze movements’ global activities and elaborate a revised conceptual framework on global civil society. It draws from social movement studies, Marxism, and neo-Gramscian globalization theory to analyze how movements use such spaces to articulate globally resonant discourses and form transnational collective identities, and how such activities, ultimately, relate to conflicts over hegemony and counter-hegemony in global capitalism, thereby situating these movements and the global civil society spaces they enact in the current conjuncture.

To achieve this aim, the thesis addresses the following research questions: *What are the relevant contextual and historical factors for understanding recent global or transnational social movements, exemplified by the climate justice, Black Lives Matter, and Palestine solidarity movements? What do*

these movements tell us about key conflicts in contemporary global society? Moreover, this entails a reconsideration of the global civil society concept—using studies of social movements’ global activities to articulate an updated conceptualization of global civil society, anchored in a critical analysis of global capitalism’s conjuncture of crisis. Methodologically, this is done through *discourse analysis of movement texts*—analyzing up to 1500 pages of movement-authored texts in each case to get a grasp of each movement’s articulation of conflict, social analysis, and collective identity, as well as their contextual situations.

The first case study, presented in the article ‘Towards a Globalized Understanding of Black Political Subjectivity: Black Lives Matter in the U.K. and Sweden’, examines the transnationalization of BLM, focusing on mobilizations in Sweden and the UK from 2020 to 2022. Two central conclusions are drawn: a) race has emerged as an increasingly central political category within contemporary global civil society, as racial hierarchies and colonial legacies are contested not only within national frameworks but also globally; b) global hegemonic structures, such as colonial difference and white supremacy, are contested not only in formalized arenas (e.g., international NGOs and institutions) but also through more informal, everyday spaces of global communication, particularly social media and digital platforms. These informal arenas are crucial for BLM’s reconstruction of globalized Black political subjectivity, enabling the translation of previous waves of transnational Black activism into new hybrid frameworks of mobilization and discourse.

The second case study, ‘Articulating Post-Apocalyptic Environmentalism: Global Civil Society and the Struggle for Anti-Colonial Climate Politics in the Climate Movement’, investigates the climate movement’s mobilization during the UNFCCC COP26 summit in Glasgow. Focusing on the COP26 Coalition, it explores how the movement articulated a post-apocalyptic environmentalist discourse centering subjects already experiencing climate crisis effects, particularly in the Global South. Two key conclusions are drawn: a) since 2015, climate activism has driven the increased centrality of racial and colonial conflicts within global civil society spaces; b) the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives in these spaces produces a dilemma for movements seeking to challenge the colonial character of neoliberal hegemony. Such movements must operate within structures privileging Western knowledge and ideologies while aiming to represent marginalized subaltern subjects. This produces tension-ridden processes of representation, where subaltern voices are often mediated through overarching counter-hegemonic formations or risk marginalization within them.

The third case study, ‘Palestine Everywhere! Theorizing International Solidarity with the Pro-Palestinian Student Movement’, analyzes texts from student solidarity organizations in

Brazil, South Africa, Sweden, and the U.S. following the escalation of violence in Gaza after October 7, 2023. Conceptualizing these organizations as part of a solidarity ecology—a decentralized field of solidarity practices unified by a shared commitment to Palestinian liberation—the study examines how global civil society spaces enable solidarity initiatives by facilitating the dissemination of information, guidelines, and ideological resources from Palestinian actors, while connecting student groups across national contexts. Two main conclusions follow: a) solidarity is a vital element in constructing counter-hegemonic projects within global civil society, as contesting transnational power structures requires discursive configurations that forge equivalencies between diverse, differently situated struggles; b) Palestine solidarity has become a key unifying axis for a broad range of social movements and subject positions within global civil society, particularly in the post-2023 context, serving as a rallying point for contesting capitalism's predatory incursions into non-capitalist spaces, exemplified by Israel's occupation of Palestine.

The concluding sections of the thesis reflect on these findings, situating them within a broader historical trajectory. It argues that the internal dynamics of global civil society have transformed since the 1990s and early 2000s, when it served as a vehicle for neoliberal globalization's legitimation. In the post-2008 period, neoliberal hegemony has fragmented, producing a multiplication of conflict lines as various actors seek to shape an emergent post-crisis world order. This historical shift forms the backdrop for the social movements analyzed in this thesis, which represent a distinct mode of anti-capitalist resistance within capitalism's organic crisis. Unlike the point-of-production struggles of the 20th century, these movements contest capitalism's predatory relationship to its boundary spaces and critique capital's entwinement with processes of racialization, colonization, and imperialism: climate justice movements resist extractivism and neo-colonial land grabs; BLM opposes the racialized production of surplus populations subject to marginalization, policing, and incarceration; and Palestine solidarity contests imperialist projects aimed at securing spaces for capital accumulation or eliminating populations deemed 'unproductive.' By waging these struggles, the movements emerge as differentiated yet interconnected responses to capitalism's current crisis complex, positioning boundary struggles as key lines of conflict within the contemporary conjuncture of crisis. In doing so, they expose the fragmented and contested character of global civil society in the post-2008 era, responding to neoliberalism's crisis by contesting its fragile inside-outside dynamic and racializing/colonial tendencies.