

# **The Ambiguity of Resistance: Civil Society Engagements with Neoliberalism**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Resistances to neoliberal capitalism primarily occur within the realm of civil society today. There are varying theories that speak to the ability of such resistances. On the one hand, a theory of neoliberal ontology posits an inescapable structure that delimits our capacity to effectively resist. On the other hand, a theory of intentional economy asserts an ability to contest and transform dominant structures. Through a qualitative semi-ethnographic extended-case study conducted with two para-capitalist organizations operating within southern British Columbia, this thesis examines and nuances notions of resistance via a Polanyian and Marxist theoretical framework, and advances an argument for a theory of the 'politics of ambiguity'. This captures the simultaneous positionings of resistance groups within a neoliberal ontology and intentional economy form. As determined, these groups necessarily demonstrate ambiguity to varying degrees, on the one hand reproducing neoliberal paradigms and structures, while concurrently working to forge emancipatory realities and understandings.

**Keywords:** Resistance to Capitalism; Neoliberalism; Para-capitalism; Substantivism; Neoliberal Ontology; Political Economy

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the relations that make life valuable. To my family, for shaping me and always being a source of great strength and confidence. To my friends, for providing a much needed and appreciated rest stop on the road of life. And to my partner in crime, for being an endless fount of laughter, joy, challenge, deliberation and support. You are a sanctuary amidst commotion, an oasis within the wilds.

This is also dedicated to all those who keep fighting the good fight, no matter how futile it may seem at times. May you never despair of humanity, capitulate, or cease to love.

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## List of Acronyms

AGM	Annual General Meeting
CB-DC	Cowichan Bio-Diesel Co-op
CVRD	Cowichan Valley Regional District
DTES	Downtown Eastside
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
IS	International Socialists
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
LGBTQ+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer/Questioning, allies and more
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SFU	Simon Fraser University
SVO	Straight Vegetable Oil
WTO	World Trade Organization
WVO	Waste Vegetable Oil



## Glossary

Biofuels	Fuels derived from organic matters, either directly from plant-based materials, or indirectly from organic waste. Biofuels can be blended with fossil fuels to make a variety of blends.
Capitalocentrism	A term used to denote a “dominant economic discourse that distributes positive value to those activities associated with capitalist economic activity however defined, and assigns lesser value to all other processes of producing and distributing goods and services by identifying them in relation to capitalism as the same as, the opposite of, a complement to, or contained within. A capitalocentric discourse condenses economic difference, fusing the variety of noncapitalist economic activities into a unity in which meaning is anchored to capitalist identity” (Gibson-Graham 2006:56, emphasis in original).
Diverse Economy	A notion used to “ . . . expand our economic vocabulary, widening the identity of the economy to include all of those practices excluded or marginalized by a strong theory of capitalism” (Gibson-Graham 2006:60).
Economization	Economization is a concept advanced independently by Çalışkan and Callon (2009), Adaman and Madra (2013), and Brown (2015). It details the operation of a neoliberal ontology, and thus speaks to the figuration of relationships (social, ecological and cultural), and self-subjectification around a rational, individualistic, market-centered logic, rearranging humanity itself according to a paradigm of human capital (Brown 2015). In essence, it is a powerfully affecting normative project that constructs and positions economic logic at the center of society and existence generally (Atasoy 2014).
Feedstock	Any renewable, biological material utilized directly as a fuel, or converted to be used as an energy product (DOE 2016).
Intentional Economy	Refers to “projects that treat economy as a political and ethical space of decision . . . placing the issues of <i>necessity</i> , <i>surplus</i> , <i>consumption</i> , and <i>commons</i> , in the foreground of ethical deliberation and decision” (Gibson-Graham 2006:101, emphasis in original).

Minority/Majority World	A terminology proposed by Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam, to more accurately capture global divisions and represent our world in terms of what they are, rather than what they lack. Thus, the 'minority world' refers to the portion of humanity that is relatively well off, materially speaking (crudely defined as the 'global north', the 'first' or 'developed' world). The 'majority world', by contrast, refers to the bulk of humanity that enjoys less material security (crudely defined as the 'global south', the 'third' world or the 'least developed countries').
Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism exists somewhat as an opaque concept, "promiscuously pervasive, yet inconsistently defined, empirically imprecise and frequently contested" (Brenner et al. 2010: 184). It may be broadly understood as a prescriptive sociopolitical and economic philosophy "justifying elevation of market principles as the organizing principle of society, where private interest trumps the public good" (McMichael 2008: 341).
Neoliberal Ontology	This speaks to the general theory or perspective that neoliberalism embodies in regards to the nature of being and existence. Grounded in Enlightenment thought, it builds upon historical conceptualizations concerning human nature: i.e. that people are selfish and greedy which thus leads to a 'me-centered' individualism connected to competition (Hobbes); and that people are free, equal and possess rationality that can be mobilized to achieve calculated goals, which thus invokes a concept of increasing efficiency (Locke) (Gill 1990). It operates today via a process of economization.
Para-Capitalism	A self-constructed term used to refer to actions, ideas, individuals and groups that are committed to addressing capitalist precipitated issues, but simultaneously recognizes the ever-present potential of those peoples and ideas (in)conspicuously reproducing and/or supporting capitalism.
Renoviction	A popular portmanteau within Metro Vancouver, combining the words 'renovation' and 'eviction'. It refers to the eviction of a building's tenants as a result of a significant renovation plan. This is directly related to, and quite often a tactic of, gentrification.
Social Reproduction	Broadly understood as ". . . the processes that reproduce the underlying structure of social relations and institutions of a society" (Wright 2010:274). Social reproduction involves ". . . not only the reproduction of the commodity labour power but also the structures of socialization in the family, the community and the state that create the social foundations upon which all production must necessarily rest" (Gill 2008:222).

Titration	A laboratory method utilized to determine the concentration of a solution.
Transesterification	The chemical process used to convert feedstock to biodiesel. This involves the reaction of triglycerides (i.e. fats or oils) with an alcohol (typically ethanol or methanol) resulting in the formation of fatty acid esters (biofuel) and glycerol (Esru 2016).

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

How do we understand resistance to neoliberal capitalism? To what extent can society agentially engage with such dominant structures, and transform them in emancipatory and socially advantageous ways? For many today, such questions might appear somewhat odd. As a popular social narrative asserts, capitalist firms and structures have created a dizzying array of technological advancements, increased overall availability of consumer goods and produced a relatively diffused improvement in the basic standards of living. However, as an alternate and notably perceptible narrative conversely claims, the very essence of capitalism is poverty amidst plenty (Wright 2015). Moreover, as many have documented, capitalism is implicated in a plethora of avoidable sociopolitical, ecological and economic transgressions, thus perpetuating forms of eliminable socio-environmental suffering and harm (see for example: Bookchin 1980; Davis and Monk 2007; Harvey 2014; Klein 2007; 2015; McMichael 2010; Piketty 2014; Robbins 2011). Accordingly, it is imperative that we adequately understand contemporary responses and countermovements to this structurally impelled distress.

Neoliberalism refers to the form of capitalism operating across the globe in varying iterations and degrees today. While there is no concise single bullet definition, it can be broadly understood as a prescriptive sociopolitical and economic philosophy “justifying elevation of market principles as the organizing principle of society, where private interest trumps the public good” (McMichael 2008: 341). This form of capitalism gained prominence within the Global North in the 1970s “as a direct response to Keynesianism and other forms of state intervention in the economy” (Guillen et. al. 2005). It coalesced structurally and ideationally in 1989 in what has been broadly defined as the Washington consensus, understood as “a set of neoliberal economic

policies (trade and financial liberalization, privatization, and macro-stability of the world economy) uniting multilateral institutions, representatives of the U.S. state, and associated G-7 countries that enable corporate globalization” (McMichael 2008: 346).<sup>1</sup>

Due to being the source of various exploitations and oppressions, a plethora of resistances and countermovements have emerged in response to neoliberalism. Such oppositional struggles generally assert that effective resistance requires substantive social empowerment over existing institutions and structures. However, they take a variety of shapes and forms (Wright 2010). For example, there are centrally organized, decentralized and individualized resistances. Some focus on attacking the state, some seek to work with the state and others ignore the state all together. Some resistances are militant and others pacifistic. Some believe that the current economic system can be fixed, while others believe that it has to be completely abolished. Additionally, such variegated resistances relate to an array of political philosophies, movements and ideologies, such as anarchism, Marxism, retreatism, environmentalism, communalism, ecofeminism, First Nations resistances and cooperativism, among others. Despite such heterogeneity, resistance today largely occurs via the activities of an interstitially situated civil society, as posited by third wave sociological Marxism (Burawoy 2014).

More precisely, and in contrast to previous epochs of socioeconomic systemic contestation where state action served as the primary mediator between the economy and society, Burawoy (2003; 2014), Wright (2010) and Friedmann and McNair (2008) argue that contemporary state restructuring and partial-capture by neoliberal logics now directly necessitates civil society to more actively discover and implement new ways of organizing and embedding economic phenomena. This is primarily achieved through the establishment of ‘real utopias’ within the interstices of capitalist structures and society. In essence, these are small-scale visions of emancipatory alternatives – such as

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent discussion detailing the specificities of neoliberalism and its origins, see Mirowski and Plehwe 2009.

cooperatives, collectives, local social-economy projects, forms of solidarity finance, etc. – that actively work to challenge forms of market tyranny and thus potentially generate molecular changes in society (Burawoy 2014:15; Wright 2012). However, such resistance prospects become unclear when considering divergent theoretical understandings regarding the ability for such action and the agentic capabilities of civil-society actors, as captured by a theory of neoliberal ontology and a theory of intentional economy.

A neoliberal ontology speaks to the general theory or perspective that neoliberalism embodies in regards to the nature of being and existence. Rooted in Enlightenment thought, this ontological framework builds upon historical conceptualizations of a rational and individualistic human nature (Gill 1990). As advanced by Brenner, Theodore and Peck (2009) and Peck (2010), this entrenched and socially pervasive ontology is primarily inescapable today due to its protean and resilient form, and it is purportedly able to adapt to, coopt, or resist any attempts at deviation or modification. At the heart of this ontology is a process of economization. A notion of economization has been advanced, independently, through the works of Çalışkan and Callon (2009) and Adaman and Madra (2013), and further revised by Brown (2015). It can essentially be understood as a powerfully affecting normative project that constructs and positions economic logic at the center of society and existence generally (Atasoy 2014). Such a theory thus suggests little to no ability for civil society to resist and potentially transform neoliberalism.

Conversely, a theory of intentional economy as advanced by Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006), and Cameron, Healy and Gibson-Graham (2013), argue that neoliberal capitalism and its ontological form are readily resisted, evaded and subverted via (discursive) recognition and advancement of socio-economic diversity concurrently existing across all societies today. This claim is furthered by recognizing civil society as comprised of empowered and self-determining social actors who can discursively conjure up non-capitalist socio-economic realities and sensibilities. As such, civil society possesses a firm capacity for resistance, articulated in its ability to effectively think about and intentionally formulate arrangements of economic diversity according to radical, communal, anti-oppressive and ethical priorities.

Given such divergent theoretical perspectives, we must consider how to best understand actually existing civil society resistances to neoliberal capitalism, and thus their abilities to contribute to emergent possibilities for emancipatory social transformations. Engaging with such discordant theoretical perspectives allow us to better consider issues of agency and structure. Specifically, a notion of neoliberal ontology is evidently centered upon a commanding structure, yet as is argued, overlooks creative agentic engagements and potentialities. By contrast, a theory of intentional economy is principally centered on a belief of capable social engagements, yet when examined against actually existing para-capitalist groups, imposing structural constraints are exposed. Moreover, this investigation further extends understandings of civil society resistance by considering group contributions to a transformative political agency (i.e. resistance *movements*), necessary for substantive social change (Gramsci 1971).

The purpose of this extended case-method study is to explore and discover how to understand interstitially situated para-capitalist resistance abilities and emergent transformative possibilities. Through this research project I illustrate the need for an intermediary theory of resistance by taking into account a politics of ambiguity. Such a schema more readily recognizes the simultaneous convergence and divergence of a theorized neoliberal ontology and intentional economy within contemporary para-capitalist groups, thus broadening notions of interstitial resistance. Accordingly, this study nuances and expands understandings of actually existing interstitially situated civil society resistances, and in doing so, attends to a theoretical discord regarding abilities for capitalist resistance and social change today.

This study speaks to the challenges and abilities of local para-capitalist projects operating within society today. Two principal questions guide this research. First, how do we understand interstitially situated para-capitalist resistance abilities and emergent transformative possibilities today? And second, what sorts of interstitial resistances provide for the best emancipatory transformative possibilities?

To achieve such understandings, I have conducted a qualitative investigation of two para-capitalist organizations operating within southern British Columbia via a

Polanyian and Marxist theoretical framework. This was realized through a combination of semi-structured in depth interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis of various records and publicly available published documents. These organizations consist of the Cowichan Bio-Diesel Co-op (a hybrid cooperative biodiesel production company), and Spartacus Books (a non-profit volunteer run bookstore and social space). These groups' value orientations, intentions and operations intimate at a disparate para-capitalist ontology and detail them as representatives of such interstitial resistance, and so are apposite for this study. By investigating their disparate positionings (i.e. intentional economy or neoliberal ontology) at different levels of their engagements (normative, diagnostic, alternative propositionings, and strategic) with the specific issues they are confronting and with neoliberalism, a politics of ambiguity was revealed. While evidently two distinct groups, comparatively examining them allows us to consider their differentiated abilities to resist and help forge emergent possibilities for social transformations, and thus reflect upon the types of responses most advantageous for such interstitial resistance.

As is argued, civil society resistance to neoliberal capitalism is necessarily ambiguous and uncertain, and occasionally reproduces the very structures being combated. Yet despite this indeterminacy, such resistance can also work towards forging and fostering forms of emancipatory and/or transformative possibilities, with no coherences, determined destinations or guarantees. From this, such ambiguity is normalized and binary perspectives of resistance and social change are modified.

Generated data has been situated in conversation with the broader applicable theories in order to determine if/how interstitially situated para-capitalist organizations are able to challenge (aspects of) neoliberal capitalism, as well as to position the locally examined part within the relevant global whole. As the global whole is a product of its constituent parts, specific localities play an important role in explaining and understanding global phenomena and their tensions, contradictions and concordances (McMichael 1990). As such, this study is beneficial for a variety of local and grassroots organizations seeking to establish idiosyncratic economic spaces, and adds to socioeconomic theoretical discussions regarding capitalist resistances today.



Chapter Two continues by further exploring and detailing the literature and theoretical paradigms being engaged, and then finishes with a brief analytical consideration of the notion of para-capitalism and the idea of a neoliberal ontology. Chapter Three details the guiding methodology and methods used in conducting this research project. Chapters Four and Five provide an examination of the organizations themselves. Beginning with the Cowichan Bio-Diesel Co-op, and then followed by Spartacus Books, these two chapters provide an analysis of these para-capitalist groups, examining their focuses, forms and practices, member understandings, encountered structural contexts, and thus their overall abilities in confronting capitalism. Such investigations further detail and substantiate the need for a theory of the politics of ambiguity. Lastly, Chapter Six provides an interorganizational comparison and contrast before finishing with an overall discussion and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Understanding Resistance**

As argued, emancipatory resistance to capitalism requires substantive social empowerment over the economy (Burawoy 2003; Gill 2008; Polanyi 1957; Wright 2010). This goal is broadly rooted in a belief that forms of human suffering and impediments to human flourishing are a result of existing institutions and social structures, and can thus be amended by transforming them in 'appropriate' anti-oppressive ways (Wright 2012:2). Such a societal desideratum is conceivably advanced and realized via a multiplicity of strategies and forms, as identified in the introduction. These various approaches are animated by three logics of resistance: smashing capitalism, taming capitalism and eroding capitalism (Wright 2015).<sup>2</sup> Such logics are theoretically understood as ruptural, symbiotic and interstitial forms of resistance respectively (Wright 2010:303).

Ruptural transformations envision the development of social empowerment via a radical break with existing socio-economic structures, in essence a 'smash first build second' strategy. Symbiotic transformations seek to craft tactics that expand and deepen institutional forms of social empowerment and concurrently solve practical problems faced by the dominant classes. Interstitial transformations work to build forms of empowerment within the margins and interstices of capitalist structures and society.

<sup>2</sup> A fourth form, understood as escaping capitalism, is not considered here, as it provides no direct method for achieving social empowerment over the economy.

These three forms broadly correspond to revolutionary socialist, social democratic and anarchist traditions of para-capitalist resistance (303-305). While all three are indispensable, in varying degrees, for realizing substantive social empowerment over the economy (370), this thesis works to nuance and expand upon understandings of contemporary interstitial resistance. A Polanyian comprehension of substantivism acts as the jumping off point for this undertaking (Polanyi 1957; 1957b).

Polanyian substantivism understands economics beyond a neoclassical representation, and thus recognizes the socially *embedded* nature of economic behaviour. As such, it appreciates that “man’s [sic.] economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets ” (Polanyi 1957:48). In essence, such embeddedness refers to the fact that economic activities and phenomena are always rooted in and constrained by a multitude of non-economic kinship, cultural, and religious institutions. Thus, by acknowledging that ‘the economy’ is “an instituted process of interaction between man [sic.] and his environment, which results in a continuous supply of want satisfying material needs” (Polanyi 1957b:248) we more accurately apprehend the function and nature of ‘economy’, effectively placing the economic back in the context of the social whole and thus better representing the world we seek to understand (Block and Somers 2014:59-60).<sup>3</sup> In his celebrated work *The Great Transformation* (1957[1944]), Polanyi details a politics of embeddedness by investigating state-centered redistributive responses to the destruction of society and nature by a chimerical ‘self-regulating market system’.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For more on substantivism and embeddedness see: Polanyi 1957:Chap. 4; 1957b.

<sup>4</sup> These include Fascism, Soviet Communism and US-style ‘social democracy’. Polanyi also theoretically details two other historical forms of embedding, identified as reciprocity and householding (Friedman and McNair 2008:430; Polanyi 1957).

Contemporizing this perspective via the work of Friedmann and McNair (2008) allows us to better conceptualize capitalist resistance projects and responses within a present-day context. As a result of the era of globalization, the ascendancy of neoliberalism, and the various associated ways in which governments have ceded authority and contracted out services as they become increasingly acquiescent to the logics of (global) capital, it is no longer the nation-state that works towards re-embedding systems within their cultural and ecological contexts in responding to the destruction fomented by a neoliberal form of capitalism (Friedmann and McNair 2008).<sup>5</sup> By contrast, it is now local social actors, constructing tiny projects in the interstices of capitalist society who seek to discover and implement a new way of organizing economic phenomena (427).

It is in understanding para-capitalist organizations as being eminently involved in such space making projects (i.e. attempting to establish a place in society for para-capitalist structures, orientations and forms, re-embedding the economic within a social context) that I seek to further explore and understand their resistance abilities and emergent transformative possibilities. Moreover, this contemporized Polanyian perspective directly relates to Burawoy's (2003; 2014) conceptualization of third wave sociological Marxism (emerging in the 1970s), which locates potential responses to neoliberal issues not within a utopic deterministic transition, nor in the redistributive powers of the state (as detailed by first and second wave sociological Marxism,

<sup>5</sup> Many others have similarly detailed this shifting role of the nation-state, such as: Beck (2000), Gill (2008), Harvey (2005; 2007) and McMichael (2008).

respectively), but rather within the 'real utopias' of a locally situated but globally engaged civil society.<sup>6</sup>

Specifically, Burawoy (2014) identifies three successive 'waves' of Marxism operating over the last two centuries, acting as methods of analyses, critiques and evolving socialist (i.e. social empowerment over the economy) responses to the vagaries of an encroaching and expanding capitalism. Each wave involves different relations between theory and practice. The first wave is understood as classical Marxism, and took place from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1914. Within this wave, "theory determined the inevitable collapse of capitalism and the rise of socialism, so practice was only affected by knowing where one was in the historical trajectory" (15). The second wave is classified as Soviet Marxism, operating from 1914-1973, and here national 'socialist' survival dictated theory, with Marxism operating as a "thinly disguised ideology of the ruling party state" (15). Contemporaneous third wave, or sociological Marxism is described as follows:

Sociological Marxism abandons theoretical certainties and practical imperatives and seeks instead to achieve a balance of dialogue of theory and practice. The point is not only to change the world now that we have understood it, but also to change it in order to understand it better. We search out real utopias that can galvanize the collective imagination but also interrogate them for their potential generalizability. (15-16)

<sup>6</sup> The idea of 'real utopias' comes from Wright (2010), and embraces a broader tension between dreams and practice. "It is grounded in the belief that what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions . . . [real utopias are] utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potential of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible waystations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change" (6). These are rooted in radical, emancipatory, egalitarian and democratic commitments, and allow us to think about 'alternatives' and transformations while responding to concerns regarding unintended consequences, such as presented in Hayek's (1944) notion of the 'fatal conceit'. See Wright (2010) for a comprehensive discussion on 'real utopias'.

As such, the third wave of Marxism asserts that effective resistance to, and transcendence of neoliberal capitalism will not emerge through some deterministic break with the past (i.e. classical Marxism), nor via state-sponsored socialism from above (i.e. Soviet Marxism). Rather, resistance today is realized through the “molecular transformation of civil society”, achieved via the establishment and advancement of ‘real utopias’ within the interstices of an ‘ecologically dominant’ neoliberal society (13-14).

Such ‘real utopias’ essentially stand as small-scale visions of emancipatory alternatives – such as cooperatives, collectives, local social-economy projects, forms of solidarity finance, participatory budgeting, etc. – that actively work to challenge forms of market tyranny (15; Wright 2012). They create moderate, or perhaps even Lilliputian developments that (potentially) work to create and foster forms of social empowerment over the economy, thus attempting to decrease forms of human suffering and increase forms of human flourishing. Through such endeavours, they also demonstrate that ‘another world is possible’ by criticizing and addressing a variety of socio-economic issues and related ideologies, potentially capturing the public imagination (Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010; 2012:22).<sup>7</sup> These projects are broadly understood as either ameliorative or real utopian transformations. The former identifies flaws in existing institutions and proposes and/or implements improvements that can be realized here and now, and which reduce harms and enhance flourishing. The latter, by contrast, “envision[s] the contours of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals and then looks for social innovations we can create in the world as it is that moves us towards that destination” (Wright 2012:9). While ameliorative reforms do not tend to provide the building blocks for emancipatory transformations, they are nonetheless an important component of real utopias grounded in a pragmatic idealism. This is claimed

<sup>7</sup> Wright (2010) provides the following examples of such interstitial projects: “worker and consumer coops, battered women’s shelters, workers factory councils, intentional communities and communes, community based social economy services, civic environmental councils, community-controlled land trusts, cross-border equal-exchange trade organizations, and many others” (324). More specific examples include Wikipedia (194), Mondragón (240) and Fair Trade movements (268).

as such ameliorative reforms are frequently necessary for arriving at utopic destinations, or perhaps represent the extent of currently feasible resistance. In its analysis of such resistance, sociological Marxism primarily focuses not on the economy, nor the state, but on civil society understood in global as well as national terms.

Building upon, and unifying Gramscian and Polanyian notions of civil society<sup>8</sup>, Burawoy (2005) defines it as “. . . a product of late-nineteenth-century Western capitalism that produced associations, movements and publics that were outside both state and economy—political parties, trade unions, schooling, communities of faith, print media, and a variety of voluntary organizations” (24). This is not some unified or harmonious societal segment, but is marked by divisions, contestation and segregation, along with various accordances. Moreover, the current era of neoliberalism and associated third wave of Marxism has seen this three-way separation of market, state and civil society dissolved and redefined, as segments of civil society now act as the preeminent responder and combatant to neoliberal controversies and contentions (Burawoy 2003; 2014). However, it must be stressed that this theoretical perspective does not fetishize the role of civil society in addressing such issues. Echoing Polanyi’s notion of a ‘double movement’<sup>9</sup>, third wave sociological Marxism understands civil society as Janus faced, on the one hand acting to stabilize and support neoliberal processes (e.g. by dampening the inequitable exigencies of a neoliberal system via a

<sup>8</sup> For Gramsci, society *is* civil society, and is understood via its contradictory connection to the state. It involves such things as trade unions, voluntary associations and interest groups. On the one hand, it collaborates with the state to contain class struggle, but on the other hand, its autonomy from the state can also promote class struggle. For Polanyi, society is (represented by Burawoy as) active society, understood via its contradictory tension with the market. While less clear than Gramsci of its constituent elements, it conceivably includes labour organizations, cooperatives, and activist groups, and interpenetrates the market (Burawoy 2003:198). It should be noted here that Polanyi provides no definitive theory of the state.

<sup>9</sup> A concept of double movement recognizes two active forces involved in shaping ‘market societies’ over the last two hundred years. “On one side is the movement of *laissez faire*—the efforts by a variety of groups to expand the scope and influence of self-regulating markets. On the other side has been the movement of protection—the initiatives, again by a wide range of social actors, to insulate the fabric of social life from the destructive impact of market pressures” (Block 2008: para 1). Very often these two sides were comprised of the same actors.

variety of social provisioning methods, and by discursively and ideologically buttressing its existence), but on the other hand providing a terrain for their potential transcendence (Burawoy 2003:199).

Such a notion firmly resonates with a politics of ambiguity as outlined below, as well as further underscores the necessity of this study into the abilities and possibilities of such civil society resistances. By extending Burawoy's concepts to local para-capitalist organizations, we can better investigate this theorized duplicity against a *specific* civil society segment (in contrast to his general discussion of civil society as a whole), and so further understand interstitial resistance projects. This third wave also understands Marxism as "a living tradition that enjoys renewal and reconstruction as the world it describes and seeks to transform undergoes change" (2014:2), and thus allows us to engage with Marxist thought in exploring various space making projects rooted within civil society today. As Burawoy asserts:

The role of such a sociological Marxism is to elaborate the concrete utopias found in embryonic forms throughout the world. The analysis focuses on their conditions of existence, their internal contradictions, and thus their potential dissemination. Sociological Marxism, therefore, keeps alive the ideas of an alternative to capitalism, an alternative that does not abolish markets or states but subjugates them to the collective self-organization of society. (15)

It is in attending to such notions that this study was conducted into two para-capitalist groups. Moreover, and as detailed in the proximate section, this concept of sociological Marxism is extended and nuanced in part by investigating such interstitially situated civil society resistances against contending theories of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy. This has allowed me to consider a comprehensive range of theorized para-capitalist abilities and actions.

Finally, these Polanyian and Marxist perspectives are indicative of Wright's (2010) concept of an emancipatory social science, which "seeks to generate scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project of challenging various forms of human oppression" (10). It is in invoking this theoretical and practical ethos that I undertook this



investigation into the abilities and emergent transformative possibilities of specific para-capitalist resistance groups today.

## **Prospects for Resistance**

Neoliberal capitalism engenders a multitude of social and ecological crises, systems of exploitation and oppression, and forms of structural violence. Yet, despite being a cause of such glaring injustices, neoliberalism still occupies a position of ideological and systemic societal supremacy, and it is claimed by a number of theorists that this extraordinary resilience is largely a result of a commanding ontology (Adaman and Madra 2013; Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2009; 2010; Brown 2015; Çalışkan and Callon 2009; cf. Gill 1990; 2012; Peck 2010). Such a notion seriously problematizes a capacity for civil society resistance to neoliberalism, as human existence is increasingly reconfigured and structured according to a specific metric of the economic.

Conversely, a theory of intentional economy, as advanced by Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006), and Cameron, Healy and Gibson-Graham (2013), affirms and upholds an existing societal ability to forge and realize non-capitalist socio-economic forms. As such, civil society possesses a clear capacity for neoliberal resistance, articulated in its ability to effectively think about and intentionally formulate arrangements of economic diversity according to radical, communal, anti-oppressive and ethical priorities. In such a manner, we capably disrupt the neoliberal economy and associated ontological form.

Given such divergent theoretical perspectives, we must consider how to best understand actually existing para-capitalist group abilities to resist neoliberal capitalist forms, and thus contribute to emergent possibilities for emancipatory social transformations. This chapter now further details a notion of neoliberal ontology via a theory of economization. This is then followed by an investigation into the contrasting notion of intentional economy. As is posited here, and further substantiated within subsequent chapters, unexplored questions of agency within both perspectives illustrate the need for an intermediary theory, which I propose as a politics of ambiguity. Such a

schema more readily recognizes the simultaneous convergence and divergence of a theorized neoliberal ontology and intentional economy within contemporary para-capitalist groups, thus broadening notions of interstitial resistance. The argument for this theoretical perspective is further realized by situating two para-capitalist groups within, and in contrast to, the above-mentioned theoretical paradigms.

