On the Dichotomy of Corporate vs. Alternative Journalism:
OWS as Constructed by Echo of Moscow

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This article argues that we need to be more cautious with the dichotomy between "corporate" and "alternative" media widely accepted within critical media studies. This division can be misleading, especially if applied to non-Western societies. I explicate my argument using the case study of the Russian alternative radio station, *Echo of Moscow*, and analyzing its coverage of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protests. My research is based on a qualitative content analysis of 73 hard news pieces on OWS that *Echo of Moscow* released from September 17 to November 18, 2011. The results of my analysis show that *Echo*'s framing of the OWS was typical "protest paradigm" framing, which corporate media usually employ when covering social protests.

Keywords: alternative media, social movements, framing, protest paradigm, public sphere, Occupy Wall Street, Russia, Echo of Moscow

It is widely recognized that in order to contribute to a more democratic society and world, social activists need rigorous critiques of corporate media networks and their nexuses with political-economic power. Indeed, it is difficult to argue against the claim that achieving economic justice, equality, and peace requires getting rid of all forms of censorship, systematic information exclusion, and propaganda. In other words, it is difficult to contest a normative democratic belief that to achieve social justice, we need to achieve a democratic condition in which nobody's opinion is excluded and no aspect of reality is hidden from public view.

However, for such a democratic condition to be achieved, it is equally important to realize that corporate media networks are not the only entities that suffer from censorship, systematic information exclusion, and propaganda. Framing their political messages strategically, alternative media striving for democracy can also mislead their publics through willful omissions, mistakes, errors, and/or exaggerations. They can fall prey to the dogmatism of counter-expertise, often with good political intentions. As a result, the mass public may remain misinformed, disoriented, and unable to think critically about what is going on. That is why the framing activities of social movements should be in the focus of communication research along with similar activities by corporate actors.

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Date submitted: 2014–01–30

In this article, I examine how Echo of Moscow (hereafter Echo)—a Russian independent radio station famous for its struggle against Putin's authoritarianism—framed the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protests for its listeners and website readers, employing the so-called "protest paradigm" that diminishes protesters and delegitimizes their demands. I discuss this framing from the perspective of Christian Fuchs's (2010) theory of alternative media as critical media, which stresses the importance of critical media's incorporation into the global network of anti-corporate movements. I also refer to Chantal Mouffe's theorizing on agonistic pluralism that warns against ideological closures in the name of democracy. In what follows, I discuss (1) Fuchs's and Mouffe's theories, highlighting their ideas related to anti-neoliberal and anti-corporate democratic struggles, (2) OWS as a movement attempting to challenge the neoliberal status quo, (3) Echo's presentation of OWS as a violator of public order (the employment of the "protest paradigm"), and (4) Echo's reasons for such negative framing and its implications for global anti-neoliberal and anti-corporate social movements.

Alternative Media as Critical Media

In his theory on alternative media as critical media, Christian Fuchs (2010) argues that, in order to be critical, alternative media should possess five qualities. First, they should demonstrate negation of negation at the content level: deconstructing dominant ideologies and showing "potential counter-tendencies and alternative modes of development." Second, they should demonstrate negation of negation at the form level: stirring up human imagination so that "suppressed possibilities of development can potentially be imagined." Third, critical media should display dialectical realism at the content level: to "uncover and reveal the essence behind existence that is ideologically distorted," employing "complex dynamic thinking, realism, an analysis of real possibilities and a dialectic of pessimism and optimism." Fourth, critical media should perform dialectical realism at the level of form involving "rupture, change, non-identity, dynamics, and the unexpected." And, finally, critical media should express "the interests of the dominated at the content level," and "in one or the other respect take the standpoint of the oppressed or exploited classes" (pp. 181–182).

Fuchs also asserts that, because of the recent rise of social-economic inequality on a global level, we need to expand the frame of reference for democratic struggle—from the local to the global and from the specific to the general. According to Fuchs, "The anti-corporate movement and the movement for democratic globalization constitute a movement of movements" (p. 185). By questioning corporate domination and unifying a multitude of particular struggles, the globalized anti-corporate movement targets the core of the global system of social injustice and mobilizes otherwise isolated global resources to fight against it.

Such a globalized frame of reference with an emphasis on anti-corporate struggle implies that critical alternative media should possess some additional characteristics as well:

1.   Be in opposition to mainstream global media controlled by corporations;

2.   Be incorporated into the global network of alternative public spheres, the totality of which comprises the global alternative (anti-corporate) public sphere;

3.   Through incorporation into the global alternative public sphere, be part of a global community of those fighting for democracy and social justice against political and economic inequality and exploitation.

In other words, critical alternative media should be seen as serving a global community of those striving for democratization; they should operate as nodes within the global democratic networks as opposed to the global networks of corporate forces.

The global dimension of critical alternative media is also important in another crucial aspect: the above-mentioned potential for critical media to stir up human imagination so that "