## **A Neoliberal Ontology**

According to Gill (1990), a neoliberal ontological schema largely originates in and builds upon Enlightenment conceptualizations concerning human nature: e.g. that people are selfish and greedy, which thus leads to a ‘me-centered’ individualism connected to competition (Hobbes 2012[1651]); and that people are free, equal and possess rationality that can be mobilized to achieve calculated goals, which thus invokes a concept of increasing efficiency (Locke 1959[1689]). As Gill (2012) and McMichael (2012) expound, this ontology has emerged today as an intellectual project that works towards rationalizing market doctrines as the organizing principles of society. By expanding an image of the economic to socio-cultural relations, it works towards crafting and advancing specific normative suppositions about the nature of being and existence (Atasoy 2014:3).

In detailing its exceptionally adaptable and pliant capacity, Peck (2010; 2010b), and Brenner et al. (2009; 2010) speak of a process of neoliberalization in order to demonstrate the metamorphic, multi-contextual applicability of this market-rooted ontology. Understood not as a static process, but rather as a dynamic movement of socio-spatial transformation allows one to see neoliberalization and its guiding ontology as a “flexibly mutating regime of ‘market rule’ . . . associated with an almost bewildering array of local trajectories, contingent forms, and hybrid assemblages” (Brenner et al. 2009:95-96). It is through crisis, continued resistances and contestation that neoliberalism adapts and is remade, thus representing a market-based ‘restructuring ethos’ which permits it to exist among alternate and *even oppositional* economic forms in a polycentric manner (Brenner et al. 2009; Peck 2010). At the very heart of this theorized

neoliberal ontology lies a process of economization, which further elucidates its *modus operandi* and so stands as the primary focus for this conspectus.

A concept of economization has been advanced, independently, through the works of Çalışkan and Callon (2009), and Adaman and Madra (2013), and further revised by Brown (2015). As posited by Çalışkan and Callon (2009), a neoliberal ontology revolves around, and is articulated through a process of economization, which refers to:

. . . the processes that constitute the behaviours, organizations, institutions and, more generally, the objects in a particular society which are tentatively and often controversially qualified, by scholars and/or lay people, as 'economic'. The construction of action(-ization) into the word implies that the economy is an achievement rather than a starting point or a pre-existing reality that can simply be revealed and acted upon. (370)

Essentially, this concept serves to highlight the socio-technical construction of that which is 'economic', and so presumed to be part of 'the economy', thus ontologically reframing the world in which we live. In other words, this notion helps to illustrate the transformation of heretofore-noneconomic spheres, activities, practices, and behaviours into economic ones, thus effectively reconstituting the very substance and significance of existence. According to Çalışkan and Callon, this process does not necessarily involve comprehensive practices of monetization and/or marketization (although these are inferred facets), rather, it works to disseminate a *market paradigm* to all corners of existence, thus effectively configuring human beings as market actors, *videlicet*, exclusively and exhaustively as *homo economicus* (Brown 2015:31; Çalışkan and Callon 2009). This notion largely accords with Adaman and Madra's (2013) conception of a neoliberal ontology.

Adaman and Madra (2013) detail a neoliberal ontology as an ideational project which works towards the "economization of the ensemble of social relations through an understanding that individuals are calculative and calculable" (Atasoy 2014:18). Essentially, they see this process as representing an interdiscursive horizon which "forges an *epistemic shift* at the level of social subjectivity: as a project, it aims to

transform the way individuals relate to one another and their environments, thereby potentially generating a change in social being” (Adaman and Madra 2013:2, emphasis in original). Effectively, we become beings, and thus citizens, who act entirely on calculable, ‘rationally’ determined incentives, as we engage in a world *completely* suffused with ‘the economic’. As *homo economicus*, competition guides our behaviour and we are largely motivated to maximize returns and respond to a quantifiable cost-benefit analysis via calculative measurements, within all aspects of existence (Adaman and Madra 2013; Atasoy 2014:293). This economization component of a neoliberal ontology ostensibly mediates our material, social, cultural, political, and ecological relationships.

Additionally, this ideational project further depoliticizes the socioeconomic realm by naturalizing the process of economization and/or by the technocratization of its governance, which in turn serves to silence attempts to re-conceptualize the organization of economic practices (Adaman and Madra 2013:2).<sup>10</sup> As is suggested, a neoliberal ontology is working towards the restructuring of human thought, which is thus delimiting our ability to imagine and enact alternate forms. Given Adaman and Madra’s claim that this project is partly rooted in the polarization and articulation of economic theoretical controversies, emerging in the inter-war period (6), we can see how the neoliberal project of economization has been working at an epistemic level for many years, and as such is deeply rooted socio-culturally.<sup>11</sup> From this, claims regarding neoliberal ontological resilience and broad applicatory ability are disinterred.

<sup>10</sup> This is achieved via diffused depictions and understandings of the ‘rational’/‘natural’ and propitious marketized administration of life, and; through a representation of the (distended) ‘economic’ as a highly specialized subject that can only be managed by a few unelected experts.

<sup>11</sup> This lineage extends beyond the realm of this study. For more on this development see Adaman and Madras 2013.

To better understand this durability, we must also acknowledge the political element. As Adaman and Madra demonstrate, both the politically left and the politically right are loyal to a common set of ontological and epistemological objectives and presuppositions (9-21). For example, “they posit *homo economicus* as the model of individual behaviour and aim at designing institutions to accommodate market failures that arise from opportunism . . . [which] remain within the strictures of the neoliberal ontological project as they demand a social subjectivity that responds to economic incentives” (20). This is further evidenced when considering the way neoliberal reason shapes government policymaking, for example, the use of market-like mechanisms “to address the interrelated dual crises of environmental pollution and natural resource overuse” (19).

As evidenced in this brief exploration above, a concept of economization, as posited by Çalışkan and Callon (2009) and Adaman and Madra (2013), is somewhat broad, with vague borders and no clearly defining substance or criterion with which to differentiate it across the diverging temporal and spatial iterations of ‘economy’. For example, it is decidedly difficult to distinguish the above notions from the guiding tenets that characterize classical liberalism. Thus, while we can see that this theorized contemporary form does indeed involve an enlarged domain and significant extension of such economization processes, a neoliberal ontology necessarily involves more than a mere matter of degrees, and to apprehend this addendum we must turn to the work of Wendy Brown (2015).

In positing the transmutation of the human form, habitat, and the associated erosion of substantive democracy, political equality and the power of the demos within neoliberalism, Brown (2015) delineates a neoliberal ontology as:

. . . a normative order of reason developed over three decades into a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality [which] transmogrifies every human domain and endeavour, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized. In neoliberal reason and in domains governed by it, we are only and everywhere *homo oeconomicus*, which itself has a historically

specific form . . . [as] an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positions and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all of its endeavours and venues. (Brown 2015:9-10)

This representation of the reduction of humanity to a “constructed and governed bit of human capital” closely mirrors Gershon’s (2011) account of ‘neoliberal agency’, where a commanding ontological form arranges people as firms and we accordingly use market rationality to interpret our selves, social relationships, and strategies (539). Such notions suggest a significantly delimited ability for para-capitalist resistance. However, as argued below, such a structuralist-centered view risks overlooking aspiring agentic engagements and ambiguous responses by civil society groups today, ones that intimate at emergent para-ontologies and possibilities.

To continue, Brown asserts that this neoliberal ontology largely operates today via specific methods of governance, i.e. “through best practices and legal tweaks, in short, through ‘soft power’ drawing on consensus and buy-in, [rather] than through violence, dictatorial command, or even overt political platforms” (2015:35).<sup>12</sup> Essentially, this ontology governs as a “sophisticated” form of common sense, where it acts as a reality principle remaking humans and institutions wherever it successfully settles and achieves affirmation (35). While Brown cursorily acknowledges unavoidable “dust-ups”, such as protests, direct actions and political altercations with police, she asserts that this ontology’s rhizomatic form, within the branches and roots of the dominant agents of socialization, permits for its perseverance and continued diffusion despite such relatively ‘negligible’ discordance. However, Brown neglects to provide any direct investigations into such “dust ups”, and so fails to test her theoretical conceptualizations against empirical realities, thus demonstrating a significant dearth in her theory.

<sup>12</sup> Soft power is a concept that details an ability to coopt and attract via cultural appeal, ideology, and international institutions. This stands in contrast with hard power, which uses direct forms of coercion and force as methods of persuasion (Nye 1990).

Thus, to reiterate and further clarify, Brown theorizes that contemporary processes of economization do not only work to recast relations, and the world, within an exclusively economic frame, but more radically, effectively economizes *humanity itself*, rearranging the subject *homo economicus* within an emergent guiding paradigm of human capital. As subjects “configured by the market metrics of our time as self-investing capital”, Brown argues that we are no longer driven by self-interest (as was *homo economicus*), nor free/able to construct our lives and chose values at will (177). Rather, human capital is now constrained by a unilinear life path, cardinally aware of, and attending to, “the innovations of its competitors or parameters of success in a world of scarcity and inequality” (41). Furthermore, Brown claims that human capital is ‘responsibilized’, as notions of collective provisioning and dependency are disparaged.

Relatedly, Brown claims that recasting humanity as human capital within every sphere profoundly alters not only the organization, but also the very purpose and character of each and every sphere, as well as the relations between them (35). For example, public goods and commons are difficult to secure or even conceive of, as market metrics dictate and define every contour of life (176). Notions of social stratification, inequality and scarcity become both normal and normative, as a society comprised of human capital necessarily involves winners and losers (38). A concept of citizenship loses its political valence and venue, as neoliberal *homo economicus* abandons the ability to think collectively in a political way, and as politics and the state are remade by this ontology, respectively (39).<sup>13</sup> Relatedly, democracy itself is fundamentally enervated and transformed, as an emerging politics without democratic institutions populate society, and notions of equality, freedom and sovereignty increasingly adopt an economic register (39; 41).

<sup>13</sup> Specifically, valence details how neoliberal *homo economicus* myopically approaches everything as a market, and so is unable to effectively think, act, and connect with others. Venue speaks to the curtailment of liberal democratic justice concerns, and a transformation of politics, as the state becomes exclusively bound to economic growth, competition and credit custody (39-40).

Moreover, Brown asserts that as a result of this ontology, “human capital is distinctly not concerned with acquiring the knowledge and experience needed for intelligent democratic citizenship” (177), thus further emaciating substantive democratic forms. This is, in part, because democracy is increasingly conceived of as requiring specialized and technically skilled human capital and not educated and active citizens (177), the corollary being that the demos are made anaemic and increasingly subservient to authoritative forms of rule (179; 202-203). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Brown alleges that eudemonia<sup>14</sup> is lost as a result of this neoliberal ontology, as the “normative reign of *homo oeconomicus* in every sphere means that there are no motivations, drives, or aspirations apart from economic ones” (43). By allowing this ontology to determine both the content and context of our present and future, we forsake our individual and collective ability to discover, forge, pilot and master our existence (221), and thus effectively resist. Brown claims that the overall success of this ontological project, remaking citizens, subjects and their habitat, is demonstrated by the lack of a “scandalized” response to the state’s emergent role of serving, bolstering and prioritizing the economy (40). Yet, again, she fails to empirically substantiate the above claims, and does not consider contemporary shifting responses to such issues, nor divergent democratic articulations within civil society today.

As demonstrated by Brown, neoliberalism and its ontological form, as economization, is not simply an intensified revival of Enlightenment thought and classical liberalism, but rather represents a qualitatively mutated social extension of this thought (60-61). As such, neoliberal rationality does not seek to prescribe detailed economic policies, but rather, it sets out “novel ways of conceiving and relating state, society, economy and subject *and also* inaugurate a new ‘economization’ of heretofore noneconomic spheres and endeavours” (50, emphasis added). Accordingly, Brown

<sup>14</sup> Eudemonia is an Aristotelian notion of human flourishing, happiness, and well-being as a result of a life governed by reason. Brown (2015) describes it as “the cultivation and expression of distinctly human capacities for ethical and political freedom, creativity, unbounded reflection, or invention” (43).



proclaims it is “the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity” (44). This above representation of a ubiquitous and dominant neoliberal ontology suggests little, if any ability, for effective forms of interstitially situated para-capitalist resistance.

## **Intentional Economy**

In contrast to the above notion of a commanding neoliberal ontology, Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006), and Cameron, Healy and Gibson-Graham (2013) argue that neoliberal capitalism and its ontological form are readily resisted, evaded and subverted via (discursive) recognition and advancement of socio-economic diversity concurrently existing across all societies today. However, as Gibson-Graham (2006) outline, there are a number of ontological and epistemological obstacles that impede such realizations, and these include: a proclivity towards ‘strong’ theory<sup>15</sup>; left melancholia<sup>16</sup>, and; a “moralistic scepticism towards power [which] render[s] the world effectively uncontestable”<sup>17</sup> (6). Such obstructions actively serve to reinforce capitalocentric discourses, and thus neoliberal dominance. Accordingly, Gibson-Graham argue that we must retrain our minds to perceive divergent readings of society, in order to allow for greater possibilities of becoming and of defining our own realities. This involves a cognition of subjection, where we apprehend “how subjects ‘become,’ and more

<sup>15</sup> “Strong theory definitively establishes what is, but pays no heed to what it does. While it affords the pleasures of recognition, of capture, of intellectually subduing that one last thing, it offers no relief or exit to a place beyond” (Gibson-Graham 2006:4).

<sup>16</sup> Left melancholia refers to an “attachment to a past political analysis or identity [which] is stronger than the interest in present possibilities for mobilization alliance or transformation” (Gibson-Graham 2006:5). In essence, it signals the resonating effects/affects, caused by the historical losses of the political left on active subjects today, typified by feelings of desolation, dejection and impotence in the face of commanding structures and socio-political and economic forms. Brown (1999) relatedly discusses issues surrounding the ‘melancholic habits of the Left’.

<sup>17</sup> This notion of scepticism refers to how power within resistance is often attributed with/connected to ruling class power. As such, “[e]xcluded from power yet fixated on the powerful, the radical subject is caught in the familiar resentment of the slave against the master” (Gibson-Graham 2006:5).

specifically how they may shift and create new identities for themselves despite the seemingly hegemonic power of dominant discourses and governmental practices” (24). To achieve this, they propose a language and imaginary of economic diversity.

By presenting a representation of the ‘diverse economy’, which “dislodges the discursive dominance of capitalist economic activity and reclaims it as a contested space of representation” (54), Gibson-Graham outline their counterhegemonic project and divergent ontology. This essentially rests on recognizing the variety of realities and perspectives that make up the economic sphere (i.e. distinct forms of labour, enterprise, transactions, property and finance), and so promotes a shift in focus that works towards unraveling the meanings that sustain contemporary capitalism (see Table 1) (Cameron et al. 2013; Gibson-Graham 2006:59-68). This is chiefly captured by, and articulated through, their notion of ‘intentional economy’, which refers to “projects that treat economy as a political and ethical space of decision . . . placing the issues of *necessity, surplus, consumption, and commons*, in the foreground of ethical deliberation and decision” (Gibson-Graham 2006:101, emphasis in original). More precisely, they emphasize the ‘community economy’, understood as “a space of decision making where we recognize and negotiate our interdependence with other humans, other species, and our environment”, for destabilizing the capitalist economy and associated ontology (Cameron et al. 2013:xix; Gibson-Graham 2006:Chap. 4). This involves cultivating an awareness of community-defined necessity, community guided appropriation and distribution of surplus, community focused consumption, and community established commons (Gibson-Graham 2006:88-97).

**Table 1. The Diverse Economy**

LABOUR	ENTERPRISE	TRANSACTIONS	PROPERTY	FINANCE
Wage	Capitalist	Market	Private	Mainstream Market
Alternative Paid	Alternative Capitalist	Alternative Market	Alternative Private	Alternative Market
Unpaid	Noncapitalist	Nonmarket	Open Access	Nonmarket

Source: *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming our Communities* (Cameron et al. 2013:13).

According to Gibson-Graham (2006), such economic forms are realized via substantive recognition of a 'politics of possibility', which:

. . . rests on an enlarged space of decisions and a vision that the world is not governed by some abstract, commanding force or global form of sovereignty . . . [and thus works] to question the claims of truth and universality that accompany any ontological rigidity and to render these claims projects for empirical investigation and theoretical re-visioning. (xxxiii)

This involves the societal comprehension and expansion of: a 'politics of language', which recognizes that social spheres are produced via specific modes of calculation and representation; a 'politics of the subject', which recognizes the ability for social actors to construct realities that go beyond predetermined discursively defined realms, and thus how changing oneself works towards changing the world, and; a 'politics of collective action', which recognizes humanity's ability to consciously and collectively work towards building new realities, and thus how changing one's environment works towards transforming the self in potentially non-economized forms (2006).

As demonstrated, such notions evidently call into question the neoliberal ontological framework detailed above, as the subject presented herein is not characterized as an atomized, 'constructed and governed bit of human capital' engaging with a world completely suffused by market relations, but rather an empowered and self-determining being who can discursively conjure up non-capitalist socio-economic realities and sensibilities. It should be stressed that this ontological perspective is not prescriptive, but rather seeks to facilitate an ability to ask important questions about, and provide critical insights into, the economic sphere, allowing for parochial and contextually relevant economic developments that exist outside of capitalist forms. It aims to expose fundamental economic interdependencies and attempts to resocialize the economy, thus emphasizing the *becoming* of novel forms of economic being (83-88).

Such notions plainly attest to a resolute belief in the resistance abilities and socio-transformative capabilities of para-capitalist actions and forms. However, as argued herein, this perspective risks overlooking significant structural constraints.

Specifically, such intentionality is centered upon a premise of viable emancipatory change. By mobilizing para-capitalist animus, society is capable of resisting and transforming capitalist structures. Yet, as explored within this thesis, such action is fundamentally situated within an existing structural context that actively maneuvers endeavours and imposes exigencies for enduring engagements, thus limiting and perhaps influencing overall agentic efforts (i.e. intentionality).

Evidently, as detailed in the above, there are vastly differing theoretical views surrounding a capacity for para-capitalist resistance and transformative possibilities. Accordingly, we are impelled to reflect on how to accurately understand para-capitalist action today. Is it chiefly relegated to the realm of a dominant ontology? Or can civil society decidedly resist, and thus conceive, forge and affirm supra-economic realities? One way to attend to this theoretical discord is via a consideration into the role of agency. As argued below, and further substantiated in the subsequent analysis chapters, such theories explored above are extended and slightly nuanced via a consideration into the agentic abilities of interstitially situated para-capitalist groups.

## **(Re)Thinking About Agency**

At its most general level, agency can be understood as a capacity for self-directed and purposeful action and social engagement, and is understood in contrast to notions of structural constraints. These do not exist as isolated concepts, but are dialectically related. Agency has been theorized in many ways. For example, Weberian social action theory historically interpreted people as “genuine actors capable of interpreting their social realities and of initiating creative action” (Kalberg 1994:25), and thus saw social engagements as either value-rational or goal instrumental. More recently, a concept of agency has been advanced within the writings of Emirbayer and Miche (1998), as a “temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its ‘iterational’ or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a ‘projective’ capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a ‘practical-evaluative’ capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the

contingencies of the moment)” (962). This formulation helps to better capture and speak to the structure-agency dialectic.

However, given the specific interest of this study, such individualized notions of agency are found wanting. More specifically, my focus herein is centered on understanding the resistance abilities, transformative involvements and agentic capacities of para-capitalist groups and thus correlated movements. Consequently, a Gramscian view of political transformative agency is more appropriate for this study.

According to Gramscian notions, effective political agency refers to a set of organized forces in movement (i.e. movements themselves), which reflect a substantive democratic will and not just groups and individuals. While for Gramsci this political agency was realized first in the activities of factory councils, and then the ‘Modern Prince’, contemporizing his views allows us to locate such conceivably transformative agency within the activities of globally diffused, non-hierarchical social movements today (Gill 2007; 2008; Schwarzmantel 2009). Thus, as is argued, it is through the capacity of *movements* that a new form of culture and society can eventually be realized via manifold political and pedagogical processes, within the moribund carapace of the old (Gill 2007:115).

Furthermore, such a transformative political agency necessarily requires a focus on the political sphere, as it is here where such structures are managed and sustained (Gramsci 1971; Schwarzmantel 2009). Accordingly, and as detailed in the subsequent chapters, within my study this agentic form more directly relates to the workings of Spartacus Books, as their resistance engagements are decidedly focused upon socio-economic and political levels, and thus represent a component of (or contributor to) such transformative movements. However, I suggest that extra-political para-capitalist engagements, such as those enacted by CB-DC, may also work generally towards building or supporting the development of forms of political agency. Further pursuing notions of transformative resistance as presented by Burawoy (2014) and Wright (2010; 2012), we can see how such issue-oriented para-capitalist projects might actively undermine the dominance of capitalism by buttressing and expanding variegated forms

of social empowerment, and thus movements generally. As Wright (2012) claims, such heterogeneous interstitial resistances “serve a critical ideological function by showing that alternative ways of working and living are possible, and [thus] potentially erodes constraints on spaces themselves” (22). As such, I advance a modified Gramscian notion of political agency, understood herein as ‘contributive interstitial agency’. Such a form, while unable to animate transformative political movements directly, works to laterally nurture societal potentialities for political agency via confrontations with a multiplicity of structural issues.

Accordingly, in this examination into para-capitalist group abilities and transformative possibilities, I investigate the capacities of such groups to both realize their specific para-capitalist goals (i.e. act collectively outside of particular structural constraints) and thus contribute (or not) to the development of an emergent transformative/interstitial agency. As asserted above, it is in relation to such agentic notions where a theory of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy are engaged and extended.

In particular, a notion of neoliberal ontology is evidently centered on the ‘inherited world’, i.e. a structure as governing rationality that ontologically frames social actors and existence. Yet, by not investigating such notions within the real world, and especially against actually existing para-capitalist resistance groups, a theory of neoliberal ontology is unable to effectively apprehend creative agentic engagements and potentialities that can emerge in response to such structure. Conversely, a theory of intentional economy is principally centered on a belief of capable social engagements, i.e. resolute agentic capacities to conceive and create new forms and realize para-capitalist goals via intentionality. Yet when examined against actually existing para-capitalist groups, imposing structural constraints are exposed, thus partially problematizing notions of intentionality and attendant transformative potentialities.

By investigating for the studied groups’ differentiated agencies, variegated interactions with structure are revealed and thus clearer understandings of para-capitalist resistance abilities and transformative possibilities are attained. As further

detailed in the subsequent chapters, such agentic abilities are examined by investigating group goals, alternative propositionings, resistance strategies, realization of intentions, and by theorizing resulting contributions to transformative movements. Such an inquiry allows us to see the simultaneous convergence and divergence of the above theories within active civil society groups, as apprehended by a politics of ambiguity.

## **A Politics of Ambiguity**

In extending the above perspectives of a neoliberal ontology and intentional economy via notions of agency, a politics of ambiguity apprehends and illustrates the successes, shortcomings, tensions and ostensible paradoxes epitomized by para-capitalist projects operating within society today. Such a perspective does not seek to minimize or discount the very real problematic structural linkages and issues (e.g. global commodity chain connections or neoliberal replications) that para-capitalist groups may exhibit. Rather, it signals such moments in order to both recognize their presence (i.e. gain a more accurate account of the situation) *and* potentially enervate their ostensibly corrupting and subversive status, by better situating such phenomena within the socio-cultural and structural contexts in which they reside and are encountered.

Relatedly, such a paradigm does not propose a conviction in the consummate ability for civil society to resist and transform capitalism via concerted effort or diverse discursive perspectives, as this ignores the complex contexts and societal structures in which we are situated. For example, imposing material exigencies that can conceivably work to vitiate para-capitalist intentions due to necessities for survival – and ‘rational’ responses to such demands – resulting in an ambiguity between desired goals and action. Rather, a politics of ambiguity calls attention to the efforts, regroupings, small ‘victories’, discernable ‘defeats’, and minor movements made as groups manoeuvre between structural impositions and agentic aspirations, seeking to affirm para-capitalist spaces of being and becoming. It is this necessary navigation between structure and agency that characterizes a politics of ambiguity, and which thus permits for enduring para-capitalist engagements with varying effects.

In such an endeavour, this theoretical perspective allows us to understand para-capitalist accordance or capitulation to a neoliberal structure or ontology as a normative component of such projects, and of para-capitalism more generally. Such a notion echoes Gramsci's (1971) historical observation regarding challenges of social change. As he states, "[t]he crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (276). However, while recognizing that some symptoms are indeed 'morbid', and thus align with and reinforce neoliberal capitalism and its theorized ontology (and perhaps even exacerbate issues), a politics of ambiguity concurrently recognizes that 'symptoms' are also part of the transformative process and thus often constructive and necessary.

In apprehending such normalized and salutary 'symptoms', a politics of ambiguity recognizes the socio-cultural structural realities that actively manoeuvre (para-capitalist) groups, individuals and ideas. More specifically, it apprehends the fact that people are, in part, a product of their society, which shapes understandings and frames action within a purview of perceived possibilities (see: Althusser 1970; Kidd and Teagle 2012:Chap. 10; Marx 1969[1852]). This speaks directly to Marx's observation that "[m]en [sic.] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please: they do not make it under the circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (398). It is through engaging with such 'circumstances' (i.e. the interface between neoliberal ontology and intentional economy) that ambiguity arises, as well as possibilities for 'making one's history'.

Moreover, and as detailed by Aminzade et al. (2001), contentious politics and movements (such as confrontations with capitalism) involve a plethora of factors and societal responses, such as resistance, oppression, opposition, resentments, resignations, concessions, cooptation, opportunities, etc. Within the para-capitalist movement, where a capitalist class, ruling elite, and congenial state systems seek to broadly maintain the socio-economic status quo and associated positions of power, structural responses of opposition and repression are constant (Engels and Marx 2004[1848]; Gramsci 1971; Scott 1990). Additionally, systems of socialization work to normalize a capitalist orientation amongst the general populace, thus tending to broadly construct para-capitalist ideals as aberrant or chimerical (cf.: Althusser 1970; Marcuse



1964). By operating within the exigencies of such perpetual struggle, the para-capitalist movement is unable to produce a significant unified resistance or bloc and so necessarily continues to constitute a politics without any clear destination, coherence or guarantees (cf. Atasoy 2009:257). Such realities again speak to the agentic obstacles and compelling structures captured by a politics of ambiguity. Accordingly, this theory does not focus on the ability for para-capitalist groups to craft new socio-economic forms and diverse realities (although clearly a part of such projects) as these are unclear at this point in history, but rather signals at how such groups are thinking about engagements, according with structure, enacting resistances and thus potentially working to ambiguously build transformative *possibilities* within such a context.

Such a politics, again, apprehends that while societal actors are shaped by the pertinent society in which they live (and thus operate within its confines), they too actively work towards creating that very society via adaptable and evolving actions, understandings and efforts.<sup>18</sup> As such, we can see how these forms of ambiguous resistance and social action constitute, and are constitutive of, cultural processes (Chin and Mittelman 1997:26), which *can* aid in the development of transformative agency. This is best captured by a concept of ‘submerged networks’, which broadly refers to the multiplicity of para-capitalist projects operating within society, with no clearly defined interlinking organizational structures or explicit connections, but which nonetheless work towards engaging in forms of openly declared systemic contestations. Such ‘submerged networks’ actively challenge and call into question delineated and prescribed reality; and by virtue of their existence, offer competing conceptualizations and act as a heuristic for the very real issues and oppressions that exist in society. However, they necessarily do this as members of the society in which they reside, and thus, ‘submerged networks’ are best understood as sites of *evolving* values, lifestyles and structures, not yet firmly established or perhaps even clearly defined (30). This reality helps to remind us that practices of resistance cannot necessarily be separated from the associated practices of

<sup>18</sup> This broadly speaks to Emirbayer and Miche’s (1998) notion of agency, as detailed above.

domination which they target, and so often emerge as amalgam forms, each bearing at least traces of the other (Routledge 1997:70). Given that resistance emerges in response to domination, such congenital association is logical.

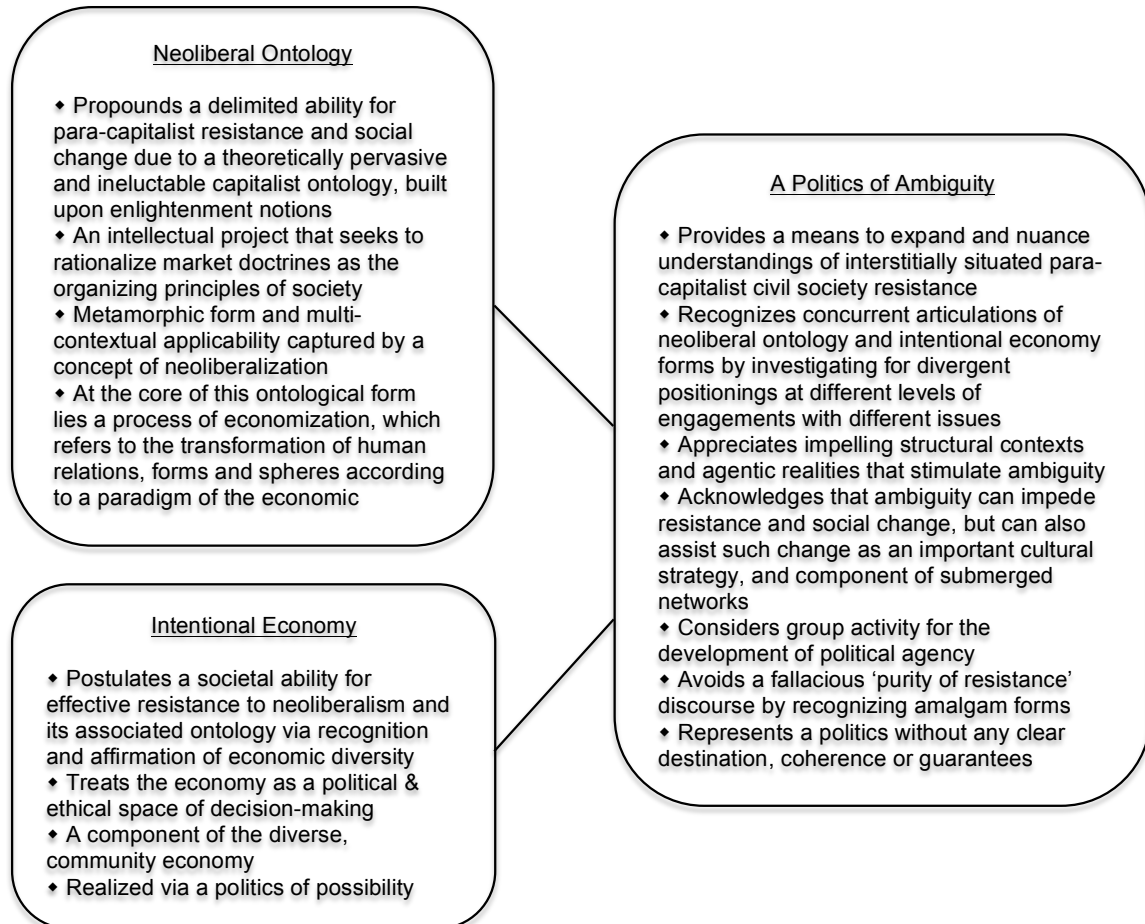
Correspondingly, and as will be further explored in the subsequent chapters, para-capitalist processes and groups thus often represent crucial, civil society-rooted cultural strategies that (despite perceived 'achievements' or 'failures') help to call into question established societal constructs and discourses by attempting to craft and assert divergent ontological paradigms and notions of self and society; favouring egalitarian, emancipatory, contextually applicable and non-oppressive forms (cf.: Kingsnorth 2003; McMichael 2009; 2010; Olesen 2005). Thus as will be detailed, through the enactment of such ambiguity CB-DC works in part to dispute a neoliberal energy and fossil fuels complex, and Spartacus broadly assists a multitude of intersecting socio-political and economic confrontations, but with varying effects. Such strategies broadly reflect a Gramscian 'war of position', essential for evading and recreating existing socio-economic and political systems and ontologies in meaningful ways (Gramsci 1971:229-239).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, such a politics largely accords with, and helps to nuance and detail a notion of civil society as presented within third wave sociological Marxism (Burawoy 2003; 2014), as was outlined above.

As will be further elaborated, such a politics is revealed amongst para-capitalist groups by analyzing for their disparate positionings (intentional economy or neoliberal ontology) at different levels of their engagements (normative, diagnostic, alternative propositionings, and enacted strategies) with the specific issues they are confronting and

<sup>19</sup> A war of position refers to an intellectual and cultural strategy employed to develop and foster a heterodox, resistant culture, capable of countering existing cultural hegemony within society. This assists in advancing class-consciousness and associated knowledge forms and understandings, all of which are necessary for meaningful political agency and lasting social transformation (Gramsci 1971:229-239).

with neoliberal capitalism generally. In doing so, understandings regarding civil society capacities for resistance are expanded.

**Figure 1. Theoretical Perspectives**



## Relevance

Such a study is especially pertinent today as recognition of political-economy issues becomes increasingly popularized in mainstream culture via publications (e.g. Adbusters 2015; Klein 2015; Pikety 2014), mass social movements (such as Anonymous, (De)Occupy Wall Street, Idle No More, and Black Lives Matter), art (e.g.

Banksy 2015; Brandalism 2015; Lambert 2015), TV shows like Mr. Robot (Esmail 2015) and The Daily Show (Smithberg and Winstead 2015), and other cultural forms and mediums such as podcasts and movies. As notions of para-capitalism begin to enter public discourse with greater frequency, it is important to have a clear understanding of the 'limits of the possible', and the existing social forces, structures and realities.

Furthermore, and as stated, the above notions detailed by third wave sociological Marxism and contemporized Polanyian substantivism necessitates such an investigation into the ability of civil society groups for realizing para-capitalist socio-economic forms. As responses to the exploitation and injustices of capitalism increasingly shift from the state to local civil society actors, it is imperative that we discover how to best study and understand the articulations, functions and overall capacities of such resistances, and thus better apprehend how to successfully enact them.

Lastly, and as asserted, the literature regarding a neoliberal ontology explored above provides no detailed investigations into the presence or absence of this theorized ontological form within resolute para-capitalist organizations. While explorations are made into the permeation and presence of this ontological form within individuals, the family and home, a multitude of interpersonal relationships, the state, the political and academic sphere (Brown 2015; Gershon 2011), as well as governmental bodies and transnational organizations (Brenner et al. 2010; Gill 2008; Peck 2010; Peck and Tickell 2002), there is an investigative dearth of this theoretical ontological form within groups that are actively seeking to challenge and ameliorate capitalist precipitated issues and forms. Although not the primary focus of this research project, exploring the complexities of such resistance processes allows for an expanded discussion regarding a neoliberal ontology. Given the claims of its ubiquitous and inveterate nature, such an investigation is useful for further understanding the scope and articulated reality of this theorized form. Relatedly, notions of intentional economy are also partially extended by conversely investigating for notable structural impediments to such resistance projects.

As such, and in heeding the call of third wave sociological Marxism to “elaborate the concrete utopias found in embryonic forms throughout the world” (Burawoy 2014:15),

this study nuances and expands understandings of actually existing interstitially situated civil society resistances, and in doing so, also attends to a theoretical discord regarding abilities for neoliberal resistance and social change today.

## Two Notes on Terminology

As detailed above, this thesis engages with the academic theorization of a neoliberal ontology as economization. While I have my own personal reservations about offering any broad, universal claims regarding social reality (viz. I wish to avoid forms of conceptual reification), and I do not wish to characterize a neoliberal ontology as some 'actorless' entity, I believe that such an exploration can be made through careful attention to empirical data and engagement with, and extension of, existing theory. Moreover, given what we know about the structuring nature of neoliberalization – including its: extended, discontinuous and mercurial genealogy; complete lack of allegiances or loyalties; fragmented, trans-temporal and spatially unbounded manifestations, and; articulation and promotion by a plethora of think tanks, policy elites, 'experts', a ruling class, and various states, sites and localities – as a relatively recent, yet enduring system, it is clearly more than the sum of its parts (Harvey 2005; Peck 2010; Peck and Tickell 2002). Thus, at its substratal level, I understand a neoliberal ontology as a neoliberal knowledge culture, which serves in part as a heuristic outlining the nature of social reality according to existing neoliberal capitalist doctrine. As such, it is both an existing theorized ontological framework, and a conceptual network useful for adequately understanding the protean, polycentric and life determining form of contemporary capitalism (i.e. an armature upon which an empirical investigation and theoretical argument can be made).

Secondly, this thesis project is committed to Erik Olin Wright's concept of emancipatory social science. This commitment is buttressed in part by analogous contributions from Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006). Rooted in a feminist critique of political economy, Gibson-Graham seek to facilitate the 'queering' of economy, which essentially involves recognizing the heterogeneity of economic spaces and thus *working* to reframe

the economy as pluralistic, amalgamated and socio-culturally contingent. Thus, in the spirit of such disciplinary forms, and despite my reservations with aspects of them as detailed above, I take great precautions in delineating the studied organizations in relation to existing neoliberal capitalism. More specifically, I wish to avoid reproducing dominant capitalocentric discourses by abstaining from the linguistic normalization of a tacitly imposed hierarchical binary, viz. a dominant normalized 'capitalism' and a subordinate deviant 'other' (cf.: Foucault 1990:100; Said 1978). Therefore, in contrast to describing these organizations as 'counter', 'anti', or 'non-capitalist' (which discursively places them in an ancillary position to a commanding 'ordinary' capitalism), I have elected to utilize the prefix *para*, as in *para-capitalist*. I believe *para* to be a more apt prefix as it indicates a more homologous and commensurate location to capitalism, signifying 'besides', 'beyond', 'resembling', and 'to guard against'. Furthermore, such a designation directly relates to a Polanyian notion of the double movement, as well as Burawoy's conceptualization of a bicephalous civil society within third wave sociological Marxism (as discussed above), and thus better captures the ways in which civil society groups work towards both challenging *and potentially* containing/supporting capitalism; thus also echoing a politics of ambiguity. The fact that this project is grounded in Polanyian substantivism further necessitates such a distinction, as it helps highlight the fundamentally embedded nature of 'doing economics', while simultaneously recognizing Polanyi's claim that reactionary developments can be as bad or worse than the system being addressed (i.e. fascism and Nazism as protectionist responses to the destructive societal effects of a 'self-regulating market economy'). Lastly, I argue that notions of 'counter', 'anti', or 'non-capitalism' suggest a chimerical path of systemic transcendence and resistance, as they imply an external sovereign force operating on a bounded and spatially limited capitalism. Such a construct is not possible, as societal members cannot situate themselves entirely outside of the society to which they belong. As such, *para-capitalism* refers to ideas, individuals and groups that are committed to addressing capitalist precipitated issues, but simultaneously recognizes the ever-present potential of those peoples and ideas (in)conspicuously reproducing and/or supporting capitalism.

## Chapter 3.

# Studying Resistance

## Methodology

I subscribe to a non-atomistic social ontology, which apprehends human beings as primarily constituted in and through social processes, institutions and ideas. As such, social relations, ideas, understandings and structures act as starting points for analysis, connected to and articulated through social actors (Gill 2008: xvii). Relatedly, such a perspective conceptualizes different forms of power as directly connected to different forms of knowledge and political agency, with power structures and relations emerging from, and connected to, agency and political actors; involving “the conscious and collective action of elites, classes and movements”. Moreover, “[p]ower is also related to how social forces are imagined, motivated and organized [and] is mediated, channelled, mobilized and institutionalized through political and civil society . . . connected to different forms and patterns of resistance” (xiv).<sup>20</sup> Thus, by being situated in such an ontological perspective, a more accurate understanding of ‘the situation’ is achieved, as well as the relations of forces in political, economic, social and ecological terms, understood as the overall ‘limits of the possible’ (Gill 2008:17; Gramsci 1971:175-185).

<sup>20</sup> This power perspective directly relates to a Foucauldian (1995) notion of capillary power, and its link to knowledge and discourse (1990). Moreover, it also closely correlates with Lukes’ (2005) third dimension of power, which can be seen as a form of ideological power that can work “against people’s interests by misleading them, thereby distorting their judgment” (13).

This project is rooted in a reflexive extended-case method, a politically engaged methodology which provides a means to re-examine the relationship between data and theory. This is accomplished in part by using observations of specific examples to challenge and engage with existing theories. In this way, generated data is 'extended' through its connection to unseen macro social phenomena bearing upon the micro social field being investigated (Burawoy 1991; 1998). Within this method, the generated 'ethnographic' data is situated within "the necessary context for explanation, to find out how to put the part in the relevant larger whole rather than to generalize to other [specific] cases" (Sullivan 2002:280). However, using observations of specific examples to extend existing theory allows for a form of generalization, as this method constructs a "generalization through reconstructing existing generalizations, that is, the reconstruction of existing theory" (Burawoy 1991:279). Accordingly, theories regarding interstitial civil society resistance are extended via this investigation into two specific and distinct para-capitalist groups. Selecting and analyzing anomalous cases (i.e. cases not included within the relevant theory) further facilitates this (Burawoy 1991; Hennen 2008).

Burawoy (1991) suggests that by investigating anomalies, we "are lead directly to an analysis of domination and resistance" (279), as they help to expose the broader forces constraining and structuring social reality. As such, by focusing on such "macro' determinations of everyday life, the extended case method is also the most appropriate way of using participant observation to (re)construct theories of advanced capitalism" (271), as it works to expose diffused and obfuscated forms of domination. Within my research, the para-capitalist organizations studied stand in part as anomalous cases, as a theory of neoliberal ontology pays little heed to the role of specific para-capitalist organizations in the reproduction, reconfiguration or departure off/from a neoliberal ontology. As such, this research method, yet again, advances on objectivity, which "is not measured by procedures that assure an accurate mapping of the world but by the growth of knowledge; that is, the imaginative and parsimonious reconstruction of theory to accommodate anomalies" (272).

In addition to the above, I suggest that the methods used for this study are particularly apposite for exploring and understanding para-capitalist resistance abilities against a theory of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy. The generally focused,



yet open, flexible and informal nature of semi-structured interviews allowed for themes and ideas to emerge and be followed up upon, as well as for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, understandings and intentions (see Mason 2006). Participant observation helped to both contextualize the interviews and better understand the inner workings and logics of the organizations. This also permitted me to observe aspects of these groups that were not discussed within the interviews (either because they were simply omitted, or perhaps considered 'self-evident'). Finally, the analysis of textual documents allowed me to consider how these organizations are discursively representing themselves and their confronted issues in a variety of mediums, as well as investigate structural components and communication methods.

By utilizing such methods, I have been able to access and investigate group action, expressed intent and understandings of engagements alongside observable realities. In this way, theoretical notions of a neoliberal ontology are extended and tested against the generated data, while claims of intentional economy are relatedly expanded and considered against structural phenomena. From this, and as developed below, the differentiated agentic abilities of these groups are revealed – both in terms of their abilities to realize group goals, and contribute to emergent transformative movements – thus detailing a politics of ambiguity. Such ambiguity emerges precisely because these para-capitalist groups are attempting to enact their agency in the face of existing structure. By conducting this study I thus demonstrate how actually occurring resistances are unfolding amongst diverse civil society para-capitalist groups, and so how to better understand them, their engagements and resulting transformative potentialities.

Relatedly, and as discussed, shifting responses to neoliberal capitalism from the state to civil society as detailed by Burawoy (2003; 2014) and Friedman and McNair (2008) impelled this study into such pertinent localized resistances. In order to better understand such resistance (in)abilities, it is important to consider the numerous ways civil society is responding, and the differentiated agentic abilities of such varied responses to resist and potentially help build emergent movements of political agency. This project begins to do so through the investigation of two distinct para-capitalist groups. Departing from theories of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy has

allowed me to consider a broad scope of such theorized resistance and transformative abilities, nuance existing understandings, and best capture the challenges, advances, uncertainties and insecurities of such projects (i.e. ambiguity).

## **Methods**

### **Data Sources & Data Generation**

Within this research project, I move between existing theories surrounding a neoliberal ontology and intentional economy, and ‘new’ information generated via an extended, qualitative investigation of two para-capitalist organizations. These groups consist of the Cowichan Bio-Diesel Co-op (CB-DC), a consumer-producer (hybrid) cooperative biodiesel production company based in Duncan; and Spartacus Books (Spartacus), a not-for profit volunteer-run radical bookstore and social space located in Vancouver. The former publicly sells membership shares and memberships, which grants consumer-members the right to purchase biodiesel produced from recycled, locally procured cooking oils, as well as permits involvement in the organization’s hierarchical liberal democratic decision making process. The latter is a well-established nonprofit volunteer owned and operated bookstore and resource center that specializes in anti-oppressive, scholarly and counterculture publications. It is run as a non-hierarchical, non-sectarian collective and is committed to offering a safe space for people to be, as well as for various gatherings and community events. Collective membership permits one to contribute to and direct the overall operation of the space, and be involved in a horizontal consensus-based decision-making structure.

These specific organizations were chosen for the following reasons. First, due to their anomalous status, they are particularly cogent for this research project (see Burawoy 1991). Second, they appear at the outset to demonstrate para-capitalist operating structures as representatives of the *diverse economy* (Gibson-Graham 2006). More specifically, they have different kinds of transactions and ways of negotiating

commensurability; different types of labour relations and ways of compensating it; and different forms of enterprise and ways of producing, appropriating and distributing surplus value (60). Furthermore, they appear to embody divergent values, extending beyond a profit focus and including a valuation of equality, democracy, community/solidarity, and sustainability. Such moral values are indicative of radical emancipatory egalitarian organizations (Wright 2014), and thus suggest a departure from a neoliberal ontology and an articulation of para-capitalist resistance forms. Moreover, these groups outwardly profess their disdain for capitalism and associated capitalist-precipitated issues, and are attempting to address and ameliorate such concerns via organizational actions and forms. As such, these groups stand as examples of interstitially situated para-capitalist civil society resistance, and so are apposite for this study.

Lastly, their particular engagements with distinct processes of neoliberalism, involving divergent structures and relations with global commodity chains (GCCs), allows for an inquiry into the effect this may have on their resistant abilities and potential transformative contributions. Specifically, CB-DC is resolutely committed to addressing specific issues of energy-security and a socio-ecologically inimical fossil fuel complex, and operates as a hybrid cooperative at a regional scale (i.e. acting within Vancouver Island, and specifically the Cowichan Valley Regional District and neighbouring areas). As will be detailed, this specific form and functionality results in a more bounded resistance and transformative capacity, as well as direct engagement with, and reliance upon GCCs, seen in its muddled and ambiguous relationship with fossil fuels.

Spartacus, by contrast, has a more substantive organizational structure as a diffused collective, and less defined or explicit objective, and thus articulates a pliant para-capitalist functionality, essentially acting as a readily available tool to help address various forms of social oppressions and exploitation. As such, it is firmly situated within a local context, actively attempting to forge connections and solidarity with the community in which it is located, and offers clearer contributions to transformative movements and potentialities. Through their specific engagements, these organizations are also conceivably acting at a global level. As further detailed in the subsequent chapters,

these groups work towards addressing global issues that have no organic attachments to them, and create spaces in which ideas and responses can be collaboratively forged.

Additionally, a connection to a GCC directly impacts the strength and severity of a neoliberal global connection (McMichael 2008). This is seen, for example, in how being entangled in a GCC often results in supporting and reinforcing various neoliberal production and distribution forms, as well as a variety of neoliberal regulatory structures and methods of policy diffusion and implementation (cf.: Dobbin, Garrett and Simmons 2008; Gereffi 1994; Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Guillen et al. 2005). More specifically, CB-DC's para-capitalist goals are complicated via its connection to corporate fossil fuels, while Spartacus's organizational ambitions are partially frustrated via their support of multinational corporate publishing houses. As briefly shown, an underlying association to a GCC complicates para-capitalist resistance by tacitly reinforcing connections to a global neoliberal structure and/or associated ontology. All of the above is further detailed in the subsequent analysis chapters.

Evidently these are two extremely dissimilar groups, yet as detailed in the conclusion, comparatively investigating them allows for an inquiry into their disparate capacities to realize para-capitalist goals, diverge from a neoliberal ontology and so act as effective components of civil society resistance. Such an exploration allows us to better extend theories of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy by examining them against two distinct para-capitalist groups, but more importantly, allows us to consider the difference in these groups' ability to help forge emergent possibilities for social transformations and thus reflect upon the types of responses most advantageous for such interstitial resistance. Accordingly, we can discover via comparison what kinds of possibilities are emerging from these groups' differentiated engagements and thus better understand the abilities and potentialities of varied forms of civil society resistance.

Moreover, in conducting this study we further uncover what kinds of para-capitalist discussions are occurring, how para-capitalist space is being made, and thus the ways in which specific civil society resistances are unfolding. Such a comparative analysis also allows us to begin to consider the role of organizational structures and their

influence on affiliates' ontological perspectives, and thus better understand how para-capitalist possibilities and worldviews are potentially expanded or contracted. This also intimates at the intersection or relation between such para-capitalist structures, amount of civil society support, and resulting variances within a politics of ambiguity (i.e. *degrees* of organizational ambiguity).

The field research for this study took place between September of 2014 and April of 2015, and involved semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and the gathering of textual documents for analysis. Both organizations were contacted via email and telephone, and correspondence spanned the better part of a month prior to my involvement with the groups, as a result of organizational structures. For Spartacus, my association first required collective approval, and as such, I had to wait until it was discussed at a monthly collective meeting. For CB-DC, this length of time was a result of the limited number of active members, resulting in extremely busy and often overworked personnel. Additionally, their geographical location meant that I needed to travel to visit them, and thus needed to wait for an appropriate time to make the journey.

Interviews were conducted with organizational members and 'customers'.<sup>21</sup> A general interview guide was utilized (see Appendix A), and interviews were recorded, with given consent. A purposive sampling technique (for 'key informants'), in conjunction with a snowball sampling method (for 'customers') was applied to select and contact interview participants. Interviews were conducted in a variety of settings, including public cafés, restaurants, parks, and within the para-capitalist spaces being studied.

<sup>21</sup> Such a distinction became much less clear in practice. For CB-DC, interviews were conducted with active members who were involved in the functional operation of the cooperative, and member-'customers' whose cooperative involvement was limited entirely to the purchasing of biofuel. For Spartacus, collective members were often 'customers' and/or users of the space prior to joining the collective, and many people who are not officially part of the collective are still actively involved in the function of the space. As such, almost all interviews conducted at Spartacus (with the exception of one) were conducted with collective members, and more informal discussions with exclusive 'customers' and/or users of the space were carried out during participant observation.

A total of twelve people were interviewed, seven with CB-DC and five with Spartacus. Seven interviews were conducted with 'key informants' of these para-capitalist organizations (individuals directly invested in the operation of these groups), and the remaining five were conducted with 'customers', which consisted of individuals who use the services provided by the organization (either through a form of market exchange or not), and are less explicitly involved in the direct operation of the space. Three key informants were interviewed at CB-DC. Two were male and one was female. One of the males was in his mid 40s, and the other two respondents were in their mid 20s. All three were university educated. In regards to Spartacus, a total of four key informants were interviewed. Three were male and one was female. Two of the males were in their late 60s, and the other two respondents were in their mid to late 20s. One of the males and the female were university educated, one male went to a technical school, and the last respondent (the male in his 20s) never completed high school.

Four customers were interviewed at CB-DC. Two of the respondents were male, and two were female. One of the males was in his 40s, and the other was in his 60s. Both females were in their mid 50s. One of the females had completed a high school education, and the other three respondents were university educated. In regards to Spartacus, one long-time customer was interviewed. The respondent was a male, in his late 40s, with a high school education. Each interview ran for a maximum of seventy-minutes, and respondents were asked about their opinions, experiences, understandings and perceptions of the para-capitalist organization that they are affiliated with.

Congruent with an ethnographic approach, this research also involved participant observation. As a participant observer, I carried out volunteer work for varying lengths of time with each organization. Divergent structures and situations resulted in distinct interorganizational volunteer opportunities and forms, as outlined in the following.

CB-DC has been established over the last ten years, and now effectively operates with minimal human interventions. As such, they had no required or readily available volunteer opportunities for me.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, throughout this study, CB-DC had been busy preparing to launch its new blending pump, which internally mixes 100% biodiesel with varying proportions of petroleum diesel. This allows them to offer a variety of blends, including b100, b50, b20 and b5.<sup>23</sup> The small number of specialized and overworked 'staff' was discernably occupied with this task, and thus unable to establish or accept a volunteer position during the time of research. Consequently, my participation was limited to spending time in the head office, going on a tour of the biodiesel production facility, and assisting their sister company Greasecycle (which collects used cooking oils from Vancouver Island and Metro Vancouver) attain new contracts. As a result of CB-DC's workload, I was ultimately only able to visit twice, the first time in December of 2014, and the second time in March of 2015, both for a duration of two nights and three days. During my time in Duncan, I stayed with Brian Roberts (cofounder and current president of CB-DC), and this allowed for the development of a good report, and for expanded evening discussions regarding political economy, energy and ecology issues.

Spartacus, by contrast, required that I join the collective in order to conduct my research with them. Given their structure as a collectively owned and operated space, there is always an opportunity and need for volunteers. Thus, after going through the formal interview process, and presenting my proposed study at a monthly collective

<sup>22</sup> While they spoke of a necessity for increasing community outreach, there were no opportunities for me to assist them with this during my visits, as they aimed to return to the weekly Farmer's market (where they had originated), but were not yet ready to do so. Additionally, I offered to help with the production of the biodiesel (which is achieved via the work of one person), but this was not possible for a variety of reasons.

<sup>23</sup> These numbers represent the percentage of biodiesel in the fuel. Thus, b100 is 100% biofuel, b50 equates to 50% biofuel and 50% petrodiesel, b20 is made up of 20% biofuel and 80% petrodiesel, and b5 is in essence commercially sold diesel, as the province has mandated that all diesel fuels sold in British Columbia must be comprised of a minimum of 4% renewables (BC 2016).

meeting, I was welcomed into the group (to varying degrees, as discussed further below). Data was collected from September of 2014 to March of 2015. During my time there, I occupied a regular weekly shift at the store, and attended a number of collective meetings and social events. This level of participant observation permitted for a very active and direct involvement with the space, and for regular communication with collective members, patrons, denizens and users of the space. Detailed fieldnotes were generated throughout the volunteer process with both organizations. Additionally, volunteering for these organizations was also intended as a form of reciprocity, as a means of thanking them for their time and participation in this study.<sup>24</sup>

Lastly, this research project involves textual analysis. Through collecting, exploring and analyzing various documents – such as meeting minutes, publicly available published texts (e.g. flyers, websites, articles and advertisements), organizational constitutions, incorporation documents, business plans, funding applications, support letters, and various email correspondences – emergent themes were identified. From this, I gained a deeper understanding of the practices of these organizations, the individuals involved, and their various perspectives and understandings.

Throughout my research, I consistently wrote detailed, analytical ethnographic fieldnotes concerning the research process, my own observations and experiences. This allowed me to more accurately record events, as well as direct and organize emergent understandings and potential pathways of learning. As such, generated fieldnotes acted as an important supplementary component of my research (see Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Disparity in volunteer opportunities resulted in a disparity in reciprocity. For Spartacus this reciprocity meant actively working at the collective for close to two years. For CB-DC, as mentioned, I helped their sister company Greasecycle attain new contracts. This included a grease collection contract with SFU, and with my sister's vegetarian restaurant, The Acorn.



## Analysis

In conducting the analysis for this study I broadly emulated Wright's (2012) framework for emancipatory social science, which details methods for "thinking sociologically about emancipatory alternatives to dominant institutions and social structures, especially capitalism" (1). To begin, I determined the studied groups' specific goals and locus of resistance together with their attendant normative-moral commitments. Such commitments act as a lodestar for organizational action, framing resistance and informing diagnostics and critiques of the specific structures being challenged. These evaluations and criticisms were briefly outlined. I then probed for their 'prognostic framings', first by looking at their alternative propositionings (i.e. emancipatory responses to identified issues), and then by examining the consequent strategies of resistance. Investigating for the kinds of discussions and awarenesses these groups generate, the types of spaces they work to create (and how they are doing so), the organizational structure, and the specific actions they are taking in their endeavours allowed for this identification of para-capitalist resistance strategies.

All of the above was continually examined against a theory of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy, as well as situated within the relevant socio-material contexts encountered. In doing so I was able to clearly demonstrate these groups' divergent and shifting positionings (between a neoliberal ontology or intentional economy form) at different levels of their engagements (goals and locus of resistance, normative-moral commitments, diagnostics and critiques, alternative propositionings and strategies), and in relation to different issues (i.e. specific resistance goals, broad resistance to neoliberalism and attendant ontology, and necessities for enduring engagements). Such concurrent positionings within seemingly polarized forms reveals a politics of ambiguity, thus illuminating structural impositions and creative agentic engagements. Finally I considered the significance of such para-capitalist activity and related emergent transformative possibilities in regards to their confrontations with the specific issues being resisted as well as with neoliberal capitalism generally. In this way I was able to theorize and identify what results from enacting this politics of ambiguity. These two notably distinct organizations lend themselves to divergent analytical procedures and

findings. As such, the analysis chapters follow the same broad framework detailed above, however the specificities and subheadings differ accordingly.

In concluding this study I comparatively investigated these organizations abilities and transformative possibilities, as well as the overall viability and achievability of their para-capitalist endeavours. Viability seeks to discover if such projects, once fully realized, would be sustainable and void of unintended consequences and self-destructive dynamics. Achievability simply asks if and how we arrive at the intended para-capitalist destination, and identifies such projects as either ameliorative or real utopian transformations. Interrogating for viability and achievability allows us to further ground 'utopic' visions within pragmatic contexts (8).

All generated data (transcribed interviews, fieldnotes, and collected texts) were digitized and anonymized (unless otherwise specified) using pseudonyms either ascribed to, or chosen by participants. This was then followed by a non-linear, line-by-line analytical coding process, concurrent with detailed memo writing as outlined by Emerson et al. (2011). From this, emergent themes were identified. Additionally, concordances and discordances were also noted and analyzed between and within the various data sets. All research has been approved, and adheres to the guidelines for ethical research as presented by the SFU Research Ethics Board. Funding for this project was attained in part via a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS M scholarship.

## **Limitations & Advantages**

As indicated, different structural realities and organizational forms resulted in a disparity of researcher participation between groups. This resulted in dissimilar experiences with, and abilities to access and comprehend both organizations. Specifically, my more intimate involvements with Spartacus Books allowed for a deeper overall understanding of this para-capitalist assemblage, while my more limited involvements with CB-DC resulted in a less exhaustive group comprehension.

Consequently, fieldnotes generated via participant observation with CB-DC played a minor role in analysis. In an effort to ameliorate this incongruity, I conducted two additional interviews with members of CB-DC. Moreover, I was ultimately able to collect a larger quantity of textual documents from CB-DC, simply due to their practices of archiving and storing organizational documentation. In this way, I have attempted to compensate for such variations in generated data.

Finding (similar) para-capitalist groups also presented a slight challenge yet ultimate advantage to this study. Given the insecurity of such resistance projects (as discussed in the preceding chapter) many para-capitalist groups tend to be somewhat ephemeral or sporadically active. This was further revealed during initial stages of research design, where a number of contacted organizations were either disbanded or dormant.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, this thesis project ended up with two extremely dissimilar groups as its focus of study. While research into similar resistance projects would no doubt stand as an interesting and pragmatic study (e.g. allowing for an inquiry into variations between organizational ‘successes’, ‘failures’ and forms, thus substantively expanding understandings surrounding a *specific* para-capitalist resistance goal), I believe that having such disparity amongst groups acts as a genuine strength for this overall inquiry, as it has allowed me to consider divergent abilities and possibilities for para-capitalist resistances *generally*. Moreover, increasing our overall appreciation of a multitude of idiosyncratic para-capitalist forms is important for expanding understandings of such civil society resistance projects.

Lastly, the timing of this study was somewhat auspicious. Given that Spartacus was recently forced out of its operational bedrock in the DTES due to processes of gentrification (and associated issues surrounding land access and land use), and that CB-DC was engaged in launching its new blending pump (resulting in a greater overall

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the Lower Mainland Timebank (a labour exchange service), and the Vancouver Parecon Collective (an organization promoting participatory economic forms).

incorporation of fossil fuels), I was able to investigate the intersection of such organizational phenomena with the theorization of a neoliberal ontology and intentional economy. This added an additional element to the exploration of these organizations, and served to enrich my study overall.

## **Reflexivity & Researcher Role**

The sum of our personal understandings and subjective experiences, or our *Weltanschauung*, evidently guides us as researchers, informing avenues of investigation and coloring the lens of our analysis. As such, it is important that we are mindful of our own established perspectives and ontological suppositions in our attempts to accurately apprehend the world that we seek to study, so that we can better avoid distorting or misrepresenting our findings. My own prejudice involves a deep-rooted desire to uncover and effectively identify successful anti-oppressive transformative movements, correlated with a genuine disdain for capitalism and associated processes. Such a desire directly stimulated this study into understanding localized para-capitalist resistances, and the ways in which we can conceptualize them and their transformative abilities. This is partly a result of my undergraduate academic experiences, where edification in economic sociology exceedingly focused on adverse and socially injurious structures and realities; as well as my own personal involvement with a variety of activist groups confronting issues of systemic exploitation and inequality (with limited successes). While clear critiques and related forms of action are no doubt important for emancipatory social goals, I ultimately yearn to distinctly identify effective para-capitalist phenomena. Thus, I have been ever vigilant and aware of this desire throughout the research process in order to avoid engaging in forms of 'confirmation bias'. This was achieved by critically questioning perceived organizational 'successes', taking time to ruminate over group forms of resistance, and thus avoiding, or at least probing my initial reactions that tended to impulsively identify efficacious para-capitalist phenomena amongst the studied groups. This was especially challenging within the analysis section of the project, where the conducted organizational critiques forced me to consider and detail the (potential) 'failings' and cycles of defeat of these para-capitalist groups. Moreover, given my active

participation, I felt somewhat obligated or committed to these groups, and as such, any criticisms of them felt like a betrayal. Recognizing my broader commitment to honestly uncovering and better understanding effective forms of social resistance and transformative potentialities helped me to accept such analytical conclusions, and (hopefully) avoid imparting my ideas on them.

Additionally, my role as a researcher within the field should also be considered. There was a discernable discrepancy in my reception as a researcher within both para-capitalist organizations. While CB-DC was noticeably supportive and pleased with my involvement, Spartacus was comparatively less enthusiastic, with a number of members being palpably perturbed by my initial presence in the collective. Their apprehensions stemmed primarily from a general mistrust of institutional research and an awareness of associated issues of power and exploitation, as well as a concern regarding overall security culture (as they were once infiltrated by a member of the Vancouver Police Department during the 2011 Occupy movement). As such, it took close to three months and a number of organizational discussions and meetings before I felt truly welcomed (or perhaps simply tolerated) by the organization. While this initial mistrust is understandable, it had a somewhat lasting effect on my own self-perception and subjective constructs. Never before had I been made to feel like a representative of institutional authority, and thus so distrusted. This forced me to seriously reflect upon my educational career and the role I play in maintaining or resisting various systems of supremacy and oppression, as well as how being a student and researcher shaped my engagements with subjects and my own positionality in writing. For example, during my initial contact with Spartacus, members were notably reticent around me and discernibly unwilling to speak openly or share too much. As a result, I began to consider the ways in which my role as researcher and academic portrayed me as an obstacle or threat for such resistance projects, and how group interactions with me unfolded as such. Would they be unwilling to share too deeply with me? Would they only provide half-truths in our discussions? How would this environment of mistrust influence my writings about them, as well as my own understandings (of myself) within the field? Ultimately such concerns were largely pacified over time. Given that I did not begin interviews or data collection for close to two months after joining the organization, I was able to develop a good rapport with most of the members and demonstrate my intentions behind this study. As such, by

the time I began writing I had forged more sincere and trustworthy relationships with many Spartacus members. By contrast, members of CB-DC were extremely delighted by my presence as I represented a potential means for attracting greater attention towards their efforts. As a result, they spoke openly with me, were unconcerned about issues of confidentiality, and readily expanded upon any topic of interest. Such an experience helped me to better realize, think about and understand the hidden ties and power connections that we unconsciously embody in our own lives, by highlighting my own associations to bourgeois institutions. Yet, as this study emphasizes, resistance is often ambiguous, and thus so are resisters.

## **Chapter 4.**

# **Cowichan Bio-Diesel Co-op: Fossil Fuel Fighters**

## **Organizational Overview**

The Cowichan Bio-diesel Co-op (CB-DC) began in December of 2004 as an informal community association of home biodiesel producers sharing knowledge and experiences within the Cowichan Valley area (CB-DC 2016). During this time, the most recent Iraq War had been ongoing for over a year, and it was this highly controversial geopolitical conflict that served as the catalyst for this cooperative's formation. As Brian Roberts, co-founder and current president of CB-DC explains:

This came shortly after the Second Gulf War, and a lot of people wanted to be able to opt out of having to purchase petroleum products that either came from war torn regions, politically unstable regions, the tar sands, or other unethical, environmentally unfriendly sources backed by a corrupt capitalism. And there was no real option, so we basically were creating our own option . . . we wanted an alternative, and we felt that protesting in some ways, of the Second Gulf War, had somehow been discredited, because despite huge global turnouts, it was shot down, you know relegated to page 26 on the national newspapers, and kind of just fizzled out when there was this huge momentum and everybody really, I think, felt that they were calling bullshit on the whole weapons of mass destruction. And there was a great feeling that the whole war could have been stopped before it even started, and then I think a lot of people were really disillusioned when that didn't happen and they were looking for other ways that, if they couldn't change the world from the outside, then maybe they could change the world from the inside, you know by changing their own behaviour and just choosing no longer to purchase fossil fuels, if they could make it themselves. (December 4, 2014)

As this quote begins to demonstrate, a keen recognition of problems surrounding corporatized fossil fuels instigated this interstitially situated civil society resistance action within the Cowichan Valley. Accordingly, small-scale local production of biofuels was identified as a direct method to address such concerns, and thus a means to escape and challenge a dominant fossil fuels complex.

Brian Roberts, Jerome Webster and Terry Esch proceeded to form the Cowichan Bio-Diesel Community in March of 2005, as a means to educate and teach community members how to produce their own biofuels from waste vegetable oil (WVO), and straight vegetable oil (SVO), and thus attain a level of energy sovereignty.<sup>26</sup> A public meeting was held later that month to assess overall interest. Through word of mouth, fourteen people attended this inaugural gathering, however as Brian explains, “that meeting got crashed by people who didn’t want to make biodiesel, they just wanted to buy it, and so that was the beginning of the coop” (December 4, 2014).

Acknowledging substantive community interest for fossil fuel divestment and the promotion of biodiesel use, and a desire to make biodiesels available for those who did not wish to produce it themselves, the Cowichan Bio-Diesel Community elected to adopt a consumer-producer hybrid cooperative structure. For the first few years of its existence, this largely informal ‘cooperative’ produced small-scale batches of biofuels and sold them at the weekly Farmer’s Market in Duncan, while simultaneously educating the community about biofuels produced from WVOs (chiefly canola oil). Increasing interest lead to increasing demand, stimulated in part by skyrocketing oil prices between 2006 and 2008, which largely harmonized price discrepancies between fossil fuels and biofuels. Primarily relying on sporadic external funding (from federal and provincial grants, as well as from NGO associations such as the BC Cooperative Association), and

<sup>26</sup> A concept of energy sovereignty is understood as “the right of conscious individuals, communities and peoples to make their own decisions on energy generation, distribution and consumption in a way that is appropriate within their ecological, social, economic and cultural circumstances, provided that these do not affect others negatively” (Berdié et al. 2014).



volunteer labour, CB-DC became an officially incorporated cooperative in 2008, eventually acquiring a central office space in downtown Duncan. Shortly after incorporation, Brian Roberts began establishing four other affiliate organizations that worked in part towards supporting and funding CB-DC. These include Cowichan Energy Alternatives (CEA)<sup>27</sup>, the Community Carbon Marketplace (CCM)<sup>28</sup>, Greasecycle<sup>29</sup>, and the BC Biofuel Network (BCBN)<sup>30</sup>. While nominally existing as separate organizations, each works collectively towards the development and continuation of biofuel production and distribution within BC and Canada.<sup>31</sup>

In 2009, Cowichan Petroleum Sales (CPS, a fuel and heating service provider based out of Duncan) hosted CB-DC's first automated cardlock system (i.e. pay at the pump), which offered both b100 and SVO fuels. However, in 2011 SVO sales were discontinued and replaced by CB-DC's first blended option, a 50% biofuel and 50% diesel mix (b50). Additionally, in 2011 CB-DC acquired its own permanent biodiesel production facility and distribution site through a partnership with the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), who allowed CB-DC to utilize a discontinued water processing

<sup>27</sup> Cowichan Energy Alternatives is "a non-profit organization focused on providing energy and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventories and planning services, renewable energy feasibility studies and implementation, and leading community carbon offsetting initiatives through Community Carbon Marketplace" (CEA 2016).

<sup>28</sup> "The Community Carbon Marketplace (CCM) is a community-based carbon exchange initiative to enable local governments, businesses and individuals to meet carbon-neutral objectives by purchasing carbon offsets from community-based projects that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and build community resilience" (CCM 2016).

<sup>29</sup> "Greasecycle is a worker-owned and operated British Columbia company focused on the production and distribution of sustainable Biodiesel made from Waste Vegetable Oil" (Greasecycle 2016). They collect used vegetable oils throughout southern BC, and transport them to Duncan for biodiesel production.

<sup>30</sup> The BCBN is an umbrella organization consisting of CEA, CCM, CB-DC, and Greasecycle, and which works towards studying and improving upon biofuel systems within BC and across Canada. Its primary purpose has been to compile data and develop reports on biofuel distribution systems within Canada, and determine the feasibility of disseminating its recently developed, open sourced cloud-based point of sale blending pump system (discussed further below) (BCBN 2016).

<sup>31</sup> For the purpose of this MA thesis, I will focus exclusively on CB-DC.

plant on CVRD property, known as Bings Creek.<sup>32</sup> As part of this partnership, CVRD also committed to purchasing biofuels for its vehicle fleets in order to help realize their obligations to the BC Climate Action Charter, which included carbon neutrality by 2012 (via a combination of carbon credit purchasing and policy changes).<sup>33</sup> As a result of CVRD's warrantied vehicle fleet, CB-DC was further impelled to develop a wider range of biofuel blend options (discussed further below). Most recently, in November of 2015 CB-DC launched the very first internal blending pump in Western Canada at their CVRD site in Duncan, offering a variety of biofuel blends, including b5, b20, b50 and b100.

Although structured as a hybrid cooperative, the operational components of CB-DC are conducted almost exclusively by the concerted efforts of five primary actors, consisting of; Brian Roberts (president); Daryl Giesbrecht (biofuel plant manager and producer); Alannah McNish (membership management); Deborah Fawcett (administrative manager), and; Hassaan Rahim (community outreach and project manager). While CB-DC technically has no official employees (with the above individuals paid out as 'contractors'), membership involvement is sporadic and nearly non-existent, and these five individuals are evidently indispensable for the continued operations of this energy-based cooperative.

Today, CB-DC represents itself as "a community owned and operated organization dedicated to the local production, use and promotion of bio-fuels in order to achieve an ethical and environmentally sustainable local economy" (CB-DC 2016).

<sup>32</sup> The CVRD is the local government for the Cowichan Valley area. Its borders extend to the Capital Regional District in the south and east, and to the Nanaimo and Alberni-Clayoquot Regional Districts in the north and northwest.

<sup>33</sup> The BC Climate Action Charter is a voluntary commitment between the province of British Columbia, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, and signatory local governments to take action and discover ways of addressing the myriad of challenges posed by climate change, and to significantly cut corporate and community-wide GHG emissions. Begun in November of 2011, it now has commitments by 182 of 190 BC local governments, or 96%, including the Islands Trust (CSCD 2016).

Encompassing a fluctuating base of approximately 200 corporate and non-corporate members over the last eight years, they publicly sell membership shares (for a one time fee of \$5), and annual memberships (60\$ for individuals, 120\$ for organizations), which grants consumer-members the right to purchase biodiesel produced from recycled, locally procured cooking oils, as well as permits involvement in the organization's hierarchical liberal democratic decision making process via annual general meetings. During the time of study, CB-DC had a membership base of 41, consisting of 40 individual members, and 1 regional district entity (CVRD). Members come from a widely diverse background, and include teachers, scientists, computer programmers, musicians, artists, students, service industry employees and labourers, with ages ranging from those in their late 20s to those in their 70s (CB-DC 2016). More specific member information was not made available to me during the time of research.

## **Intentions, Commitments & Diagnostics**

In investigating the resistance abilities and transformative possibilities of this specific para-capitalist group, and intersections with a theory of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy, we begin by identifying their leading goals, locus of resistance, normative principles and moral commitments, and associated diagnosis and critique of existing institutions. These will now be cursorily outlined, and further referenced and detailed throughout the chapter.

At its most basic level, CB-DC is decidedly attending to questions and issues surrounding physical motion, expressed in existing energy and transportation structures we encounter daily as societal inhabitants. Shouldn't communities be able to actively determine the form and content of their movements? Shouldn't societal members be able to traverse terrain in a form free of exploitation and environmental degradation if they choose to do so? While it might be argued that we all have the ability to elect how we physically manoeuvre through spatial contexts, this is discernibly limited by the extent to which we depend on existing transportation and energy structures for our social reproduction and existence. As Brian, president and cofounder of CB-DC explains, a

personal automobile “is really important in a community like Cowichan Valley because it really is quite a spread out community and you need a car to get to places, much more than you do in the city where you have an established transit system” (December 4, 2014). Thus, alternative transportation methods (such as public transit, walking or biking) are largely absent or impractical in this highly diffused rural-urban territory where the car serves as a potentially literal lifeline, means of connection and mechanism for existence.

It is within such a context that CB-DC was formed with the specific intent of resisting and working to transform the corporate fossil fuel system. Such an objective was informed by and rooted in a number of normative-moral commitments. To begin, and as revealed, the Second Gulf War directly stimulated CB-DC’s para-capitalist endeavours. Wishing to avoid complicity in the unethical activities of a globalized capitalist energy complex, these community members came together to devise methods for realizing a form of fossil fuel autonomy. This sentiment was commonly expressed within interviews, and detailed in a number of organizational documents such as the CB-DC Business Plan (2007), which asserts that:

Our dependency on oil has a significant impact both here and abroad. Oil and gas has been linked to everything from the assassinations of pro-democratic protesters in Nigeria to the more recent war in Iraq. By using a local independent fuel supply, we end our implicit support for these actions by stopping our contributions to the Oil Companies’ revenues while increasing our own fuel security by providing a local supply. (18)

This guiding objective details a specified anti-oppressive moral commitment, connected to a broader principle of equality.<sup>34</sup> As understood here, oppression refers to the “use of power to disempower, marginalize, silence or otherwise subordinate one social group,

<sup>34</sup> As detailed by Wright (2012), an equality principle is defined as follows: “In a socially just society, all people would have broadly equal access to the social and material conditions necessary for living a flourishing life” (4). Forms of fossil fuel generated oppressions plainly obstruct such socio-material access and thus the ability for living a flourishing life.

individual or category, often in order to further empower and/or privilege the oppressor” (The Anti-Oppression Network, 2016: NP). Accordingly, normative-moral commitments of anti-oppression seek to avoid or combat the generation of such forms of social subordination and disempowerment, and relatedly recognize how one’s own actions generate, prevent or eschew the articulation of such oppression within the world. Within CB-DC, this commitment is decidedly centered upon a fossil fuels complex.

Relatedly, community commitments to environmentalism also clearly act as a directing normative-moral principle. In identifying the corporate production, distribution and societal use of hydrocarbon fuels as a chief contributing factor to increasing GHG emissions and unnecessary planetary destruction, CB-DC performs its para-capitalist energy activities. As Lynn, a Cowichan Valley university professor who has been involved with the cooperative ever since the first meeting, and who drafted the organization’s constitution states, “[t]here are ethical issues that CB-DC was formed to address, one of them being the whole environmental impact of fossil fuels” (April 2, 2015). Steph, a housecleaner and member of 5 years similarly expresses such a sentiment when she explains that she joined CB-DC because she “. . . feels very frustrated about the state of affairs, about the nature of energy production and use in our world and its connection to big business, because it is unnecessary to poison our planet, and there are just so many alternative energy forms these days” (December 5, 2014). Such notions speak to a normative-moral principle of ecological sustainability.

In following Wright (2012) and Passerini (1998), I understand this principle as representing an intertemporal justice concept, captured in a belief that “[f]uture generations should have access to the social and material conditions to live flourishing lives at least at the same level as the present generation” (Wright 2012: 5). This logically refers to the ways in which we can currently meet our needs without seriously compromising the ability for others to do the same (Passerini 1998). “In other words, it is

a vision of a society which neither borrows from future generations nor lives at the expense of current generations” (60).<sup>35</sup> Correspondingly, CB-DC actively works to create an energy form that adheres to and honours this organizational commitment.

Lastly, a desire to strengthen community and cultivate a local economy further inspires their fossil fuel resistance. This is advanced on the CB-DC website, where the organization affirms its commitments towards the development of a local economy that “builds local resilience” (CB-DC 2016). CB-DC’s Business Plan (2007) further details this in its assertion that “locally-owned companies contribute far more to the local economy than large multi-national corporations do . . . as we reinvest our revenues back into the local community instead of sending them abroad” (18). Similarly, as one testimonial states, an association with CB-DC allows members to “ . . . put money towards a local grassroots organization working towards sustainability [rather] than large oil companies and all their associated evils” (CB-DC 2016). Such interests and intents speak to a normative-moral commitment of community solidarity.

Community solidarity refers to a moral principle that prioritizes the development, strengthening and sustaining of one’s community, either through economic, social and/or political means (Wright 2014). This involves working together to identify, define and realize non-exploitative and anti-oppressive local interests, standards and objectives, thus empowering and affirming one’s community associations and abilities. In this way, contextually meaningful forms and visions are pursued and upheld, and localized practices for human flourishing are advanced. Respectively, CB-DC endeavours to uphold such commitments via resistance actions that attend to local interests and work to generate local livelihoods, auxiliary industries and thus a strengthened community (buffered from the vagaries of a global fuel economy).

<sup>35</sup> Such a conceptualization distinctly represents an anthropocentric view of sustainability. However this understanding concurrently recognizes and upholds humanity’s indispensable relations and connections with the world, and as such promotes and stresses a need for environmental conservation and respect.

Such normative-moral commitments inform this organization's diagnostic assessment and critique of the existing fossil fuel complex, and thus its resistance activities. Specifically, and as specified by cooperative members and documents in the above, a corporate fossil fuel regime violates group principles of anti-oppression by fuelling global instability and war, disempowering, silencing and oppressing various social groups in pursuit of oil access, profit and further politico-economic empowerment. Principles of sustainability are similarly contravened by fossil fuel systems as a result of perceivably unnecessary adverse environmental impacts, bankrupting future generations for the economic benefits of (a few) current ones. Lastly, commitments of community solidarity are transgressed as multi-national fossil fuel corporations funnel resources outside of local economies, thus decreasing community resilience and diffused prosperity, and so also increasing exposure to the vagaries of a capitalist energy market.

Consequently, CB-DC has identified this fossil fuel complex as a primary source of unnecessary human suffering and an impediment to forms of human flourishing and ecological sustainability, and it thus represents the locus of their resistance. Moreover, their guiding normative-moral commitments indicate radical emancipatory and supra-economic forms (Wright 2014) that depart from the economization logics of a neoliberal ontology and thus represent intentional economy arrangements. Specifically (and as further detailed throughout this chapter), CB-DC illustrates a community resistance project which treats the existing energy economy as a political and ethical space of decision making, positioning community defined priorities in the foreground of their ethical deliberations and decisions as they both recognize and negotiate their interdependence with other humans and the world (Gibson-Graham 2006). As such, they seek to agentially engage with existing structures in a way that conceivably sits outside of totalizing economization logics. However, in order to effectively understand this process, and thus elaborate on the resistance abilities of this interstitially situated para-capitalist group, we must investigate how such commitments are approached.

## ‘Prognostic Framings’

### Alternative Propositionings

Following these normative-moral commitments and attendant diagnoses and critiques, CB-DC advances its emancipatory response to a component of the fossil fuel economy, being the local, ethical production, promotion and distribution of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation biofuels.<sup>36</sup> In this way they seek to create and promote diversified localized energy systems, and thus a form of contextually relevant energy sovereignty that, as detailed, upholds supra-economic community defined priorities. It should be mentioned here that this action is not intended to be an exhaustive solution to fossil fuel dominance, but rather an intermediary and/or partial fuel option that permits for the enervation of petroleum energy systems by providing immediate answers to current issues. As Kerry, a newer member of CB-DC who joined less than two years ago candidly states, “I think biofuel stands as a better transition fuel than most” (April 1, 2015). Brian clarifies this further when he explains his vision for future energy systems, and biofuel’s fractional role in it:

I don’t think we will ever need to get to a point where we can rely completely on biofuels. I think we are moving away from a single source reliant energy system to multiple different sources where communities are looking at what the best potential is, energy generating potential, in their particular community, whether it’s hydro or whether they have, you know, excellent solar access, to whether they have a farm that can grow additional like oil crops for fuel. You know I think it’s going to a more diversified, robust, if you want to call it that, localized approach, which I

<sup>36</sup> A large variety of biomass can be used today for biofuel feedstock, and are conceptualized as 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> generation biofuels. These include biofuels produced from: food crops (1<sup>st</sup> generation biofuels); grasses, inedible/non-food producing seed crops, municipal solid waste, and WVOs (2<sup>nd</sup> generation biofuels); algae and other feedstocks produced using non-arable land (3<sup>rd</sup> generation biofuels), and; genetically optimized feedstocks designed to capture large amounts of carbon via production (4<sup>th</sup> generation biofuels) (BiofuelsDigest 2010; Kagan 2010).



think is going to be creating those kind of more resilient communities that people are, I think, getting a sense of the need for now. (December 4, 2014)

Accordingly, CB-DC's alternative propositioning is not geared towards offering comprehensive solutions to capitalist precipitated fossil fuel issues, but rather demonstrate locally relevant forms of diversified energy sovereignty. In doing so, as Brian affirms, they are “. . . offering an actual solution to pipelines and fossil fuels that is here and now and that can be used with existing technology” (December 4, 2014).

In conducting this study into civil society para-capitalist engagements, we must investigate how such alternative propositionings are organizationally approached. Is CB-DC able to effectively realize its goals, and in what way is this resistance unfolding? Such an inquiry directly speaks to group engagements with structure and enactments of agency. Accordingly, we know look at the particular group strategies used.

## **Strategies of Resistance**

The specific strategies for this para-capitalist action evolved over an extended process of community deliberation and engagement within the Cowichan Valley. As detailed in the Organizational Overview, CB-DC was born out of a firm belief in effective and capable communal action. By identifying a variety of problems with a neoliberal fossil fuel structure, and a dearth of existing emancipatory alternatives, community members came together and elected to 'create their own option'. As Brian explains, this began by “. . . looking inside ourselves to *be the solution*, and then by doing that, trying to create a solution for as many other people as we could in the process” (December 4, 2016). Having experimented with biofuels produced from WVO, Brian Roberts, Jerome Webster and Terry Esch came together in late 2004 and began discussing the possibility for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation biofuels to act as an immediate solution to transportation-based fossil fuel dependency. Shortly thereafter, a public meeting was called in Duncan with the intent of educating community members to create their own biofuels and thus attain energy sovereignty. However, this was not so easily realized. As Brian reveals, “. . . a

lot of people, actually most of the people that came to this first meeting didn't want to know anything about how to make it, they just wanted to be able to buy it, because there was no where to get an alternative to fossil fuels" (December 4, 2016). This indicates an immediate obstacle to the intended establishment of a non-economized fossil fuel resistance strategy. While Brian et al. had intended to educate community members on how to produce their own biofuels, 'most' just wanted to purchase a solution. Such a reality problematized the agentic abilities of this gathering and intimates at the function of, and impulsion towards, economization logics and forms (as discussed further below).

Despite this obstacle, Cowichan Valley community members were still directly involved in the formation of this cooperative. As Brian continues to detail:

The CBDC was born in a very long process. There was great community support and interest in the creation of this kind of alternative. So really from 2005 through 2007 we worked as an unofficial organization under the name of—under the banner of a coop, but we weren't an officially incorporated cooperative until 2008. And during that time, even just the first full year was many many public meetings, where people were invited to come to talk about what they wanted from a community organization, and to participate in the creation of that. So those were some very interesting and sometimes very charged meetings, because it was quite an emotional thing for many people to create something like this, and to create an alternative to what they saw--. You know having an alternative to something they felt kind of trapped in, being the fossil fuel grid. And so really, as I say, the first year or two years was really just creating the structure and talking to people and growing this base of support that led to the incorporation of the coop in 2008. (December 4, 2016)

It was during this time that the above-identified normative-moral principles were being worked out and affirmed, and such a reality directly speaks to a notion of intentional economy. This is demonstrated in this organizations' strategy of community directed resistance, collectively identifying issues, concerns and responses that prioritize their normative-moral commitments above economic ones (Gibson-Graham 1996; 2006). Yet, as further outlined below, it is also here where we begin to see the inception of the duality in their resistance strategy, marked by the simultaneous presence of a theorized neoliberal ontology and intentional economy form. This is a result of CB-DC's aspiration to create new energy realities based on collectively determined principles, while

concurrently positioning its actions and forms within a capitalist-market paradigm due to community demands (i.e. vending/purchasing resistance options), which eventually worked to further impel group alignments with economization logics.

As time progressed, this informal coop attracted more and more community interest via its resistance activities. In setting up at the Duncan Farmer's Market, both producer and consumer 'members' would take turns every weekend selling biodiesel out of plastic jugs and acting as a free information service for anyone that wanted to learn about bio-fuels and the negative impacts of fossil fuels, thus making greater community connections. Eventually, as 'membership' continued to grow, it became apparent that a more clearly defined organizational structure was necessary, and a consumer-producer hybrid cooperative form was elected.

In establishing itself as an officially incorporated cooperative, an organizational constitution was drafted (2008). This listed seven strategies that detailed their methods to produce, use and promote bio-fuels, and are as follows; (a) Use a sustainable, environmentally benign fuel; (b) Ethically produce and distribute sustainable fuel alternatives; (c) Have a community source for sustainable bio-fuel production that can recycle local supplies of waste vegetable oil; (d) Stimulate local economic activity by producing bio-fuel and supplying it at a reasonable and justifiable price; (e) Ensure a stable, quality, local fuel supply; (f) Share information about community-based bio-fuel, and; (g) Provide a strong voice for sustainable fuel production and use. These were primarily achieved by using entirely recycled WVOs to produce and distribute b100 and SVO locally, and by reinvesting revenues back into the organization to further its goals. Such strategies clearly resonate with, and are derived from the guiding normative-moral principles explored above, thus detailing the assertion and attempted realization of community-defined intentions.

Lynn further demonstrates CB-DC's intentional economy form, and partially successful agentic engagements within the following discussion regarding corporate biofuel connections with food crisis issues. As she states:

And so one of our commitments from the get go was that we wanted it to be ethical. One of my areas of research is the global food crisis, and the evidence is very clear that biofuels are contributing significantly to the global food crisis. So we wanted to make very very sure that our biodiesel was ethically sourced, so that meant collecting from local restaurants and what not. (April 2, 2015)

As she indicates, industrial biofuel production is intimately connected to a corporate food regime (McMichael 2009).<sup>37</sup> This can be seen, for example, in the Minority World's 'imposition' of an export-oriented monoculture production method upon the Majority World (e.g. corn crops for first generation biofuels), which involves a number of deleterious implications, such as: mass deforestation; increased displacement trends (of both people and food crops, resulting in rising food costs and food security issues) and; a promotion of 'land grabs' (Borras Jr. et al. 2010). As is argued, the result is the 'externalization' of costs of the high-energy consumption culture of the Majority World to the Minority World, which is thus indicative of a form of neocolonial relations (Borras Jr. et al. 2010). As Borras Jr. et al. (2010) claim:

[this] reproduces a 'global ecology' (Sachs 1993), whereby planetary resources are to be managed through the application of the market paradigm to the environment ('market environmentalism'), reinforcing a

<sup>37</sup> A notion of the corporate food regime comes from 'food regime analysis', which refers to the integral role of agriculture in the development of the capitalist economy, and is perceived to involve three waves, beginning in 1870. "It identifies stable periods of capital accumulation associated with particular configurations of geopolitical power, conditioned by forms of agricultural production and consumption relations within and across national spaces" (McMichael 2009:139). The third wave, or corporate food regime, was institutionalized via the WTO, which worked to secure profits for agribusiness by redefining food security as a market relation during the 1993 Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. This shifted the locus of control for food security from nation-states to the world market (Hawkes, Plahe and Ponnampereuma 2013).

growing 'metabolic rift', and the separation of people and nature . . . and the privileging of corporate management of energy resources. (578)<sup>38</sup>

Such forms of industrial biofuel production are purportedly aimed at addressing fossil fuel concerns, but ultimately produce alternate, equally caustic issues as they conceivably accord with a notion of economization as detailed within a theorized neoliberal ontology. However, as Lynn effectively captures and outlines in the following excerpt, involvement with CB-DC allows for the attenuation of such biofuel issues, and its liberation from these specific economized practices:

My concern with big biofuel is that it is just slotted beautifully into the capitalist system, and that's one of the reasons we have food crisis connections with biofuels, is because Monsanto and other really big agricorps are paying farmers more to grow crops for biofuels than the sums they are getting for food—for growing those crops of food. That to me is first of all unconscionable, and secondly it's a huge problem, and thirdly it's a perfect example of capitalism run awry without any controls on it, which is where we are historically right now. So, I'm very proud of our coop, because we stand for the complete opposite of all of those things, and it's one of the reasons I'm a founding member and one of the reasons I'm still involved, because those ethical positions are extremely important to me. Especially, as I said, I do a lot of research in this field and I know how bad things are. And, you know, capitalism is a huge contributor to both the general environmental woes, and the food crisis in particular, because we've got people or organizations like Monsanto that are running the show, and they only have one interest, which is profit. Which is one of the reasons we really downplay profit as a motive for the coop. (April 2, 2015)

As Lynn asserts, CB-DC works towards re-embedding biofuels within a community context, exhibiting a more ecologically sustainable and anti-oppressive form of energy

<sup>38</sup> A concept of the 'metabolic rift', as developed by John Bellamy Foster (1999), refers to Marx's notion of the "irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism" (1981:949). In essence, it indicates the rupture between human production (i.e. the economy) and its natural conditions (the environment).

production. In identifying issues with a corporate biofuel industry based on guiding normative-moral principles and collectively detailing and realizing strategies to address them (i.e. only using WVOs for biodiesel production), this para-capitalist organization devises a means to agentially address specific capitalist precipitated issues as a (partial) representative of intentional economy. Although such agentic accomplishments were ultimately impeded and partially transformed (detailed below), for a time CB-DC and its members effectively and ethically resisted a corporate energy complex.

It must be mentioned here that while the burning of any fuel is evidently polluting, 100% 2<sup>nd</sup> generation biofuels certainly better approaches commitments of sustainability. More specifically, and from a lifecycle perspective, GHG emissions are reduced by 94% when compared to the GHG produced by fossil fuels (Bugaje, Highina and Umar 2014). And such 2<sup>nd</sup> generation biofuels redirect used cooking oils from waste streams and effectively reuses them as energy products, avoiding competition with food crops. Thus, while not without their own issues, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation biofuels evidently mark a notable improvement on fossil fuels and 1<sup>st</sup> generation biofuels generally.

In addition to such material advancements, CB-DC also works towards influencing ideological and normative stances via its strategic intent of creating a “paradigm shift in thinking”, in order to facilitate and promote this goal of fossil fuel resistance. Brian explains this notion in the following:

What I mean by a paradigm shift in thinking is just having people start to make those connections between what they consume and the true cost of their consumption from more of a lifecycle perspective. So how is that commodity produced, and is it produced in a good economically, environmentally, socially sustainable way? Or is it produced in a way that makes the planet a worse place. (December 4, 2014)

This was primarily achieved via the work of collective members conversing with people at the weekly Farmer’s Market, as well as by hosting a number of international documentary premiers around biodiesels and fossil fuels, and by providing related information on the group’s website. Such an organizational commitment diverges from,

and partially engages with a theorized neoliberal ontology, as people are encouraged to make supra-economic considerations in their daily consumptive practices.

Over time, this para-capitalist organization began to confront affecting structural demands for survival, which directly encumbered its intentional economy arrangement and agentic abilities. Moreover, strategic responses to these structural issues demonstrate the articulation of economization logics and forms, as is now demonstrated.

To begin, the initial structure was somewhat problematic for their goal. As Daryl, co-founder and current sole biodiesel producer explained to me at the production facility one day, selling jugs of biofuel at the Farmer's Market presented a real obstacle for substantive fossil fuel divestment within Cowichan Valley. This was primarily because access to biofuels was inconsistent (weekly at best), and it was hard at times to find consumer-members who were willing to participate. Moreover, pouring biofuels into individual jugs for distribution was labour intensive. Thus, in 2009, CB-DC acquired a 24/7-cardlock pump at a gas station in Duncan. As a result of this development they no longer participated in the weekly Farmer's Market, and so began to lose connection with members and the community, which was the principal means for them to create a 'paradigm shift in thinking'.

CB-DC is also clearly positioned on the margins of existing energy arrangements, and relatedly exists in a state of material precarity as a partial result of its hybrid cooperative structure. As shown below, such a reality impels them to attend to affecting price issues and so encourages organizational alignments with economization logics. In seeking to resist and evade a perceivably dominant and societally entrenched corporate energy regime, Brian poignantly notes:

. . . it's kind of a hard task. We're kind of recreating the entire fuel infrastructure from collecting waste cooking oil and having the trucks and infrastructure to do that, to the infrastructure to produce the fuel, the refinery, if you want to call it that, or we call it our microbrewery. And uhh, but then also to distribute it, and that's been a bit of a bottleneck . . . And so there's a lot of moving parts, and so there are a lot of things that are motivating there, from feeling good about what I do, to the actual scope of what we're trying to accomplish too, which you know maybe would make

some people kind of crazy, and sometimes it makes me crazy, trying to do that with so little resource to do it. If we had been a fossil fuel company from the start we could have done this in a snap. But we're having to do it with no--. Basically nothing but our own motivation and our abilities to raise funds through various sources and to figure out the problems and the challenges of, you know, accomplishing the vision that we have created. (December 4, 2014)

As indicated, CB-DC operates with minimal resources. In standing as a heterodox energy organization, they lack access to any established infrastructure, thus necessitating them to forge new systems and solve issues as they operate. While apparently motivating and affirming work, it is also clearly a daunting task, fraught with material insecurity.

Hassaan, the community-outreach and project manager who has been with the cooperative for 3 years, speaks to this notion of organizational precarity as a result of its configuration as a cooperative. As he asserts:

. . . it does sometimes struggle, because it is hard for it to be self sustaining, it is hard for it to be profitable or even make enough money to keep going. It is hard for us to not just be volunteer run and pay a fair wage. So I think from that point of view the cooperative model can fall short sometimes because we cannot charge as much money as we want for our biofuels, we cannot raise our prices or we cannot structurally change the organization so there are less expenses, so there are challenges like that that are involved with having such a model. (April 1, 2015)

As a volunteer run commodity producing and distributing cooperative, CB-DC is limited in terms of its ability to structurally address financial needs for subsistence. Moreover, and as stated in the Organizational Overview above, it significantly relies on external funding from infrequent government and NGO grants. Such a state of material insecurity no doubt complicates an ability to realize group intentions, and intimates at affecting economic considerations that can manoeuvre para-capitalist action, as a need for existence becomes paramount (this is further considered below).



Additionally, fossil fuels have exerted a clear and direct impact on CB-DC, further demonstrating their peripheral position within, and extant relation with established energy structures. As Brian details, CB-DC enjoyed one of its greatest periods of growth in 2008, when:

. . . fossil fuel prices were going up exponentially to \$150 a barrel, and all of a sudden biodiesel was financially competitive with its fossil fuel equivalent, if you want to call it that. So there was a huge expansion, I think, and a push to create more biofuels, and for the first time our fuel was less than fossil diesel prices, and we actually had--. And that's when we really saw how price affects consumer behaviour, because we had some of our best sales ever during that time, more and more people joining the coop as we became the cheaper option. (December 4, 2014)

Here we see the very real relation with oil prices that this coop must attend to as a result of its organizational structure. In acting as a commodity distributor, they are partially compelled to provide a financially comparable energy product in their attempts to transform existing energy arrangements. Allanah further demonstrates this susceptibility to the established fossil fuel sector in her discussion regarding the crash in oil prices that came shortly thereafter. As she states:

So, we had a huge membership probably a couple of years ago, of like around 200 people, maybe, and uhh, since oil prices have dropped . . . a lot of people were and became deterred to buying our fuel because there was so much of a price gap between what they could pay at the pump versus what they could pay us, and so even though people like and want to support the local economy and sustainable fuels, they still have a budget, they can only spend so much on fuel, and so a lot of people kind of dropped out because of the price . . . I think the price had a huge effect on our coop membership. (March 30, 2015)

Again, we see that despite attempting to reform and exist outside of a fossil fuel complex, CB-DC's intent and organizational structure necessarily means that they are affected by it, intimating at the interrelation between practices of resistance and associated practices of domination (Routledge 1997). Moreover, Allanah's statement clearly demonstrates that despite firm value commitments and desires, people must attend to affecting material demands for social reproduction (i.e. 'they still have a budget,

they can only spend so much on fuel'). This reality complicates notions of intentional economy and the capacity for civil society resistance, as it palpably demonstrates a bounded agency.

In keenly recognizing this comparative impact of price, and thus indirectly speaking to their delimited agency, Kerry suggests that “. . . if we could get the price down it would certainly go a long way to getting more people, and as I'm sure you know, coops and pretty much everything else works better with more people” (April 1, 2015). As similarly expressed by many others during my stay in Duncan, Kerry here speaks to the organizational need to mitigate price issues in order to continue existing, attract more cooperative members, and thus have a substantive impact on fossil fuel reliance within the Cowichan Valley. However, as Hassaan details in the subsequent excerpt, engaging with this structural exigency has not been easy:

So this is one of our biggest challenges, in bringing the price down when everything already is down to the minimum. Like our expenses are already a minimum, the work is done mostly by volunteers or underpaid staff, so a lot of things are already happening to keep the price down, and so our challenge is how to further drop the price, or I guess increase the supply so we can drop the price. We have already reached the threshold, and so we're having a hard time dropping the price further, and the market for fossil fuels is also complicating this issue as it is dropping so much lately. So, our only way around this was to increase both the supply and distribution, because if you can work on that, then the price can really go down. (April 1, 2015)

As demonstrated by Hassaan, CB-DC confronts significant material challenges. Unable to address any other organizational component for mollifying price discrepancies with fossil fuels, they began to focus on increasing overall distribution. Such a response begins to detail the articulation of a neoliberal ontology, as this para-capitalist group interprets its resistance activities through an economized framework (i.e. increase commodity market distribution to maintain fossil fuel resistance), resulting in the adoption of growth imperatives that supplant existing commitments and increasingly guide organizational strategies and regroupings (Brown 2015), as now detailed.

This issue was first navigated by incorporating a b50 blend at their CPS site in 2011. By offering a half diesel and half biodiesel blend, CB-DC was able to provide a cheaper fuelling option, slightly increase distribution, and thus maintain activity. Moreover, they had just recently stopped offering SVO at the CPS pump, because as Brian explained to me via email correspondence:

People that use SVO tend to be more price motivated and would rather try to collect and process the oil themselves, and also because of regulatory and taxations issues (it was going to be taxed at the same rate as fossil diesel, which would make it even more expensive to a member sub-clientele that doesn't want to pay for something they think they can get for cheaper themselves). So, bottom line, it was not a financially sustainable market for the co-op. (May 27, 2015)

Motivated by financial needs for subsistence at this stage in its para-capitalist engagements, CB-DC discontinued SVO sales, and subsequently began to incorporate *the very fossil fuel industry it was formed to resist*. Such an ostensibly incongruous process demonstrates the articulation of economization logics, as this para-capitalist resistance group evidently employs a marketing rationality to construe and enact its strategy for survival, and thus its enduring resistance (see: Brown 2015; Gershon 2011).

In addition to addressing such price concerns, the incorporation of fossil fuels was also carried out to resolve affecting environmental constraints (on distribution). As Allanah explains, the development of blended fuels allowed CB-DC:

. . . to accommodate people who aren't necessarily-- Or can't necessarily pay the price of the 100% biodiesel, but also in winter months, biodiesel can gel up a little bit, so by having that blend you get the property of the diesel but you also have some sort of sustainable fuel in there, so it accommodates cool weather. (March 30, 2015)

Here we see the physical limitations of biofuels in colder climates, as the oils and fats imparted from the feedstock used in production become quite viscous at cooler temperatures, rendering the biodiesel inoperative.<sup>39</sup> Such a reality represents a physical obstacle to this group's resistance goals, further complicating notions of intentionality (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006). Thus, by introducing fossil fuel blends, CB-DC employs a strategy to continue its engagements throughout the colder winter months, permitting for increased annual distribution that, while in part comprises of petrol-diesel, still has "some sort of sustainable fuel in there".

This strategic incorporation of fossil fuel blends as a means to expand distribution was furthered with the development of the first internal blending pump in Western Canada, beginning in 2013. In congruence with this economized response to structural impediments, CB-DC recognized a huge growth potential from accessing company fleets. As Hassaan details:

. . . we came to a point where we were looking at expanding, and we were looking at a point where we needed to actually be sustainable, because it was being supported by a lot of funds and grants, and we wanted to be self-sustaining and not be dependent on those grants, because you need people to be writing and getting those grants, and if you don't have the money or the time or the people to be writing those then it is a problem. So we hit a junction where we wanted to expand and the only way it seemed was to get some fleets which have more demand. (April 1, 2015)

However, this expansion strategy was restricted as a result of warranty regulations imposed by auto manufacturers, as company fleets are typically comprised of warrantied

<sup>39</sup> The incorporation of petroleum diesel ensures sufficient fuel fluidity at low temperatures for the continued (fractional) use of biodiesel. This is because the 'cloud point' (the temperature at which diesel fuels begin to gel and thus clog fuel filters and injectors) sits at 0°C for common biodiesels, and -35°C for petroleum diesel (NREL 2009).

vehicles. This directly motivated the further inclusion of fossil fuels. Brian outlines this in the following discussion:

So, vehicle manufacturers are still limiting the amount of biofuel that vehicles can use through the warranting, and so saying that they'll only warranty up to a 5% or 20% biofuel blend . . . So that kind of, in some ways, *takes a lot of new vehicles out of the market* and takes--. Which is one of the reasons we came out with the blending pump option as well. *It kind of forced us into it.* If we wanted to *get our product out to the most people as possible and maximize the amounts of biofuels that everyone can use*, whether they have a new vehicle or an old vehicle, *we had to come up with a—create this blending pump system somehow.* Now we have four different blends of biodiesel. We have a b5 and b20 blend, or a 5% or 20% blend that you can use if your car is on warranty, and we also have a 50% and a 100% blend that you can use if your car is off warranty . . . So in order to meet imposed warranty requirements, and still aim to *maximize potential GHG reductions and fossil fuel divestments*, we had to start offering blends. (December 4, 2014)

Note the language utilized in discussing this para-capitalist regrouping. As Brian asserts, they were 'forced into it' in order to 'get their product out to the most people as possible' and thus 'maximize GHG reductions and fossil fuel divestment'. Such discursive representations detail a perceivably paradoxical reality, where the inclusion of fossil fuels is necessary in order to achieve divestment from fossil fuels. However, such a reality more accurately intimates at the bounded agentic engagements of this resistance group, and thus also their simultaneous convergence and divergence with a neoliberal ontology. This is claimed because while they are striving to uphold their guiding goals and normative-moral principles (i.e. 'GHG reductions and fossil fuel divestment', indicative of their intentionality), they concurrently employ an economized strategy to do so (i.e. maximize market access to increase distribution). In this way we can see how they are engaging with an existing structure that in part maneuvers their actions, yet they maintain commitments and (partly) discover methods to realize goals and thus

ambiguous contestations of that very structure.<sup>40</sup> This outcome of ambiguity will be further examined in the Discussion section.

It should be briefly noted here that b5 is in essence commercially sold petroleum diesel, as the province has mandated that all diesel fuels sold in British Columbia must be comprised of a minimum of 4% renewables (BC 2016). This organizational regrouping palpably demonstrates clear fossil fuel GCC connections, resulting in the direct support of a neoliberal governed energy complex, in transmuted forms.<sup>41</sup> Such a reality speaks in part to a broader concept of neoliberalization, and its coopting and malleable form (Brenner et. al 2009; Peck 2010).

Further investigating understandings of such regroupings can allow us to better appreciate this study into para-capitalist resistance. When asked how she feels about this development of blends, Allanah provides the following:

So, you know, honestly it is something that *we have to do*, so it's kind of *unavoidable*. If people want to have access to the biodiesel in the winter months then it's something we have had to do. Obviously it's not something that we support, but it's to accommodate our members more than anything. Even though most of our members don't agree with it. Because it is kind of going against everything that they want out of the coop. You know, they want to have a sustainable local fuel that is not

<sup>40</sup> As explained to me at their production facility on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, b100 produced entirely from WVOs still constitutes the majority of cooperative sales, accounting for approximately 85% of total distribution.

<sup>41</sup> As outlined in a Government of Canada website, "Edmonton refineries provide about 50-60% of the petroleum product needs in the Vancouver market. The rest of the Vancouver area is supplied either by the Chevron refinery in Vancouver, or with product imports from the U.S." From here, "[b]arges carry product from Vancouver to terminals on Vancouver Island" (Natural Resources Canada 2016). Thus, the fossil fuels being used by CB-DC in its blends, and in its sale of conventional diesel (b5), is produced and distributed by giant multinational oil and gas corporations (such as Kinder Morgan, Chevron, and others), who source the crude oil from problematic origins (e.g. the Tar Sands, and international wells), all of which are implicated in countless socio-economic, political and environmental controversies, and literally fuel global instability and war (Foster 2013).

fossil fuel derived, so *it's kind of a catch 22*, really. Damned if you do damned if you don't. Like what are we going to do? We have to have a winter fuel but at the same time you can't do that without the diesel. (March 30, 2015)

Parallel to Brian above, notions of an undesired yet unavoidable necessity for continued resistance details this understanding. Relatedly, the organizational navigation of goals, or agentic ability (i.e. to foster a 'sustainable local fuel that is not fossil fuel derived'), and structure (i.e. price and environmental constraints) is also clearly displayed here. Members are decidedly opposed to the adoption and use of fossil fuels as 'most don't agree with it', but given environmental limitations and price issues, they are 'forced' to act against their wishes in order to stay in existence and maintain their engagements.

On one hand, the above understandings partly problematize a theory of neoliberal ontology, as CB-DC's actions do not exclusively exhibit a commanding market rationality eschewing self-interested para-capitalist action, nor an arresting awareness of competition and metrics of success as detailed by Brown (2015), but rather a salient 'catch 22'. As stated, they are 'forced into it', and thus 'damned if they do' (i.e. use diesel to persist), or 'damned if they don't' (i.e. disengage and become totally ineffective). Yet, on the other hand this strategic response concurrently details the operation of a theorized neoliberal ontology as governing rationality, positioning resistance activities within an image of the economic (Brown 2015:9). This is illustrated in how CB-DC 'rationally' responds to such challenges and agentic obstacles via economized solutions.

Brian more clearly details this duality in the following. When asked how this support of the fossil fuel industry is understood within the broader mission of CB-DC, he proclaims, "It's a lesser evil", adding that:

We held out selling any fossil fuels for a long time which hurt us financially and denied biofuels to anyone with warrantied vehicles, which is a much larger potential market with much greater opportunities for GHG reductions than selling only b100 to people with older cars. So I'm conflicted, but it's a *practical necessity and acceptance of the current reality, if we want to continue working towards our goals*. (December 4, 2014)

Again, such language and understandings speak to their moral-normative commitments of resistance, while simultaneously demonstrating a neoliberal ontology as governing rationality. This is clearly expressed in the assertion that this inclusion of the very system being fought presents ‘much greater opportunities’ and so is a ‘conflicting’ yet ‘practical necessity and acceptant of the current reality in order to continue working towards their goals’. Although maintaining commitments to fossil fuel divestment, CB-DC’s economized and ‘rational’ response to impelling structure helps reveal the operation of a neoliberal ontology through ‘soft power’, governing as a sophisticated form of common sense (Brown 2015:35). Again, such internal duality details a politics of ambiguity.

This binary resistance positioning is further demonstrated in consumer-member strategies engendered via cooperative association. As discussed above, and commonly expressed throughout interviews, consumer-members join CB-DC in order to collectively resist fossil fuels and attend to supra-economic normative-moral commitments, thus detailing intentional economy forms. However, their specific strategies partly exhibit an economized response to neoliberal precipitated issues, as now briefly examined.

In considering the dearth of active member involvement in the cooperative, Lynn states the following:

This is a product-based coop, most people are just really happy--. If the biodiesel is there, they are happy. If the biodiesel isn't there for too long, they are unhappy. And really, I think that is sort of how this has evolved into an organization where there's not a whole lot of involvement, because people sign up for the biodiesel. They don't really sign up to be an active part of a cooperative [laughter]. They have to be a member of the coop to get their biodiesel, and that's what they're after. (April 1' 2015)

As detailed, members join CB-DC in order to gain access to a market commodity, and thus with the intent of purchasing solutions to identified problems, not to participate in supra-economic activities. This reveals an extension of market metrics for addressing ecological issues, and thus the economization of this resistance sphere (Brown 2015). This sentiment is further captured in the following customer-member considerations.



In considering his involvement with CB-DC, Kerry provides the following; “I suppose my association with the CB-DC is fairly limited, is really just a customer, I buy biodiesel from them, b100, most of the year” (April 1, 2015). Kerry evidently perceives his cooperative involvement through the lens of a commodity purchaser. He illuminates this further when asked if he has any memorable experiences from his time with CB-DC. As he affirms, “I haven’t really participated in anything other than the buying. I haven’t even made it to an AGM yet” (April 1, 2015). Analogously, when asked if she would like to learn how to make biodiesel, Steph states “[y]ea, no, I just want them to do it and to pay them to do it. I don’t really have time for that” (December 5, 2014).

Tom, the self-proclaimed seventh member of CB-DC similarly explains his association with the cooperative in the following; “I’m only a very minor participant in the coop. I run a biodiesel Jetta, and so I buy my fuel here. Not exclusively, but mostly, or as much as I can do it”. When asked if he has any other engagements with the cooperative, he states, “I go to the annual meetings when I can”. However when probed about what happens at the meetings, he professes the following:

You know, to be honest, it’s been a while since I’ve gone to one. There’s generally an update of sorts, and then the coop is told about future plans for growth and development. We may vote on a pressing matters, and--.  
Yea, sorry. I really can’t remember to well right now. (March 31, 2015)

As suggested in the above, cooperative involvement is almost exclusively limited to the act of purchasing a commodity.<sup>42</sup> While it does offer an (ambiguous) ability to partially realize consumer goals (i.e. fossil fuel divestment via b100 use), the method for this arguably works to further normalize economized resistance processes, thus upholding and reifying market-mediated solutions to supra-economic commitments and concerns (Brown 2015).

<sup>42</sup> At the time of writing, 100% biodiesel was selling for \$0.41/L more than conventional diesel.

As a product-based hybrid coop, manufacturing and distributing a market commodity, CB-DC necessitates minimal involvement from members as long as the employed contractors and core of dedicated producers/workers persist. In this way it closely replicates existing neoliberal arrangements, and beyond purchasing, member involvement in this coop is thus essentially limited to participating in a hierarchical liberal-democratic decision making process (i.e. voting), if they choose to do so. As Allannah explains, “we have our AGM once a year, and if anything major needs to be discussed then that’s when it is addressed . . . but Brian just makes most of the decisions, he just does what’s needed to keep things going” (December 4, 2014). To this extent CB-DC emulates and partially normalizes technocratic and economized responses to socio-environmental issues (Brown 2015). This is claimed because members passively rely on the concerted efforts of ‘experts’ and ‘specialists’ to provide market-mediated solutions to issues, void of substantive democratic involvement. Such a paucity of actively involved members results in minimal insulation from market pressures, conceivably impelling (or at least not preventing) the use of economized logics for responding to exigencies for enduring engagements.

## **Discussion**

### **A Politics of Ambiguity**

As evidenced, CB-DC clearly demonstrates different positionings at different levels of their engagement with a neoliberal ontology and fossil fuels complex. It is this simultaneous differentiation in resistance alignment – i.e. their convergences and divergences with a theory of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy – that explicitly details a politics of ambiguity. Alignments with a theory of intentional economy were demonstrated in CB-DC’s guiding normative-moral commitments, associated diagnostic and critique of the fossil fuel complex, and initial alternative propositioning. At this level of their engagement, they identified the locus of their resistance and attendant issues based on non-economized community determined concerns and commitments. These were to be addressed through the ethical and sustainable production, use and promotion

of biodiesel, thus forging new relevant realities and resilient communities via a diversified and localized energy arrangement. Such forms deviate from a theorized neoliberal ontology, as civil society actors here do not constitute people as human capital, void of self-interests and cardinally aware of and attending to “the innovations of its competitors or parameters of success in a world of scarcity and inequality” (Brown 2015: 41). By contrast, such forms detail the embryonic development of a community economy seeking to affirm a politics of possibility in their confrontations with a neoliberal coordinated fossil fuels complex (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Strategically speaking, CB-DC exhibits a dual positioning. Intentional economy arrangements were firmly maintained in the initial stratagem to teach people how to produce their own ethical biofuels. Although agentially limited in such ambitions due to a community preference to ‘just buy’ biodiesel (i.e. the germ of increasing economization alignments), they still managed to devise a resistance strategy that attended to group intentions. This was evidenced in the formation of a hybrid coop that sought to cultivate a local ethical economy via the advancement of b100 and SVO biofuels made entirely from WVOs. In doing so, they attended to the normative-moral commitments of a burgeoning intentional economy that thus partially evaded neoliberal ontological arrangements (see Gibson-Graham 2006:Chap. 4).

However, CB-DC’s mounting confrontations with structural issues clearly demonstrated significant agentic obstacles. This resulted in substantial strategic regroupings, detailed above in the ‘practical’ incorporation of fossil fuel blends for continued engagements via increased distribution. Such a response to encountered structural impositions revealed the operation of a neoliberal ontology as governing rationality, and thus clearer positioning of this group within an economization paradigm (Brown 2015). Yet, as asserted, this economized strategy to market their product and increase distribution was directly linked to guiding group goals. Thus while it does represent a modification in their strategic positioning towards a neoliberal ontological form, they still distinctly maintain their supra-economic normative-moral commitments and related diagnostic assessments and critiques. Such bifurcated positioning is, again, indicative of a politics of ambiguity. Relatedly, and as detailed, membership strategies for addressing commitments and critiques, as well as the organizational structure

concurrently work to normalize technocratic, non-democratized and market mediated solutions consistent with economization logics (Brown 2015).

Accordingly, this organization, like the blends that it sells, stands as an amalgamate form of resistance and accordance. As detailed, this is a result of its (limited) agentic capabilities and affecting structural engagements. It is this organizational navigation of structure and agency that illustrates the fulcrum of a politics of ambiguity and related accordances with a theory of intentional economy and neoliberal ontology, speaking to the overall degree of ambiguity. By enacting such a politics, this organization discovers methods for enduring engagements. Thus in order to substantively understand such interstitially situated para-capitalist resistance we must now consider what results from this continuance.

## **Abilities & Emergent Transformative Possibilities**

To understand the outcome of a politics of ambiguity is to comprehend the abilities and emergent transformative possibilities of a para-capitalist resistance group. In doing so we further apprehend interstitially situated civil society resistances today (see: Burawoy 2003; 2014; Friedman and McNair 2008; Wright 2010; 2012). In order to achieve such understandings we must consider group engagements with two aspects of their resistance, being the specific issue engaged (viz. fossil fuels), as well as the terrain of the struggle itself (viz. a neoliberal ontology and structure). The latter speaks to CB-DC's contributive interstitial agency, and will only be briefly considered here and further examined in the concluding chapter.

By realizing methods for enduring engagements, and in its ambiguous confrontations with a neoliberal structured fossil fuels complex, CB-DC is logically supporting and resisting. Such support directly problematizes the resistance abilities and transformative possibilities of this para-capitalist group, and is plainly exhibited in their structurally impelled incorporation of fossil fuels. By including blends and vending b5 (i.e. diesel), CB-DC financially backs and helps to restructure components of a corporatized fossil fuel system, as petroleum diesel is sold and tacitly supported by a resistance

organization that affirms its commitments to challenge and transform it. In this way, corporate fossil fuels maintain a form of participatory relevance amidst the struggle against them, as their (undesired) inclusion is discursively constructed as necessary for achieving a diffused and meaningful social impact (i.e. 'maximize GHG reductions and divestment'). Such a reality also manifestly results in organizational support of associated fossil fuel precipitated geopolitical and ecological issues (e.g. Klein 2015). Accordingly, this intimates at the theorized mutable and co-optive capacities of neoliberal systems as a result of neoliberal ontological forms (Brenner et al. 2009; Peck 2010), directly obfuscating this para-capitalist resistance project.

On the other hand, by enacting such economized methods for group survival, CB-DC is palpably realizing degrees of meaningful and measurable resistance. This is demonstrated within both material and ideological spheres. Materially speaking, they distinctly decrease overall fossil fuel reliance and use within the Cowichan Valley by offering an alternative fuel source. In doing so they generate gradational reductions in the support of fossil fuel generated human suffering and oppressions, environmental destruction, corporate funding and concurrent fossil fuel externalities. Additionally, they avoid local food crisis connections with biofuels via the exclusive use of WVO in production, and so also help to lower overall pollution in the Cowichan Valley by reprocessing an idle waste product. Through group activity, they also work to strengthen the local economy, ensuring that more financial resources remain within their locality rather than being directed towards multinational fossil fuel producers. Although clearly not a panacea to socio-economic issues, and possessing its own range of problems, empowering local economies over multinational corporate bodies generally works to better foster forms of community flourishing (Schwartz 2009).

Ideologically speaking, CB-DC's enactment of a politics of ambiguity allows it to continue operating as a cultural strategy that works to ambiguously combat fossil fuel dominance (see: McMichael 2009; 2010; Olesen 2005). Tom astutely captures this in discussing how CB-DC's very existence stands as form of systemic contestation. As he states:

. . . the underlying true power behind the continued success and work of the CB-DC is in educating and spreading information, and offering an immediate response and opportunity for action to address some serious social issues. It is empowering work and no doubt important. And people know that, you know, and it motivates them. You know, when they see my car with the little 'we smell better' sticker on the back, many many people will ask me, 'oh what's that', and I tell them and then they say 'oh I wish I had a diesel, I'd do that to', you know. They recognize that, hey, at least *it's some little thing, to fight or push back*. (March 31, 2015)

CB-DC's function as a cultural strategy is plainly evidenced here, in its role as an educator, disseminator of information and cynosure of diversity. Not only by providing information on its website, or engaging in a variety of community activities, but by virtue of simply existing and broadcasting its existence through such things as stickers, CB-DC helps to create dialogue, expand understandings and thus potentially shift existing discourses surrounding energy forms in society. In this way it offers 'some little thing, to fight or push back', by providing perceivably immediate and empowering responses to social issues (albeit in ambiguous and economized ways). Accordingly, we can see that in working to provide (incomplete) solutions to specific issues, CB-DC is helping society to recognize its potentiality to craft and imagine new forms and actively work out tensions in indeterminate, yet locally meaningful ways. In this way, and together with other similar projects, it stands as a totem for diversified and localized para-capitalist energy arrangements as a member of submerged networks (Chin and Mittelman 1997), with no clearly defined resolutions. Such a reality attests to this organization's (bounded) agentic engagements with the broader structure.

Through such material and ideological achievements, CB-DC helps to better approximate more resilient and diversified community forms of energy sovereignty in ambiguous ways. And from such ambiguity, they effectively maintain a presence within the sphere of energy production and consumption, staking a community claim for participation and thus asserting their right to *attempt* to forge contextually relevant forms and critique existing practices within the milieu of an existing neoliberal structure. While evidently an unclear and indeterminate project, it creates minor yet very real socio-material impacts that help to reduce extant forms of environmental degradations, related

forms of human suffering, and thus potentially increases possibilities for human flourishing (Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010; 2012).

In regards to their broader and indirect engagements with a neoliberal ontology and system, it appears that they have marginal resistance abilities and impacts, suggesting a severely delimited contributive interstitial agency. Specifically, and as detailed above, CB-DC works in part to normalize and uphold technocratic economized forms of resistance, and relatedly, closely emulates existing capitalist structures. In this way it also arguably exerts little if any significant influence on members' socio-economic ontological perspectives, as resistance is distinctly connected to private-property based market-purchasing decisions. This will be further detailed in Chapter Six.

Evidently, this group is limited in its interstitially situated para-capitalist abilities, suggesting narrow (if any) transformative possibilities by such a civil society resistance group. By probing their politics of ambiguity, we were able to see how CB-DC gradationally addresses components of the targeted fossil fuel complex, and create minor ideological impacts via their cultural strategy role, but are clearly unable to transform the fossil fuel sector as it stands, and even less capable to contributively address neoliberal capitalism as they partially reinforce both via group action. Such processes speak to the inabilities and uncertainties of this interstitial resistance, and its representation of an ameliorative reform, discussed further in the concluding chapter (cf.: Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010; 2012). As detailed, this is a direct result of their encounter with impelling structural realities and accordances with a theorized neoliberal ontology in pursuing their para-capitalist intentions.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Spartacus Books: A Tool for Social Change**

#### **Organizational Overview**

Spartacus Books (Spartacus) originated in 1972 as a book-table run by students at Simon Fraser University (SFU), with the aim of disseminating critical, anti-oppressive, para-capitalist and leftist material not readily available on campus.<sup>43</sup> Recognizing genuine student interest and a broader need which they were fulfilling, they moved down from Burnaby Mountain one year later and set up on the edge of the DTES. This area would become their home for the next 41 years. Initially they established themselves as the ‘Spartacus Socialist Education Society’ above a pool hall run by the Vancouver American Exiles Association (a group of military defectors and war resisters), across from the historic Woodward’s Building. As a result of this new and expanded space, they began to hold various meetings and events in addition to disseminating radical literature (Spartacus 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Some articles written on Spartacus credit an SFU bookstore employee, who went by the name of Roger Perkins, with initiating the book-table on Burnaby campus. However, as many members assert, this representation places excessive import on one individual in the creation of this radical collective. As such, the specificities of this process are often contested, with many arguing that it was in fact a collaborative effort between a number of students working together with Roger Perkins. I have elected to simply state that it was constructed by ‘students’, as this is how the Spartacus website explains their origins, and how members often represent the beginnings of the collective.



During this epoch, the DTES witnessed the increasing concentration of disenfranchised, homeless, and vulnerable peoples due to a shortage of affordable housing, increasing wealth stratification and inequality, an enduring legacy of colonialism, and the deinstitutionalization of thousands of psychiatric patients (and this heritage continues today) (cf. Ivanova 2009; Newnham, 2005). Such a politically charged climate worked, in part, to shape and inform Spartacus and its overall organizational identity. Accordingly, Spartacus established itself within the DTES as a 'safer space', with accessible public washrooms, a free 'people's phone', a 'community café', and eventually free computer access and Wi-Fi.<sup>44</sup> Such expressions of solidarity with their local community, and forms of resistance to private property paradigms and the economization of space, became a fundamental organizational component.

Two years later they moved to a new, and slightly larger location across from Victory Square, on Hastings and Cambie, and remained there for the next 30 years. Throughout this time they continued to grow and forge deep grassroots, civil society connections within the DTES, eventually changing their official name to Spartacus Community Education Society in order to more accurately reflect the nonsectarian ethos that characterizes the space. In April of 2004, the building in which they resided was completely destroyed by a fire which began in the back alley. As they were unable to afford insurance at this time, the entire inventory, along with store records, paraphernalia and memorabilia was lost, totalling over \$100,000 in damages (Puzon 2014). In response to this tragedy, overwhelming civil society support began to pour in, and via a combination of donations, volunteer work, and fundraising, they were able to officially reopen in February of 2006, less than a half block west of their previous location.

<sup>44</sup> In their interview guide for new members, Spartacus defines a 'safer space' as "[a] place where anyone can relax and be fully self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, age, or physical or mental ability; a place where the rules guard each person's self-respect and dignity and strongly encourage everyone to respect others".

However, as a result of rising rental rates within an increasingly gentrified urban core, Spartacus was forced to move, yet again, in 2008.

Spartacus found its penultimate location within the 600 block of East Hastings, where intensifying processes of gentrification (outlined further below) ultimately exposed them to yet another threat of spatial dislocation in the beginning of 2013, when their landlords served them with a 'renoviction' notice. Once again, mass civil society support arose to assist and defend them, effectively petitioning and deferring their displacement. This resulted in the 'renoviction' notice being rescinded, and Spartacus was able to stay in their home until the end of their lease. As such, in May of 2014, Spartacus Books was effectively extirpated from their organizational bedrock within the DTES when their lease expired. A lack of affordable vacancies within the DTES area, and a need to reestablish as quickly as possible resulted in their movement into their current local, the suburban Vancouver neighbourhood of Kensington-Cedar Cottage. Yet again, this was achieved entirely via mass community support, with over one hundred people volunteering their time to help pack, move and set up Spartacus within their new space (Leonard 2014).

As detailed, Spartacus is a non-profit, volunteer owned and operated bookstore and resource center (Spartacus 2016). Structurally, it operates as a non-hierarchical collective, with a nominally appointed board of directors, and utilizes a horizontal consensus based decision-making process. Membership is achieved via an application and subsequent interview process, conducted by two existing members of the collective with diverse gender identifications. In recognizing and seeking to address societal issues of patriarchy and heteronormativity (see Butler 1990), new members are asked to specify preferred gender pronouns (he/him, she/her, they) to better provide space for people to actively self-define. Once accepted into the collective, new members must

undergo a training period at the store if they wish to occupy weekly shifts.<sup>45</sup> This typically consists of two to four 'shadow' shifts, where the basic operations of the store are learned (however, the length of this training period is entirely up to the new member). Collective participation can also consist of event coordinating and planning, technology and website development, fundraising, or whatever other practical position one can conceive of. The level of collective participation is entirely decided upon by each member, based on their own comfort level and overall desire. Everyone who joins the collective acts as a part owner, and as such, is able to actively direct, modify, and control the space (of course, within reason or with collective approval). Accordingly, each and every member plays a key role in the form and function of Spartacus.

All organizational finances are deposited in a collectively owned bank account, which can be accessed by any member for use on/for the store. Minor functional decisions are typically made by individual members contextually on an as-need basis (such as design, decoration and organization of space, book ordering, small scale product purchases, event bookings, operation of space during shifts, etc.), while major decisions are made by consensus via email correspondence or at the monthly collective meeting (such as new membership decisions, major purchases, donations to other groups, implementation or amendment of 'policy', solutions to notable issues, etc.).

A self described 'nonsectarian radical space', Spartacus has a long history of engaging with the sundry left, attracting those who identify as anarchist, socialist, feminists, Marxists, Maoists and communists, amongst others. Accordingly, Spartacus as an organization addresses a broad array of socio-political, environmental and economic issues, as many of its members seek to address (self-affecting) structural problems of oppression, inequality and social stratification. The two primary strategies by

<sup>45</sup> The store is open seven days a week, 365 days a year. This translates to three shifts every Monday to Friday (open from 10am to 8:30pm), and two shifts every Saturday and Sunday (open from 11am to 7pm), totalling 19 shifts per week.

which such social engagements are organizationally realized are through the dissemination of information, and by serving as an active and uniting anomalous resource center and social space.

It is estimated that there have been over 1000 collective members throughout Spartacus' 44 years of existence. During the time of research, active collective membership totalled 23 people, and comprised of a vastly dissimilar association. For example, ages ranged from 16 to mid 60s. Members belonged to assorted classes, genders and sexual orientations. There were those who had their PhD and those who had never finished high school. Some members were employed as professors, nurses, labourers, tradespersons, in restaurants or retail, and others were unemployed (comprehensive occupational information on the collective was not attained). More specifically, there were two people under 19, ten members in their 20s, six members in their 30s, two members in their 40s, one member in their 50s and two members in their 60s. There were a total of twelve self-identified males, eight self-identified females, and three members who did not identify with a gender binary.

## **Intentions, Commitments & Diagnostics**

Consistent with the preceding analytical chapter, we begin here by cursorily identifying guiding goals, the locus of resistance, normative-moral commitments and associated diagnoses and critiques of existing institutions.

Spartacus Books has a notably amorphous objective and exists as a pliant and multifunctional para-capitalist space, directed and formed by its surrounding community, active collective and by those who use it. However, underlining this indeterminacy is a clear group commitment towards addressing and combating socio-systemic oppressions. Such a vague organizational animus is reflected by an equally broad group goal, plainly detailed by Alexander, the longest serving collective member. Having joined the group back in 1976, Alexander has been a member of Spartacus for almost as long as it has existed. When asked to describe what Spartacus is and aims to do, he candidly

asserts, “it is a tool for social change” (December 3, 2014). This broad organizational intent to facilitate emancipatory ‘social change’ is informed by a number of normative-moral commitments, as now briefly detailed.

Although distinctly shaped by those who use it, there are abiding normative commitments and moral principles that serve to structure and guide Spartacus’ activities and forms generally. Alan, a collective member who joined in the late 1970s and then took 30 years off before joining again in his retirement, speaks to these very commitments when describing Spartacus as a “non-sectarian . . . non-hierarchical collective fighting multiple oppressions” (February 11, 2015). Briefly unpacking this statement, in reverse, will allow us to clearly identify these guiding principles.

To begin, and as asserted, “fighting multiple oppressions” is at the heart of this para-capitalist resistance project. This is firmly detailed in the volunteer application form, which asserts that Spartacus Books facilitates “struggles against classism, racism, sexism, war, corporate greed, and other institutional atrocities” (Spartacus 2016: NP). Such broad but essential group commitments speak directly to guiding moral principles of equality and anti-oppression, consonant with the operationalization of such terms as provided in Chapter Four. Group engagements are thus distinctly geared towards actively attending to myriad forms of material and social conditions of inequality (i.e. social injustices) that exist in our society today, and thus seek to decrease forms of human suffering and increase potentialities for human flourishing (Wright, 2012).

To continue, Alan’s statement above asserts that Spartacus wages this anti-oppressive battle as a “non-hierarchical collective”. As explained to me during one of my first shifts at the store by Alexy, a member of 3 years, Spartacus is “completely run, owned and managed by the collective, everyone is a volunteer and everyone is equal” (October 27, 2014). Such notions detail a normative commitment to substantive participatory democracy. As detailed by Wright (2012), this is understood here as members’ having “broadly equal access to the necessary means to participate meaningfully in decisions about things that affect their lives” *within the collective* (5). Slightly modifying Wright’s description by adding a focus on the organizational collective

allows us to apply this broader moral-normative principle directly to the functioning of this para-capitalist group. As will be further supported throughout, Spartacus actively works to foster such participatory governance forms amongst collective members.

Lastly, a notion of broad social inclusion is indicated in Alan's description of Spartacus as "non-sectarian", and acting as an inclusive and supporting community space definitively undergirds Spartacus' para-capitalist actions and form. As Lucka, a collective member who joined the organization around the same time as me attests, Spartacus Books is "more than a store, it's a space that exists for people" (December 10, 2014). This was intensely evident during my time with the collective, as a vast array of peoples with disparate anti-oppressive ideologies populated and capably used the store for a variety of supra-economic community-focused objectives. Again, paralleling the conceptual operationalization provided in Chapter Four, such a reality directly speaks to a guiding normative-moral commitment of community solidarity. As evidenced below, Spartacus works to uphold this commitment by establishing, affirming and providing a space that attends to local interests and needs, and which members and the community use for a multiplicity of emancipatory actions and goals.

These above commitments broadly inform this organization's variegated diagnostic assessments and critiques of existing socio-economic and political structures of oppression, and thus their resistance activities. While the specificities of such assessments and critiques vary according to the understandings, interests and intents of individual collective members and users of the space, all affiliates are resolutely critical of capitalism. This was commonly expressed within interviews and during participant observation work. For example, Loïc, a collective member of 4 years, keenly captures this in his discussion regarding Spartacus volunteers. As he explains, "I think that the two unifying factors are that everyone who volunteers at Spartacus is anti-capitalist, I think that is a big one, and the other one being that they don't really have anything else in common" (January 29, 2015). Relatedly, Tim, a 'customer' of Spartacus since 1986 affirms that the space "is run by volunteers who tend to have a left point perspective, a critical perspective on society, I mean, you have a wide rainbow of people from anarchists to Marxists, but all of them are strongly critical of capitalist society and how it functions" (February 19, 2015). Opposition to capitalism thus stands as the consolidating

organizational diagnostic, with assessments and critiques of other interrelated systemic oppressions being contingent on specific member/community interests (see Johnson 2001). To further reiterate, Lucka asserts that Spartacus is fundamentally “anti-capitalist”. As she clarifies, “I mean that’s really what it is meant to be . . . but also opposed to all those things that are integrated into capitalism, like patriarchy and all those things” (December 10, 2014).

Accordingly, and as further detailed throughout, capitalist arrangements (and concurrent oppressions) contravene group commitments to equality, participatory democracy and community solidarity by generating social stratifications and inequalities, excluding civil society from participating in self-affecting decisions, and by positioning economized considerations above community needs and interests. Thus, capitalism and interrelated oppressions represent the loci of Spartacus’ broad resistance activities. These guiding normative-moral commitments denote radical emancipatory and supra-economic forms that conceivably depart from the economization logics of a neoliberal ontology (Wright 2014) and thus intimate at intentional economy arrangements.

Specifically (and as further detailed throughout this chapter), Spartacus illustrates a civil society resistance project that approaches the socio-economic sphere as a political and ethical space of decision making, positioning their communally defined priorities in the foreground of their ethical deliberations and decisions as they both recognize and negotiate their interdependence with other humans, other species and the world (Gibson-Graham 2006). As such, they seek to agentially engage with existing structures and foster resistances and emancipatory movements in a way that conceivably sits outside of totalizing economization logics. In doing so they potentially evade theoretical notions of neoliberal ontology as they work to molecularly transform components of civil society according to their ‘utopic’ visions (see: Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010). In order to understand this process, and thus elaborate on the resistance abilities of this interstitially situated para-capitalist group, we must now investigate how such commitments are approximated and realized.

## **‘Prognostic Framings’**

### **Alternative Propositionings**

In according with these normative-moral commitments and general diagnoses and critiques, Spartacus Books organizationally advances an inchoate and malleable emancipatory response to societal structures of oppression, being the development and preservation of an interstitially situated resistance sphere. More specifically, they work to forge and maintain a radical community space that emboldens para-capitalist knowledge, understandings, realities, forms of being and organizing, and which thus supports anti-oppressive societal arrangements generally. Alexander speaks to this in considering how Spartacus approaches its group goal. As he states, “[a]long with disseminating information, it provides a space for politically focused activities and events, in whatever form or capacity . . . and creates meaningful space for others to fight issues of oppression and exploitation” (December 3, 2014).

While Spartacus clearly cannot provide exhaustive solutions to capitalism and related forms of oppression, it works to address a variety of issues via this localized space of resistance. In this way members facilitate potentialities for emancipatory social change, but with no distinctly defined procedures or destinations. Lucka captures this very notion when she claims that Spartacus “is attempting to find some sort of alternative place within capitalism”, however proceeds to assert that there is “no particular vision of what should ultimately go in its place” (December 10, 2014). Accordingly, this organization’s alternative propositioning does not detail a fully determined, or even necessarily positive project, but rather a resistance form that is evolving contextually, enacted in the moment and situationally dependent. Again, in mirroring the previous chapter, we must investigate how this emancipatory response is organizationally realized. As such, we now examine the specific group strategies employed in relation to theories of neoliberal ontology and intentional economy.



## **Strategies of Resistance**

The strategies used by this para-capitalist group for realizing their alternative propositioning can be broadly divided between two major groupings, being its organizational structure and resistance practices. As detailed, the organizational structure acts as a specific resistance strategy, but also establishes a necessary framework for the articulation of variegated emancipatory group practices.

### ***Organizational Structure***

Structurally speaking, Spartacus exhibits an intentional economy form that departs from economization constructs and helps to build transformative possibilities. As explained above, and in accordance with their substantive participatory democratic principle, Spartacus Books is structured as a non-profit non-hierarchical volunteer collective. As Lucka explains, “. . . it really is meant to be a non-hierarchical space, and I think people really have embraced that, and are making a very conscious effort to make sure there are no informal structures that can pop up and dominate” (December 10, 2014). Consequently, there are no formal positions, no bosses, no directors and all members are empowered to effectively operate the store and do as much or as little work as they feel is necessary. As detailed in the Spartacus Books Interview Guide for new members (2016), “[w]hat happens at the store is a direct reflection of the amount of effort people put into it, this includes working on cash and helping customers, cleaning, receiving and ordering books and zines, co-ordinating events, fund raising and promotion” (1). Such a self-directed and communal ethos was palpably visible on my first day working at the store. Not long after arriving I was pricing donated books according to what I thought would be a ‘fair price’, reorganizing shelves, and told by fellow collective members that the space was ‘mine to direct’ during shifts. Moreover, I was given the option to get an access card for the group’s communal bank account.

Accordingly, the space is collectively owned and operated by all members, with minor operational decisions made individually and major organizational decisions made via a horizontal consensus-based structure. As Alexander clarifies, “decisions need to be made by meetings, by consensus, there’s a real aversion to voting at the meeting, six

people can't vote down five people and carry the day, somebody has to relent and make a consensus, otherwise it is individual initiative dealing with stuff" (December 3, 2014). While evidently occurring at a parochial level (i.e. within the context of this para-capitalist group), this organizational structure works towards promoting empowered collective control, and thus the development of faculties necessary for one to actively direct and shape their society via radical, participatory, egalitarian governance (Fung and Wright 2003; Macpherson 1977:Chap. 5). Lucka speaks to this when she asserts that "[t]here is a lot of interesting power that you end up having just as a volunteer here, with respect to the store, right away . . . everybody has thoughts and inputs, and everybody's input is seriously considered in this collective" (December 10, 2014). Such diffusion of governance power intimates at *localized forms* of an intelligent democratic citizenship that affirms its political valence, and thus begins to detail a specific segment of humanity that asserts and fosters an ability to think and act collectively in distinctly supra-economic political ways as representatives of *homo reciprocans* (contra Brown 2015).

All positions are volunteer based and focused on the operation and continuation of this para-capitalist space. As Tim details, "everyone at Spartacus is working for the common good, you know, to keep the bookstore going, no one is in it for profit, no one is profiting being there" (February 19, 2015). Such a distinct form of labour details diverse economy arrangements (Gibson-Graham 2006), and seemingly evades economization logics as members and affiliates participate entirely for supra-economic reasons (detailed further in the subsequent section). Loïc relatedly expands on this notion in his consideration of Spartacus' configuration as 'non-capitalist'. As he explains "[s]o non-capitalist I would define as being that we don't function on a profit model, so it's like non-capitalist is akin to non-profit or something, but were not in the business of accumulating capital and growing, I mean financially or economically or whatever" (January 29, 2015). Such an understanding clearly speaks to classical Marxist notions regarding the capitalist mode of production (Marx 1977 [1867]). By eschewing forms of wage labour, private ownership and the accumulation of profit, Spartacus structurally deviates from capitalist arrangements, again speaking to its diverse economy form (Cameron et al. 2013). While being structurally organized as a not-for-profit, and circumventing profit motives does not necessarily entail resistance to or departure from neoliberal

arrangements and logics today (Incite! 2009), Spartacus avoids connections to the 'non-profit industrial complex' by subsisting entirely via civil society support.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, it is this very support that has permitted for Spartacus' protracted existence and resolute resistance. As one member explained in a 2014 Vancouver Media Collective article, "the biggest reason for our success over the years has been the community support – every time we go through some kind of crisis, we get a huge amount of community support" (VMC 2014:NP). Tim relatedly affirms that Spartacus has "lurched from crisis to crisis, but we've survived, and it's just because we've all kind of pulled it together . . . people coming together, you know, I think that type of vibe has kept the store going" (February 19, 2015). As these quotes contend, and as argued, substantive civil society support allows Spartacus to largely maintain its supra-economic commitments in the face of imposing structure. This structural element directly relates to the group's configuration as a community rooted and directed para-capitalist space.

In attesting to its community solidarity principle, Spartacus Books is distinctly shaped by civil society interests and intentions. Alexander details this in the following discussion regarding the configuration of the store. As he explains:

. . . it's the interest of the people of the store and the interests of the people coming in that makes it what it is. And they both influence each other . . . A lot of stuff happens depending on who's in the collective. Some people come in who have a lot of energy for particular things and a lot more things happen, as long as that person is there. (December 3, 2014)

As detailed, it is the community in which it is situated that fundamentally shapes Spartacus, and by the civil society members who use, support and run it. In such a way

<sup>46</sup> The non-profit industrial complex refers to a system of relationships between non-profits/NGOs and the State/owning classes and associated foundations. In this way such 'resistance' groups serve to reinforce existing structures of domination and capitalist relations (Incite! 2009).

it does not represent an economized sphere governed by profit motives and market rationalities (as per Brown 2015). Rather, as will be further demonstrated, Spartacus largely stands as a community economy space rooted in its supra-economic normative commitments. This community-centered ethos is furthered by its non-sectarian configuration. In existing as what Alan describes as “a big tent”, Spartacus is committed to accepting all peoples and ideas that accord with their guiding normative-moral principles. As such, it structurally ensures a diversity of ideas, opinions and politics, and so also helps to forge forms of emancipatory solidarities and emboldened community connections and resistances as described in the successive section.

In according with its anti-oppressive principle, and further detailing this structure as strategy notion, Loïc contends that Spartacus’ para-capitalist resistance is articulated in part via the configuration of a ‘safe space’. As he expounds:

I think that trying to operate on principles of safe space is inherently anti-capitalist, because capitalism is an unsafe space. So yea, just like the model that we’re trying to work under within the limits of the store is--. And the way that we interact with each other and the way that we interact with people that come in, this is something that I think is an anti-capitalist way of being . . . I mean capitalism is a--it’s like--it’s a structure that is therefore like a milieu, it’s a space, it’s an environment that we’re in, that we swim in, and it is based on oppression, and so it’s going to be fundamentally unsafe, I mean for--. Like you know, a lot of people have different takes on it but I think that capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, these are all political systems that are wrapped up in one another, at least in this place. So like, anyway, it’s not just about getting rid of one of them, it’s about getting rid of all of them. But yea, so, the fact is that in order for these things to exist there needs to be a system of oppression, there needs to be people who are unsafe, and there needs to be exploiters. (January 29, 2015)

As Loïc proposes, Spartacus structurally challenges a neoliberal ontology and system via its formation as an anomalous ‘safe space’, fostering a form of ‘being’ that is free of insecurity, oppression and exploitation, delineated here as keystones of capitalism and intersecting political systems of oppression. Such commitments further detail a strategic alignment with intentional economy forms at this level of engagement, as they exhibit an ethical space of decision-making that acknowledges and upholds social

interdependencies and community priorities for destabilizing the capitalist economy and associated ontology (Gibson-Graham 2006:Chap. 4). This distinctly contrasts with Brown's (2015) notion of humanity as human capital, and the consequential normalization of social stratification, inequality and thus structural oppressions.

Lastly, these above structures and normative commitments are organizationally ensured in part via the volunteer admissions process. As specified in the Spartacus Books Interview Guide (2016), this gatekeeping practice is intended to accomplish the following objectives. First, it aims to attain "a sense of the temperament and experience of the applicant", and secondly it is meant to maintain "Spartacus as a safe(r), and anti-oppressive space for all, and to ensure good security culture." Interview questions are thus centered on ascertaining the applicant's familiarity with "radical/left/anti-capitalist/anti-oppressive politics", "consensus and collective based spaces", and "issues of privilege". During my five months of participatory research with the collective, a total of three applicants were rejected (out of an estimated 15 interviews) due to 'unfamiliarity with anti-oppressive ideas' and 'disregard of privilege'. Such requisites and considerations clearly extend beyond economized considerations and market metrics and further attest to this organization's collective commitment to emancipatory interests and intentions.

Thus – regardless of the fluctuating nature of the collective membership and users of the space, and correlated variations in specific resistance activities and focuses – these enduring structures serve as an armature and commanding cynosure for the overall operation of this para-capitalist organization, sustaining broader commitments and intentions. In this way Spartacus works to structurally promote non-economized emancipatory forms of being, as member participation and activities are shaped by and constrained to guiding normative-moral principles and forms. As a direct result of this enduring structure, it is thus able to operate as a pliant tool for emancipatory community action and support for para-capitalist social change, as now explored.

## ***Resistance Practices***

Spartacus' specific resistance practices can be divided between two principal forms, being its operation as a bookstore, and its role as a social space and resource center. As a bookstore, Spartacus disseminates radical leftist information and local products that reflect and articulate their guiding normative-moral commitments and potentially help with its broader goal. This is chiefly evidenced amongst the various categories that populate its bookshelves. Throughout the store, handmade cardboard cut-out signs sit upon assorted racks announcing literary sections containing information on anarchism, communism, radical theory, heterodox economics, race and society, feminism, gender and queer studies, resistance/workplace organizing, DIY (i.e. instructional books on how to make, grow and repair most basic needs and many superfluous wants), First Nations, ecology, animal rights, prisons, geography, history and art, in addition to radical (youth) fiction and graphic novels. Alexander illustrates how this radical and non-sectarian informational assemblage imaginably works towards facilitating emancipatory social change in considering Spartacus' function as a book distributor. As he explains:

We are a space which disseminates applicable knowledge for those who wish to use it, and which can ideally create social change . . . because every different section of the store is providing tools for people working on different issues. From animal liberation--. Our labour section is used by a lot of people in the labour movement. It's hard to think of an area of action that isn't supplied, in some way, by some part of the store. All the ecology books, or gender, queer activism, *et cetera*. (December 3, 2014)

By providing an array of applicable information as resources for various resistance actions and intentions, Spartacus conceivably works towards its goal of facilitating and empowering transformative resistance, and thus also emboldening para-capitalist understandings generally.

Tim further details this bookstore resistance strategy in the following discussion about why he thinks Spartacus effectively challenges and confronts existing forms of societal oppressions:

I think it is effective in terms of offering books that are critical, offering a critical perspective. There are a lot of books and a lot of authors that you never find in your mainstream bookstore . . . And there are a lot of small publishers, like Monthly Revue Press or Verso. And so I think it plays an important role in terms of promoting perspectives and ideas that can't be found in mainstream bookstores, or ideas spoken about in the media. For instance there is a big magazine and newspaper section. (February 19, 2015)

As Tim outlines, and parallel to Alexander's understanding above, by amalgamating and promoting dissident heterodox information, Spartacus works to maintain and disseminate critical perspectives generally, speaking to its engagements as a cultural strategy. While notably consisting of widely available books from mainstream corporate publishing houses (e.g. Penguin Random House, McMillan Publishing and HarperCollins, examined further below), Spartacus simultaneously offers a selection of information from radical emancipatory and subversive grassroots publishers such as Black Cat Press, AK Press, PM Press, Phoenix Press and CrimethInc. Additionally, as Tim implies, Spartacus' literary assemblage incorporates a variety of critical zines, journals, newspapers and magazines. It is the organizational commitment to these latter materials that most clearly details a non-economized resistance practice.

Specifically, Spartacus carries a plethora of critical periodicals, including Adbusters, Briarpatch, Hip Mama, Jacobin, World War 3, Z Magazine, the People's Voice, Socialist Alternative and the Worker's Vanguard, amongst others. Such notably left wing, para-capitalist, critical and often seditious publications act as a palpable financial drain on the organization. As Freja, a collective member of three years explained to me during my training, "the majority of magazines aren't actually sold but just read in store" (October 15, 2014). This was clearly evidenced at the end of my research participation, where I sold approximately two magazines, one zine and no newspapers during five months (or twenty one shifts), and often witnessed people reading them in the store. While some of the magazine distributors offer refunds on unsold copies (attained by mailing in the front cover of the remaining periodical), the majority are bought outright, and thus the cost of unsold editions are borne by Spartacus. These unsold and out-dated editions are then placed on the 'free rack' at the front of the store, for anyone to take. When I asked Alexander why we continue to carry

periodicals given that they don't sell, he affirmed that it is an important part of Spartacus' resistance, as "magazines represent the most relevant form of contemporary printed social critique". He clarifies this further by professing that "it's not like we're doing this for the money anyways" (October 15, 2014). Accordingly, this practice firmly details a non-economized 'irrational' (as per Brown 2015) strategy based entirely on group intentions to promote para-capitalist resistance literature, knowledge and broad social change.

On one hand, this resistance strategy details Spartacus' emancipatory commitments and overall values. By operating as a bookstore they distinctly work to disseminate critical power-knowledge, thus aiming to increase para-capitalist awarenesses and ontologies, and provide informational resources for a variety of social movements and causes. The significance of such action is palpable when considering the import of knowledge for transformative resistance possibilities (Gill 2008; Gramsci 1971). Such resistance activity details a positioning within intentional economy forms, as Spartacus places supra-economic communal interests in the foreground of their ethical and functional decisions (Gibson-Graham 2006:101). However, on the other hand, it is this form as bookstore that concurrently results in the organization's fractional positioning within a neoliberal ontological form, partially problematizing their resistance goals as they are structurally impelled to employ a market rationality to interpret a *segment* of their para-capitalist activities.

Principally, this bookstore strategy amounts in part to the vending of resistance literature, and thus more broadly, selling methods for social change. In this way, forms of private property distribution are utilized and understood as a means for addressing an array of social issues – intimating at the fragmentary economization of this para-capitalist resistance sphere (Brown 2015). Furthermore, this commodity distribution role served as a primary group strategy for organizationally addressing affecting material issues (i.e. financial concerns), and was relatedly discussed in three of the five monthly



collective meetings that I attended. Resulting from group concerns regarding a dwindling bank account and general financial precarity, there was notable collective discussion surrounding the need to increase overall sales, and thus bring in additional revenue to ensure enduring engagements.<sup>47</sup> Such an issue was ultimately addressed via increased advertising and in-store sales (offering 10% off books for the months of December and January), proposed by a number of members and unanimously supported by the collective. This economized response to such structural concerns partially details the group's strategic alignment with a governing market rationality (Brown 2015).

Relatedly, the operation of this governing rationality was demonstrated in a discussion following this group attenuation to financial concerns. Shortly after the decision to have a book sale, Samson, a mid 20's collective member of two years, sent an email out to the collective inquiring if we could begin engaging in non-fiat currency based trade, barter and exchange. As he argued, this would "allow us to stop using money and make deeper community connections, perhaps resulting in more support for Spartacus" (December 9, 2014). In responding to Samson, Alexander asserted that while he "respect[s] the intent of this request, trade won't pay the bills". Alexander continued by stating that, "at this point in time, this is not a good idea, and while I recognize the right of the collective to decide, this would not bode well for our survival" (December 11, 2014). This effectively ended Samson's request, and helps to partially illustrate the functioning of a neoliberal ontology as governing rationality for maintaining this group's broad accordance with economization constructs. That is, in order to "pay the bills" Spartacus must respond to structural issues via economized behaviour, thus impelling them to distinctly maintain a market-mediated commodity-distributing role for the preservation of this resistance sphere, despite a discord in opinion (cf. Brown 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Such financial issues were a direct result of lower initial sales in the new space compared to the DTES location, and increased book ordering to replenish stock lost from theft and sales and to fill the new and larger space.

In addition to the above, such a group focus and form – i.e. increasing sales to attend to material issues, and vending literature to broadly promote/support forms of emancipatory social change – partially complicates Spartacus’s broad resistance goal as a result of GCC connections, further intimating at limitations in intentionality. Specifically, and as mentioned above, Spartacus purchases and distributes material produced by a variety of differing publishing houses and groups. Given contemporary processes of corporate consolidation and media convergence, today’s mainstream publishing industry is dominated by an incipient oligopoly known as the ‘big 5’ (Bagdikian 2004). These publishers are directly tied to a variety of multibillion-dollar capitalist industries, media conglomerates and private equity firms (see Appendix B).

Accordingly, many of the books found on Spartacus’ shelves come from these corporate publishing houses, and although the content may be critical of neoliberalism, this demonstrates oblique organizational support of these neoliberal corporate bodies and intersecting socio-economic phenomena. In this way, group intentions of promoting and supporting emancipatory social change are partially frustrated, as the broader systems they seek to ultimately transform are indirectly buttressed via their economized resistance actions. This process calls into question civil society’s capacity to substantively re-embed economic phenomena within a social context, as impelling structures and prevalent systems partially subvert and coopt para-capitalist activity, speaking to notions of neoliberalization (Brenner et al. 2009; Peck 2010).

While such realities explored above demonstrate the limited economization of this para-capitalist resistance strategy, this is evidently not a subliminal or unconscious group phenomenon. As now briefly explored, Spartacus members do not exemplify passively duped recipients of a commanding ontology, but rather engaged and aware para-capitalist actors operating within the confines of existing structural contexts. Alan begins to humorously detail this in considering some of the challenges that they face:

Well I suppose some of it is, that through it all, the contradiction of being an anti-capitalist organization that is selling books [laughing] . . . but, you know, contradictions are what makes life interesting. You know there’s a-- . My favourite Walt Whitman quote is ‘Do I contradict myself? Sure I do,

I'm immense, I contain multitudes.' And you know, so we're an inefficient small business. (February 11, 2015)

By keenly recognizing organizationally generated ambiguity, Alan shows how they are not simply acquiescent to a theorized governing rationality, but rather aware of the complexity involved in their resistance engagements and desired goal.

Lucka astutely expands on this in analogously considering the interplay between Spartacus' role as a bookstore and the 'anti-capitalist' value that it seeks to affirm. As she states:

In terms of anti-capitalism, can we achieve it? No, of course we can't, because in the end it is still a store, there are still commodities being bought and sold here, and exchange relations can be dominant . . . So yea, it's a capitalist business because we live in this capitalist world, and we wouldn't be able to have this space without it. And uhh, so I'd say on the one hand, can it embrace everything that it believes? No, like no one can. I can't, you can't. When you live in this world, it's impossible to live outside of it. And, by removing yourself, you are not engaging with other people and issues, and I think that is one of the things that Spartacus wants to do. It has an idea that there are people out there that want to engage with us, and we want to engage with them. And so, you need a space to do that. And to have this space we need money, and the books bring money. (December 10, 2014)

Lucka here keenly speaks to the idea that practices of resistance cannot necessarily be separated from the associated practices of domination which they target, and so often emerge as amalgam forms (Routledge 1997). Moreover, she firmly recognizes that resignation is ineffectual, and so in order to engage with others and work towards realizing transformative goals, one must often maintain immersed in the context of their subjugations. In this way, gradations of meaningful engagements might occur.

Thus, as Lucka suggest, it is this 'living in the world' which works to agentially limit this para-capitalist group in its resistance endeavours and intentionality, as they are impelled to partially accord with existing structures in order to subsist and thus resist (i.e. the books bring money, which is necessary in order to have a space to engage with

others). Thus by engaging in economized activity, and so surviving, Spartacus is able to forge and maintain an emancipatory radical social space and resource center, as now explored.

Beyond its bookstore configuration, Spartacus performs its para-capitalist resistance by creating and maintaining a community directed social space and resource center. In this way they directly work to challenge both a neoliberal system and its attendant theorized ontology. While the specificities of this strategy is contingent on the particular intentions of the various actors that use the space, there are four principle forms that characterize and broadly frame such para-capitalist strategic actions, and these are: a limited 'community commons', a 'subaltern counterpublic', a para-capitalist spoke and a vibrant events and organizing space. These are not isolated components, but rather intimately related organizational strategies. However, we will now briefly examine them separately in order to facilitate this investigation.

A concept of the commons is understood as a "popular term for common property systems, where villagers or communities manage land, resources and ecosystems in the collective interest" (McMichael 2016: 365). Accordingly, a limited 'community commons' refers to Spartacus itself as loosely representing a shared space and resource that is cared for and used by the attendant community. This was indicated in the structure as strategy section above (i.e. in being collectively owned and operated), and is further detailed here in how this organization provides a 'space to be', which helps to challenge private property paradigms that characterize a neoliberal system and ontology. Specifically, there is no obligation to purchase anything at Spartacus, and anyone can come in and use the space as long as they accord with the guiding safe-space principles. Tim captures this very notion when he claims that, "the thing I love about Spartacus is that they have the couches there, and there's no pressure to buy, so you can sit down there for a couple of hours just browsing and reading books . . . and it's hard to do that in other places" (February 19, 2015). In addition to this, people can use the free computers, phone, washroom, play a variety of board games and musical instruments, rest on the couches in a safe, warm and dry environment, and utilize the space itself for a variety of community events, meetings and actions (detailed below). It

is presumed that everyone who does make use of the space cares for and maintains it as if it was their own.

Moreover, and in detailing non-economized forms of communal provisioning, both collective members and ‘customers’ often bring in food and refreshments for communal use, such as bagels, bread, preserves, muffins, coffee and tea without any obligations for reciprocity. These victuals are placed upon a counter at the front of the store labeled ‘the People’s Café’ – complete with a toaster, kettle, coffee percolator, dishes and utensils – and is freely available to all. This use of the ‘commons’ was frequently witnessed during my participant work, where a variety of people, such as young mothers, elderly men, students, foreign labourers, the itinerant and dispossessed would come in to relax on the couches, use the computers, flip through a book or magazine, grab a bite and a cup of coffee or play guitar without purchasing anything.

This form as a limited ‘community commons’ clearly speaks to organizational normative-moral commitments of community-solidarity and equality. Additionally, this strategic form conspicuously stands in contrast to Brown’s (2015) notion of humanity as ‘responsibilized human capital’ and specifically the idea that practices of collective provisioning and dependency, and thus the commons are disparaged or difficult to even conceive of as a result of this shifting form of personhood within a neoliberal ontological form (176). By actively crafting and maintaining this ‘community commons’ space, Spartacus Books works towards affirming intentional economy forms that place and prioritize issues of the commons in the foreground of their ethical decision making (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Intimately connected to this form as community commons, Spartacus broadly details an inclusive ‘subaltern counterpublic’ as a component of its para-capitalist resistance. As detailed by Nancy Fraser (1997), this refers to “discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (81). Such a public sphere is distinct from economized forms as it details an arena that is not based on market relations, but rather upon discursive relations,

providing a space for debate and deliberation and thus the formation of public opinion. In this way, such spaces provide opportunities for support and potential means of collective resistances (Fraser 1990). Spartacus Books loosely details such a counterpublic because it stands as an inclusive and vibrant public sphere where a heterogeneity of societal members come together and debate mutually-affecting issues, identifying, unbracketing and thematizing structural inequalities, and is void of exclusionary practices or (economized) requirements for participation apart from respecting the guiding safe space principles.

This resistance form, as an inclusive discursive sphere was profoundly visible during research, where sixteen of my twenty-one shifts included some level of dialogue centered upon a variety of socio-economic and political concerns. Providing a broad summation of these verbal exchanges, focusing on topics and participants, will allow us to better apprehend this. Such discussions included the following: comprehensive deliberations of differing political ideologies and para-capitalist resistances (i.e. anarchism, socialism and communism) and their distinctive merits and failings – this typically included a specific critique of existing capitalism and interrelated oppressions in conjunction with an elaboration of utopic emancipatory social alternatives and visions; the role of the nation-state in maintaining oppressive structures; considerations of extractive industries and (alternative) energy systems; environmental issues and their relations to capitalist systems; intensification in the import of subject positions and identity politics today, and their connections to neoliberal ideologies; positions of privilege and their relations to systemic oppressions, and; the Indigenous Peoples in Canada, including contemporary issues of racism, colonialism, land use/ownership and competing modernities and ontologies. Such discussions were had with Mooney (a 17 year old male collective member of one year), Walter Scott (a 31 year old male collective member of three years), Kika (a late 30s male collective member of 1 year and professor in linguistics), Samson, Lucka, Alexander, Alan, Loïc, Reverend Paul (a homeless man who frequented the space, in his mid 60s), Sheila (a woman in her late 30s who would sporadically come into the space), Will (a man in his late 50s who delivered the Carnegie Newsletter once a week) and Viho (an Anthropology professor in his 50s), both individually and jointly in different arrangements, as well as with a variety of other ‘customers’ and users of the space.

As suggested, this role as an inclusive 'subaltern counterpublic' works towards fostering localized forms of intelligent citizenship according to correlated group commitments. Here, a heterogeneous amalgamation of peoples are provided a non-economized space to come together and critically think about and examine existence, potentially de-normalizing narratives that marginalize the lifeworlds of the subordinate and powerless (McMichael 2009b: 28). Thus, rather than representing an anaemic and increasingly subservient demos as human capital, active civil society members here conceivably come together to work towards determining both the content and context of our present and undetermined future, affirming an individual and collective ability to discover, forge, pilot and master our existence (contra Brown 2015: 221). In doing so they formulate and embryonically construct methods for resistance and diverse emancipatory realities, speaking to a politics of possibility (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Moreover, this localized project conceivably helps *humanity* to concretize progressively via ethical engagements that struggle to expand non-economized para-ontologies founded on interpersonal respect and dignity (e.g. supra economic 'safe space' and normative-moral commitments, facilitating this discursive arena) (cf. McMichael 2009: 29). This local-global articulation in resistance is best understood via the following assertion by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional: "fight for justice in your own lands, because if there is justice in your own lands, there will be justice here as well because it is all in the same struggle" (quoted in Olesen 2005: 172). Thus despite formal borders, Spartacus' resistance strategies act as components of a para-capitalist submerged network that collectively develops and offers competing conceptualizations and forms of being (cf. Chin and Mittelman 1997).

It must be briefly noted here that these two above para-capitalist resistance practices were directly impacted as a result of the most recent forced spatial dislocation out of the DTES. Loïc details this in considering the resulting shift in the organizational character that this 'renoviction' precipitated. As he states:

. . . we've come from a place that was situated in the Downtown Eastside, and that was--. It had a very different character to it. I mean we were--. Sure, we were a bookstore first and foremost, but we were much more of a social space for people that lived in the neighbourhood or just groups

who organized, or a place to just come hang out, free internet, Wi-Fi, all that stuff. So it was mainly--. Yea, in addition to being a bookstore, it was a social space. Since then, our new location has become less about--. Less of like a 'drop-in center' type of arrangement . . . This kind of like free drop in center kind of quality to the space, where folks who lived in the area, or folks who lived on the street, sex-workers, all kinds of people would come in and just feel like they can hang out. You know if they needed to chill out, or maybe get away from someone who was making them feel uncomfortable, they could just step into this store. And so it felt like it was much more community engaged. (January 29, 2015)

As this quote suggests, and as was expressed by many collective members, this shift in location has altered the nature of this community commons space and those who populate the store, and thus partially diminished this group's ethical engagements. Given that the DTES has the highest concentration of homelessness, poverty, survival sex workers, people with addiction, physical disabilities, mental illness, and other precariously situated and disempowered social groups within Vancouver, the forced ejection of a 'safer-space' community-commons and subaltern counterpublic from this local is evidently problematic, as it further restricts and limits total accessible spaces (i.e. available and useable land) for marginalized and disenfranchised populations, and has incidentally excluded them from participating in this discursive arena.<sup>48</sup>

While Spartacus conserves these resistance commitments in distinct forms within their new location, such a reality helps to further detail agentic obstacles. As seen, they

<sup>48</sup> A 2013 City of Vancouver report informs that within the DTES; there are an estimated 846 homeless people; the median income for single residence is less than half that of single residence in the rest of Vancouver, and more than one quarter of families fall below the low income threshold, with close to half of all single mothers falling within or below the low income threshold; the majority of some 1,500 to 2,000 sex workers operate within the DTES; there are an estimated 4,700 injection drug users, and proportionately higher alcohol and drug-related deaths than the rest of Vancouver; 3,193 residents receive disability assistance, comprising of \$531.42 for support, and \$375 for shelter per month; an estimated one in five 'residents' have mental health issues, and; there are a disproportionate number of aboriginal and LGBTQ+ people in SROs, shelters, safe injection sites, prisons, missing, and as victims of crimes (Vancouver 2013).



are forced to respond to manoeuvring structural realities, such as market-determined land forms, which impose degrees of organizational transformations. Thus despite their intentionality, we again comprehend how 'living in this world' subjects interstitially situated groups to certain prohibitive conditions in their para-capitalist engagements.

To continue, and despite such structural obstacles, Spartacus exhibits a para-capitalist strategy as a connecting radical spoke. Lucka speaks to this tactic in the following assertion. As she states: "Spartacus provides a way to connect with the overall radical or anarchist community, and to find out a little about what's going on in the city . . . it can kind of become a spoke, in that way I guess, with what is happening" (December 10, 2014). This is achieved by advertising, supporting, promoting and connecting emancipatory events, protests, campaigns and causes throughout the city and beyond.

More precisely, this strategic component is realized in three ways. To begin, Spartacus has a community board where people can post flyers, and relatedly consigns its store window and walls for the same purpose. At any given time there is an array of placards and posters announcing a plethora of para-capitalist happenings, such as free radical lectures and forums, fundraisers and music shows, art collective events, club gatherings and reading groups, maker meetings and various resistance actions and protests. For example, during my time at the collective there were notices for a Stop the Pipelines protest, a Youth Marxist Reading Group, a public forum on anarchism & anarchist schools, a fundraising event for the Kinder Morgan Pipeline resistance, a knitting collective, a free public lecture on building a 'socialist alternative' in Canada, a radical slam poetry event, an Animal Rights collective, and monthly posters advertising events at 38 Blood Alley.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> 38 Blood Alley is an anarchist social space dedicated to creating a space "that is accessible to everyone in order to facilitate discussion on struggles against capitalism, the state, resource extraction, and all forms of oppression" (Blood Alley 2016).

Secondly, Spartacus acts as a para-capitalist informational hub. They do this by amassing and disseminating free flyers and pamphlets on a variety of resistance campaigns and movements. During my participation civil society actors would often come into the store to drop off such informational materials for distribution. This included: a flyer produced by Stop the Institute, detailing exploitative Canadian corporate mining practices and methods for resistance; a pamphlet from No One is Illegal, outlining an array of policies, processes and campaigns related to struggles for (im)migrant/refugee justice from a para-capitalist and anti-oppressive perspective, and; a booklet entitled To Change Everything (CrimethInc. 2015), which is an anarchist outreach project aimed at explaining and popularizing anarchist thought and action.

Lastly, Spartacus sells and distributes tickets for various radical events in the city. During my time there I sold tickets for the People's Prom, billed as "the prom you never had in high school: it's a radical, community-oriented, anti-capitalist, queer, cross-dressing, gender bending, bike loving, slow dancing, big dress wearing, good time" (Peoples Prom 2016: NP). All funds raised from this event go to various direct actions and resistance projects each year. This year was for resistance actions in opposition to the Enbridge Gateway pipeline.

In acting as a radical spoke, Spartacus conceivably helps to connect and embolden emancipatory spaces, understandings, forms and movements across the city and beyond, based on supra-economic intentions and goals. While group members may not participate directly in these various projects, the space nonetheless supports ecology movements, (im)migration and refugee justice struggles, animal rights actions, and various other para-capitalist and anti-oppressive resistances as detailed above.

Lastly, Spartacus acts as its *own* vibrant events and organizing space, and in this manner directly supports resistance projects and forms. Specifically, Spartacus members coordinate and host a multiplicity of para-capitalist events and groups, providing a space for fundraising, donation collections, awareness activities, and group operations and organizing. There were a variety of such events throughout my research participation, which comprised of, but were not limited to the following.

Each month Samson hosted a free movie series at the store, which would show one movie per week based on various para-capitalist topics and issues. These themes included water and ecology, Corporatocracy, immigration and nation building, the prison-industrial complex, and Black Lives Matter. Each monthly movie series ended with an open discussion, where civil society members deliberated the subject of that month, and sometimes included a guest speaker to elaborate upon the issue at hand.

There were a variety of concerts as fundraisers for an assortment of resistance actions, including a 'Night to Oppose the Trans Mountain Pipeline' featuring seven different bands, and a concert for the Unist'ot'en Action Camp (a First Nation's resistance camp in central BC opposing the construction of pipelines and LNG development in the area). These events had a pay-by-donation structure, with the bands playing free of charge and all proceeds going directly to these emancipatory projects. Related to these resistances, Spartacus helped to coordinate a tool drive for the Madii Lii camp within Gitksan Nation in northwest BC (a First Nation's resistance camp fighting LNG development). Over a three-week period, civil society members came into the store and gifted tools, including a generator, impact drivers, saws and a chainsaw. These items were then picked up by a member of the camp and taken north. During my participation Spartacus members also organized and hosted a variety of radical lectures (concerning creative resistance, prison justice and anti-pipeline actions), reading groups (on feminism, anarchism, animal rights and radical resistance), radical social nights for teens, and Queer Crafternoons (a weekly craft event for the LGBTQ+ community).

In addition to the above, and as stated, Spartacus also acts as a space for emancipatory groups and movements to organize and operate. These included organizations that would assemble in the store regularly such as Rising Tide (a para-capitalist grassroots environmental justice group), the IWW (a revolutionary international labour union), the IS (a globally active Trotskyist resistance group), and the Prison Letter Writing Group (a group committed to resisting the industrial prison complex by providing social support to 'comrades in captivity'). This also comprised of groups that would make use of the store sporadically or only once, such as the Stop UBC Animal Research Steering Committee, and the Mining Justice Alliance.

Additionally, the very logics underpinning this specific resistance strategy conspicuously deviate from a theorized neoliberal ontology. As outlined on the group's website and implemented in practice, there is "no fixed charge associated with the use of the space, as we love to share our resources under the principle of mutual aid" (Spartacus 2016).<sup>50</sup> The only requisite for using the space is detailed as follows:

Please be respectful of the values that the space upholds, and ask participants to remember that we are not a corporate establishment with an eye on making cash. [The] [s]pace is open and welcoming, which means that anyone can use the bathroom or phone without fear of judgment. The space/we respect diversity, and so must you. No homophobic, transphobic, sexist, racist, anti-poor, ableist discourse or any other forms of discrimination will be tolerated. (Spartacus 2016)

Such arrangements distinctly demonstrate group commitments to non-economized forms of collective provisioning, in accordance with guiding normative-moral principles of anti-oppression and community solidarity. Thus, in acting as a community events and organizing space, Spartacus stands as a 'public good' that helps to materially, ideologically and culturally support para-capitalist groups and intentions, First Nations' struggles, environmental movements, prison resistances, feminist causes, animal rights and more, as detailed above. Additionally, as intimated, this resistance form and group structure provides members a means to engage with their own emancipatory interests and causes, by offering them a physical space and attendant resources to organize and operate. Accordingly, Spartacus further details an intentional economy positioning at this level of their engagement (Gibson-Graham 2006).

As detailed throughout the above, this radical social space and resource center strategy demonstrates Spartacus as an interstitially situated non-economized space for para-capitalist civil society action and support. By forging and affirming a delimited

<sup>50</sup> A concept of mutual aid comes from Peter Kropotkin's (1902) book entitled *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, and generally refers to voluntary reciprocity for mutual benefit.

community commons, a subaltern counterpublic, a vibrant events and organizing space, and working to connect and promote resistance phenomena generally, Spartacus approaches its goal for broad emancipatory social change according to guiding commitments.

## **Discussion**

### **A Politics of Ambiguity**

Spartacus primarily occupies a consistent resistance positioning with minimal variances across the different levels of their engagement with a neoliberal system and ontology and interrelated structures of oppression. Such predominant positional congruity thus details minor ambiguity overall. Alignments with a theory of intentional economy were demonstrated in Spartacus' guiding normative-moral commitments, associated diagnostic and critique of capitalism and intersecting oppressions, and alternative propositioning (as detailed in the above). At this level of engagement they indicate and affirm the locus of group resistance based on non-economized community determined concerns and commitments. These are addressed through the creation and preservation of an interstitially situated resistance sphere and bookstore that works to embolden emancipatory para-capitalist community forms, and thus acts as a broad tool for combating capitalism and variegated social oppressions. In such a way they seek to facilitate emancipatory social change generally. As argued, such forms firmly align with a theory of intentional economy as they work to dislodge the dominance of neoliberal capitalism and reclaim the socio-economic sphere as a contested and ethical space (Cameron et al. 2013; Gibson-Graham 2006).

Strategically speaking, Spartacus exhibits a binary positioning, yet predominantly details intentional economy forms. As detailed, this principle positioning is firmly maintained within its structural strategy. In existing as a community-directed safe space non-profit non-hierarchical volunteer collective, Spartacus structurally deviates from

capitalist arrangements and thus stands as a component of an ethical diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 2006). Moreover, as argued, this very structure facilitates the development of substantive participatory democratic faculties that contextually challenge aspects of Brown's (2015) notion of a prevailing human capital.

In regards to their specific resistance practices, Spartacus' strategy as a bookstore partially reflects their supra-economic commitments and intentions in working to disseminate critical power-knowledge that assists its goal of facilitating and empowering transformative movements, and so emboldening para-capitalist understandings and ontologies generally. This was chiefly detailed in their desire to promote such information outside of economized logics (e.g. encouraging materials to be read in store, and maintaining financially taxing periodicals), thus detailing intentional economy alignments as they place communal interests in the foreground of their ethical and functional decisions (Gibson-Graham 2006:101). Conversely, as was also shown, it is this very role that simultaneously results in their fractional positional manoeuvring towards a neoliberal ontology. This was roughly demonstrated in their strategy to sell market-mediated commodities for social change, intimating at the fragmentary economization of this para-capitalist resistance sphere, as well as in their employment of a market-rationality to address material exigencies for survival (i.e. increase sales) (Brown 2015).

As affirmed, such alignments with a theorized neoliberal ontology are a partial result of agentic limitations and impelling structural exigencies resulting from 'being in the world', i.e. the books provide a context and material means for the sustenance of an interstitially situated para-capitalist resistance sphere. Moreover, members were keenly aware of such ambiguity, and expressed it openly. In terms of their strategy as a radical social space and resource center, Spartacus represents an intentional economy form that distinctly departs from a theorized neoliberal ontology. This was affirmed by looking at their specific formation of a supra-economic community commons, subaltern counterpublic, para-capitalist spoke and vibrant events and organizing space that resolutely works towards destabilizing a neoliberal structure and ontology as a para-capitalist 'public good'.

Accordingly, this para-capitalist collective details a very minimal ambiguity as they largely forge and assert a multiplicity of emancipatory resistance methods. As maintained, their minor accordances with a neoliberal ontological form result from group engagements with extant structural realities, and in response to material exigencies for survival. Consonant with the previous analytical chapter, we must now specifically consider what emerges from enacting this politics of ambiguity.

## **Abilities & Emergent Transformative Possibilities**

In apprehending the outcome of Spartacus' politics of ambiguity, I broadly consider group engagements with a neoliberal structure and ontology and intersecting systems of oppression. This evidently diverges from the corresponding section in the previous chapter, as for Spartacus the primary issue being engaged is also the terrain of the struggle itself. Thus, I focus on specific group phenomena here and only include a brief consideration of their transformative political agency, which is further explored in the concluding chapter. Again, such an investigation allows us to better apprehend and expand understandings regarding the effectiveness of interstitially situated civil society resistances today (see: Burawoy 2003; 2014; Friedman and McNair 2008; Wright 2010; 2012).

By realizing methods for enduring engagements, and thus enacting a minimal politics of ambiguity, Spartacus is both supporting and concurrently contriving methods for resisting neoliberalism. Specifically, and as detailed, Spartacus partially supports a neoliberal ontology and related systems via its strategy as a bookstore by engaging in forms of commodity distribution for resistance (i.e. selling books to facilitate resistance that come from corporate publishers, illustrating problematic GCC connections). Such a reality obfuscates Spartacus' resistance endeavours by materially backing trenchant components of the very system they seek to transform (i.e. multibillion dollar transnational corporations).

However, as asserted, it is *through* such economized action that Spartacus Books is able to forge significant forms of emancipatory civil society action as a para-

capitalist resistance sphere and place of being. This has notable material and ideological results. As detailed, Spartacus generates concrete material support for various emancipatory resistance movements and actions via events such as fundraisers and donation drives, thus directly assisting ecology movements and First Nations struggles (amongst others).

Through its continued engagements, Spartacus also provides free advertising for many causes as a para-capitalist spoke, directly helping to promote and stimulate a wide variety of emancipatory civil society activities. Providing a free space for organizing and operating, based on principles of mutual aid, furthers such material accomplishments. While I have been unable to measure the specific impacts of such activity (as this would require investigating the achievements made by the various organizations they support, and in relation to the aid they receive from Spartacus), it is nonetheless evident that Spartacus creates very real forms of support for such para-capitalist emancipatory struggles generally. Additionally, as a community commons space, it continues to provide victuals to civil society members, thus conceivably limiting forms of human suffering and increasing potentialities for human flourishing via this 'safe space' that allows people the opportunity to 'just be'.

Ideologically speaking, Spartacus' ambiguity allows it to continue to subsist as a para-capitalist 'subaltern counterpublic', and so operate as a space of inclusive deliberation, education, and thus participatory formation of worldviews and identities, speaking to its ethical engagements. In this way it works to support and empower para-capitalist ontologies and forms of being, and thus potentially influence broader societal understandings, also achieved in part via its dissemination of critical information. This is best comprehended via the expressed understandings of collective members.

Toby, an ex-collective member of four years who was back visiting the store one day during my shift, keenly details this ideological function in considering how Spartacus helped to further shape her understandings of society. As she explains, "I always kind of knew that things were fucked, you know, but being here let me meet people with similar



understandings, and we learned from each other.” When I ask her what she means by this, she explains via the following:

Like, I always kind of knew that capitalism is a really big problem, but it was by talking to people here that I came to an understanding of how it works, and how we can make personal decisions everyday to try and change that, you know, through what we buy or where we go or whatever. And also by having discussions. Talking and learning from each other. (December 8, 2014)

As Toby demonstrates, Spartacus plays an important ideological role for civil society resistance by providing a space for people to ‘talk and learn from each other’.

Lucka further details this in discussing how Spartacus plays a significant role for affirming para-capitalist diversity. As she explains:

I was starting to get to a point where I was feeling like everything I was doing was just normal capitalist existence, and I was starting to feel really bad about it. And so when you start to reengage with people, and things and places like this, that kind of remind you that, you know you live and exist within capitalism, but that doesn't mean that you have to allow your life to be completely dominated by it. It doesn't mean that you have to identify as a male or a female all the time. There can be spaces where you can exist outside of that, even if it's for, you know, brief periods. And that kind of reminder to the individual and the self has been positive for me because it's made me want to create small changes in my own life that will allow me to, I guess, live more freely than maybe I have been doing in the past little while. (December 10, 2014)

As Lucka affirms, Spartacus serves as an important reminder that other socio-economic realities and forms exist, directly speaking to Gibson-Graham's (2006) notion of the diverse economy. By existing, *and continuing to exist*, Spartacus conceivably facilitates emancipatory social change by promoting and normalizing para-capitalist views, forms and ontologies, despite minimal degrees of ambiguity. In this way it pushes back on economization logics and capitalocentric discourses. As explored in the above, this process is also assisted in part by the organizational structure, which helps to parochially promote empowered forms of citizenship and participatory democratic action.

Such material and ideological effects speak to this organization's political transformative agency, suggesting an ability, however limited, for supporting and assisting social change as a broad cultural strategy (Chin and Mittelman 1997). This is exhibited in how Spartacus, despite its fractional accordance with economization logics, works to distinctly support a variety of social movements and para-capitalist ontologies via group activity. In such a way, it exists with similar movements and projects as a member of a para-capitalist submerged network, seeking to potentially position society on an emancipatory path towards a future not yet determined. This will be further examined within the subsequent chapter.

As a result of 'living in this world', Spartacus is agentially limited in its resistance abilities and transformative intentions, resulting in its politics of ambiguity. By probing this ambiguity, we were able to see how Spartacus fractionally supports aspects of a neoliberal capitalist system. Yet, doing so concurrently allows them to exist as an important para-capitalist resistance sphere that works to both materially and ideologically engage with that very system and intersecting structures of oppression. Such processes speak to the emancipatory abilities and possibilities of this interstitial resistance, and thus its representation of a 'real utopia' (cf.: Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010; 2012). In such a way, Spartacus effectively stands as a pliant tool for facilitating para-capitalist social change and resistance.

## **Chapter 6.**

### **Conclusion**

It appears that para-capitalist resistances, like neoliberalism itself, are necessarily ambiguous and contextually divergent, as demonstrated in the preceding investigation into two groups operating within southern British Columbia today. Investigating their engagements, perceived 'shortcomings', and observable 'successes' has allowed us to better understand civil society's para-capitalist capacity, as well as attend to a theoretical discord between concepts of intentional economy and neoliberal ontology via a theory of the politics of ambiguity. Comparing and contrasting the studied organizations allows us to further these understandings. This is then followed by a brief discussion and consideration of areas for future research.

### **Interorganizational Consideration**

While clearly existing as two idiosyncratic para-capitalist groups, comparatively investigating them allows us to better understand such interstitial forms of resistance by probing for differences in abilities, transformative possibilities, and thus their 'conditions of existence, internal contradictions and potential disseminations' (Burawoy 2014:15).

To begin, Spartacus Books notably details a much lower degree of ambiguity when compared to CB-DC, and this is arguably a consequence of overall group focus and form. As detailed, CB-DC seeks to resist and transform a corporate fossil fuel regime via the development and promotion of local ethical 2<sup>nd</sup> generation biofuels, based on normative moral principles of anti-oppression, sustainability and community solidarity.

Spartacus, by contrast, aims to broadly contest and transform variegated systemic oppressions, and so facilitate emancipatory forms of social change via the development of an interstitially situated resistance sphere, based on normative moral principles of anti-oppression, participatory democracy and community solidarity. While these groups extend from parallel supra-economic normative moral commitments, the intent of their actions is clearly very different. Such disparity in group focus evidently lends itself to distinct organizational structures and forms.

Specifically, CB-DC has a precise organizational focus, and necessitates a specialized and dedicated skillset and labour force for the realization of their alternative propositioning. This is clearly evidenced in the production and distribution of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation biofuels, which in addition to a technical savvy, requires substantial time and equipment. For example, the process of collecting used cooking oils, performing titrations, filtering and refining feedstock, transesterification, and preparing biodiesel for distribution can take days to execute, requires specific instruments and infrastructure and must be regularly performed. Moreover, group engagements only attract those civil society members with diesel-powered vehicles who are interested in such specific energy concerns and, as previously asserted, member participation is primarily relegated to the act of purchasing 'solutions'. Accordingly, CB-DC is structured as a consumer-worker hybrid cooperative with a hierarchical liberal-democratic decision making process, a few specialized roles combining volunteer and paid labour, and a for-purchase membership structure; and distinctly performs its resistance activities via the distribution of a market-mediated commodity. Such a form permits it to engage in this specific and technical resistance action with limited civil society support and involvement.

Spartacus, by contrast, has a broad and pliant organizational focus that requires little expertise or specialized skills. For instance, only rudimentary computer and math skills are necessary for the continued operation of this community directed para-capitalist resistance sphere. Additionally, it more readily attracts civil society actors that can attend to an array of emancipatory interest and self-affecting intents via association. As such, Spartacus is structured as a non-profit non-hierarchical volunteer collective, with a horizontal consensus based decision making process, diffused and non-

specialized unpaid roles, and a non-monetized value-oriented membership arrangement. While distinctly engaged in forms of market-mediated commodity distribution, it is also resolutely performs its resistance activities outside of such economized arrangements. Such a structure facilitates this broad community-centered resistance, which enjoys substantial civil society support and involvement.

As intimated in the previous analysis chapters, and further argued herein, such structural differences result in differentiated degrees of ambiguity and thus different emergent transformative possibilities. More precisely, CB-DC's focus and structural arrangements impel them to enact a more trenchant politics of ambiguity at the strategic level of engagement, as detailed in their clearly bifurcated resistance positionings. This is primarily a result of their technocratic and hierarchical resistance structure and clear commodity distribution focus, necessitating minimal civil society involvement. As such, they have no insulation (viz. substantial volunteer labour or material support) from the pressures of the market economy in which they are situated, and as illustrated, are impelled to respond to structural exigencies for enduring engagements via market rationalities that serve to betray guiding goals and intentions (i.e. the incorporation of blends for increased distribution), and which thus impede their specific resistance abilities. This demonstrates a clearer positioning within a neoliberal ontological form, and its operation via 'soft power' (Brown 2015).

Additionally, while CB-DC does ambiguously engage with a fossil fuels complex as well as ideologies and understandings surrounding energy forms in society, it does not engage with a neoliberal ontology, thus seriously delimiting its contributive interstitial agency. Specifically, and as detailed in the analysis chapter, CB-DC in part represents a cultural strategy connected to energy-based submerged networks. As such, they work to stimulate energy centered emancipatory discussions, goals and understandings within their local, and this arguably helps to diffuse such discussions to other areas of life (as a 'cynosure of diversity'). For example, and analogous to food sovereignty movements, proclaiming this right to energy sovereignty is manifestly representative of a declared right to collective self-determination (cf. McMichael 2009b: 33). This is claimed because related discourses, realities and subjectivities adopt a contextually relevant, empowered, and potentially democratized form. In such a way, CB-DC conceivably galvanizes the

collective imagination and affirms an ability for civil society to effectively act and create locally relevant forms. However, as also detailed, this interstitial resistance strategy is entirely situated within economized logics and arrangements (Brown 2015), thus reproducing and further normalizing fundamental components of socio-economic exploitation and oppression. As such, they detail a limited contributive interstitial agency as group engagements are unable to fuel movements for substantive and non-economized social transformations.

Spartacus's structure, by contrast, permits for minimal ambiguity as detailed in their more consistent resistance positioning. This is primarily a result of their horizontal resistance arrangement, which fundamentally relies on direct civil society participation and control, and only fractional commodity distribution focus. As such, Spartacus enjoys a greater degree of insulation (viz. substantial volunteer labour and material support) from the pressures of the market economy in which they are situated. While they are partially impelled towards economization logics in responding to structural demands for enduring engagements (i.e. increase book sales), they concurrently maintain a resolute resistance sphere that operates outside of market rationalities and economized considerations (as a 'safe' social space and resource center), speaking to a greater resistance capacity. Moreover, as was detailed, the very membership structure works towards promoting para-capitalist forms of being that challenge notions of human capital within a neoliberal ontology (Brown 2015).

Accordingly, Spartacus effectively forges an interstitial resistance sphere that broadly acts as a component of emancipatory transformative movements. This was detailed in their development of a non-economized 'community commons', 'subaltern counterpublic', para-capitalist spoke and vibrant events and organizing space. Such forms illustrated their cultural strategy role as a proponent, defender and member of a variety of submerged resistance movements, such as para-capitalist political parties (IWW and IS), First Nations and ecology movements, and migration and identity rights actions. Thus while they may in part support aspects of the structures they seek to transform (i.e. via book sales), in doing so they also help to stimulate empowered and non-economized citizenship forms and para-capitalist realities and movements, thus

speaking to an emergent transformative political agency *from* ambiguity (cf.: Burawoy 2003; 2014).

In addition to indicating transformative agencies, this study suggests that gradations in a politics of ambiguity logically correlate with differentiated abilities for impacting members' ontological perspectives. This alludes to the manner in which para-capitalist possibilities and worldviews are expanded and/or contracted via organizational activity. More specifically, and as detailed, by chiefly standing as a technocratic commodity distributor vending solutions to ecology concerns, CB-DC works to further normalize and reify economization logics and understandings. By contrast, in existing as an egalitarian collective resistance space, Spartacus fosters the development of empowered radical governance capabilities and para-ontologies that prioritize community and the environment above all else (Gibson-Graham 2006). In addition to contextually problematizing Brown's (2015) notion of an increasingly subservient demos, such a structure conceivably impacts the (belief in the) ability to forge para-capitalist realities.

From the above, we see how CB-DC does not directly push back on market realities or economization logics, yet does help to partially create forms of (ambiguous) energy sovereignty which helps to lower human sufferings and increase potentialities for human flourishing while concurrently attending to immediate ecology concerns. As such, through enacting their politics of ambiguity, CB-DC creates and maintains pragmatic micro-emancipatory channels that circumvent existing corporate structures and market relations, but are still firmly situated within economized paradigms. Consequently, they distinctly represent an ameliorative reform (Wright 2012) that works towards implementing institutional improvements within the predetermined contours of the current structure. Yet, as this study shows, such pragmatic ameliorative reforms *may* act as a barricade on the road to utopic destinations by buttressing the underlining logics (i.e. neoliberal ontology) that distinctly work to maintain existing institutions of oppression (i.e. capitalism). Such potential hurdles problematize the resistance abilities and roles of such interstitial civil society groups today (cf.: Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010; 2012).

Spartacus, by contrast, does ambiguously challenge market realities and economization logics in radical, anti-oppressive and emancipatory forms via their formation of a social space and structural advancement of a para-ontology, thus working towards collectively determining the content of our future within the contours of the present. As such, Spartacus details a 'real utopia' (Wright 2012) that helps to promote undetermined molecular transformations of civil society.

Lastly, we must consider the viability and achievability of these resistance projects, as per Wright (2010; 2012). As clarified, CB-DC's goal is not to offer complete solutions to fossil fuels, but begin to craft divergent and localized energy forms that sit outside of a fossil fuels complex. Such a goal is achievable, but clearly became problematized as a result of their accordance with economization logics and structures, and resulting incorporation of fossil fuels. Relatedly, the viability of their overall objective is, at this point in history, unclear. Evidently new energy systems will be required as we approach increasingly problematic global and ecological realities from fossil fuel dependency, however the ability to escape corporate controlled energy schemas and maintain localized and diversified community-directed forms is as yet unknown, especially when considering such ambiguity in resistance. Such emancipatory energy forms will no doubt require the successful resistance and transformation of a neoliberal structure and ontology, so as to avoid unintended consequences and self-destructive dynamics impelled in part by this politics of ambiguity (cf. Wright 2012:8).

Spartacus, by contrast, aims to facilitate anti-oppressive social change broadly. As demonstrated, they are capable of *assisting* such endeavours. However, the overall achievability of such comprehensive social change is at this point in time unclear. Structures of oppression are firmly rooted within existing societal institutions and as such are difficult to address. However, I argue that such a resistance project is *theoretically* viable. That is, if oppressive structures were effectively transformed based on emancipatory and egalitarian commitments, we would imaginably be able to craft sustainable systems that avoid unexpected drawbacks. As such, Spartacus stands as a largely desirable and replicable para-capitalist resistance model and despite specific abilities, helps to galvanize the public imagination by envisioning and working to craft emancipatory social possibilities and non-economized realities (8).



## Discussion

This study slightly nuances understandings of interstitially situated civil society resistances via a concept of the politics of ambiguity. Such a theoretical perspective effectively captures and conjoins the tension that exists between a commanding structure (i.e. a theorized neoliberal ontology), and the agentic aspirations of para-capitalist groups seeking to craft emancipatory possibilities (i.e. a theorized intentional economy). Again, expanding upon such understandings is paramount today given the essential role of civil society for responding to the deleterious demands of neoliberal capitalism (Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010).

More precisely, and as effectively apprehended by a politics of ambiguity, interstitially situated para-capitalist groups occupy different positionings within different levels and focuses of their engagements (cf. Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010). That is, both the investigated para-capitalist groups in this thesis stand as a component of the intentional economy, detailed in their varied attempts to “dislodge the discursive dominance of capitalist economic activity and reclaim it as a contested space of representation” by treating it as an ethical space of decision-making, affirming a politics of possibility (Gibson Graham 2006: 54). This was seen specifically at the normative-moral, diagnostic, and alternative propositioning levels of resistance. Here they detailed commitments towards realizing supra-economic emancipatory goals, thus departing from a theorized neoliberal ontology (cf. Brown 2015).

However, as was subsequently detailed, these interstitially situated para-capitalist projects are bounded in part by the structural contexts that they exist in and encounter, thus complicating such intentionality within the strategic level of resistance. That is, as a result of their engagements with ‘inherited circumstances’, as well as compelling exigencies for organizational survival, these para-capitalist groups demonstrated a bifurcated strategic positioning (situated within intentional economy and neoliberal ontology forms) to varying degrees. As was argued, it is this binary positioning resulting from delimited agentic engagement with structure and partial accordances with a theorized neoliberal ontology that results in the groups’ enactment of a politics of

ambiguity, indicating their capacities for resistance and thus transformative agencies and emergent possibilities (cf.: Burawoy 2014; Wright 2010).

As seen, this degree of ambiguity varies according to organizational goals, related structural forms and the degree of direct civil society support. Goals and structures that promote empowered participatory democratic control, substantive civil society support, (fractional) positionings outside of economization logics, and thus the (discursive) development and promotion of emancipatory para-ontologies and forms permit for less overall ambiguity, and thus greater para-capitalist abilities and emergent transformative possibilities. In such a way they work towards ambiguously generating molecular transformations of civil society, potentially challenging forms of market tyranny by building upon and nourishing emancipatory movements (i.e. political agency) as cultural strategies (cf. Burawoy 2014). Accordingly, and as suggested from this analysis, effective emancipatory resistances (i.e. 'real utopias') are *primarily* situated outside of a theorized neoliberal ontology. By contrast, ameliorative reforms, while equally capable of making concrete improvements in the lived realities of human beings and the world, increasing potentials for human flourishing and decreasing forms of (environmental) suffering, are largely situated within a theorized neoliberal ontology and so unable to impress upon underlying structures of oppression and potentially reinforce interrelated ideological schemas (i.e. economization logics) (cf. Wright 2010). Thus, and to reiterate, while conceivably representing important components of 'real utopias' grounded in a pragmatic idealism, such ameliorative reforms also potentially obstruct the substantive realization of 'real utopias' due to their more trenchant ambiguity, and associated legitimization and sustenance of capitalist phenomena (cf. Wright 2012:9). Such realities help to further expose the indeterminacy of civil society interstitial resistances today, as well as expand understanding of effective transformative strategies.

As this thesis details, interstitially situated civil society resistances to neoliberal capitalism are *necessarily* ambiguous and uncertain, and potentially reproduce the very structures being combated. Yet, despite this indeterminacy, such resistance also works towards forging and fostering forms of emancipatory and/or transformative possibilities (cf.: Burawoy 2003; 2014 Wright 2010). Consequently, I argue that this study begins to reveal a para-capitalist continuum, situating civil society resistance projects between

antipodal theories of intentional economy (i.e. full agentic resistance) and neoliberal ontology (i.e. complete structural accordance). Such a spectrum allows us to further understand resistance outside of binary perspectives, and thus better apprehend and normalize ambiguity in action. In such a way we comprehend the structural limitations of intentionality, while concurrently apprehending the creative and extant agentic engagements of civil society; affirming that neoliberalism is not necessarily “the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity” (Brown 2015: 44).

For the time being, neoliberal capitalism will continue operating across the globe. While durable, emancipatory and substantive social change necessitates the egalitarian expansion of meaningful participatory democracy over all aspects of life – i.e. Polanyi’s (1957) concept of socialism – para-capitalist civil society organizations will continue to play an ambiguous, but nonetheless important role for the potential realization of this socio-economic desideratum. By utilizing a theory of the politics of ambiguity, and thus recognizing the concurrent binary positioning of such civil society resistance groups, we better understand the indeterminacy of such countermovements today, and thus also the para-capitalist projects that better position us upon the road to a ‘real utopia’. As such, we expand the existing dialogue between theory and practise (Burawoy 2014:15).

## **Areas for Future Research**

Future research should continue to locate, identify and explain the presence and function of a politics of ambiguity, in order to better reveal existing fractures, gaps and discontinuities within neoliberalism and its theorized ontological form, and further understand notions of intentional economy. Special attention should be paid to neoliberal ideological constructs, connective tissues, mimetic forms, and socio-cognitive networks. Moreover, by expanding the overall ‘sample size’, a more accurate understanding of para-capitalism and a politics of ambiguity in general will be achieved. In this way we can further apprehend variegated civil society resistances, and thus refine our considerations of para-capitalist abilities and emergent transformative possibilities. Such studies will also allow us to continue populating this embryonic resistance continuum,

placing such para-capitalist projects on the spectrum between neoliberal ontology and intentional economy.

Such research with other para-capitalist groups should also continue to focus on the role of organizational structures and their influence on affiliates' ontological perspectives, in order to better understand how para-capitalist possibilities and worldviews are potentially expanded or contracted. This must also investigate for the intersection or relation between such para-capitalist structures, degrees of civil society support and resulting variances within a politics of ambiguity (i.e. degrees of ambiguity). Such a study should also involve an extended investigation into para-capitalist organizational engagements with the realm of culture generally, in order to better determine how para-capitalist ontological perspectives could be expanded or created as a result of specific cultural group activity, and the results this may have. Additionally, attention could be paid to the effect of para-capitalist group involvement on forms of democratic and political actions and participations.

Lastly, while the groups studied in this thesis do not stand as replicable cases, their specific processes and engagements may conceivably be applicable beyond their immediate environment (e.g. the creation of a contextually relevant para-capitalist structure and space). Relatedly, such non-replicable, but broadly desirable and generalizable factors should be examined and uncovered amongst other para-capitalist groups, in order to enlarge imaginaries and perceived potentialities and thus further enervate a neoliberal ontological form and associated systems of oppression and exploitation.

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## Appendix A.

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS		
OBJECTIVE	POSSIBLE QUESTIONS	POSSIBLE PROMPTS
Build a report and establish context	In general, how would you describe the organization you are affiliated with?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the broad mission statement or goal?</li> <li>- How does being involved with this organization make you feel?</li> <li>- What sorts of goals or outcomes do you have for yourself in being involved with this organization?</li> </ul>
	How did you become affiliated with this organization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What motivated you to [volunteer with/join/become a founder/consumer with] this organization?</li> <li>- How long have you been involved with this organization?</li> <li>- Can you explain your particular role in this organization?</li> </ul>
Understand affiliated members ('consumers')	Can you please describe to me a typical client of this business?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why do they come here?</li> <li>- What are they looking for when they come in?</li> <li>- Are your typical customers now the same as they were when this organization began/when you first became involved here?</li> <li>- What types of questions might they ask you about the products you are offering?</li> <li>- Have customers ever told you anything about why they come here (as oppose to other businesses)?</li> </ul>
	What types of information, if any, do you provide to 'consumers'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How is this information provided [pamphlets/flyers/websites etc]?</li> <li>- Has this type of provided information changed over the years? How?</li> </ul>

Understand affiliated members ('key informants')	Can you please describe to me a typical employee/volunteer of this organization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why do you think they work/volunteer/are involved here?</li> <li>- What sorts of typical conversations might occur [what do you talk about]?</li> </ul>
Understand ideologies and functioning of organization	Can you explain to me how this organization works?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you understand the functioning of this organization?</li> <li>- How are your products manufactured/ obtained? What impacts or benefits might this cause within the community? The world?</li> <li>- What do you consider as key to this organization's continued operation?</li> <li>- How do you see this business as being different to other similar businesses?</li> <li>- How do you see this business as being similar to other businesses of this type?</li> </ul>
	What sorts of values do you believe this organization embodies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What sorts of social values?</li> <li>- What sorts of economic values?</li> <li>- What sorts of political values?</li> <li>- Do you think these values are met?</li> <li>- How might they fall short?</li> </ul>
	What do you believe are some of the most important considerations involved in running this business?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you please explain why you think _____ are important?</li> <li>- What considerations do you believe need to be focused on more?</li> </ul>
	Can you tell me about a specific experience you had while [working / participating / 'purchasing'] from/with this organization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anything memorable or that stands out.</li> <li>- Why does this stand out?</li> </ul>
	How would you describe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In thinking about this, can you tell</li> </ul>

	your relationship with the local community?	me about anything you are particularly proud about? -Any tensions?
	In what way or how do you envision or see this organization's role within the world?	- What sorts of impacts or influences might this organization have beyond the local community? - What sorts of issues or broader problems might this organization be confronting?
Conclusion	Is there anything else you would like to add or that you think we should have talked about?	
	I would like to interview some of your customers for this project.	- Would you be willing to distribute my contact information so that they can get in touch with me if they are interested?

## **Appendix B.**

### **The 'Big 5'**

The 'big 5' consists of:

1. HarperCollins Publishers LLC; which is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, and boasts a 2015 revenue of \$8.6 billion (News Corp 2015).
2. Penguin Random House; which is 53% owned by Bertelsmann, a German multinational mass media corporation with a 2014 revenue of €16.7 billion (Bertelsmann 2015), and 47% owned by Pearson PLC, a British multinational publishing and education company with 2014 assets totalling over £11 million (Pearson 2015).
3. Simon & Schuster; a division of CBS Corporation, run by media magnet Sumner Murray Redstone, and multimillionaire Leslie Moonves. Reported a 2013 revenue of \$15.2 billion (CBS 2014).
4. Hachette Book Group (HBG); a publishing conglomerate that includes Time Warner Book Group and Disney's Hyperion Books. HBG is an entirely owned subsidiary of the Lagardère Group, a French multinational media conglomerate with a reported 2014 revenue of €7.17 billion (Lagardère 2014).
5. Macmillan Publishers; owned by the Holtzbrinck Publishing Group (HPG), who recently entered into a merger in 2015 with BC Partners, a London based multinational private equity firm which specializes in acquisition financing and buyouts. HPG reported a 2014 revenue of €1.7billion (Publisher Weekly 2015).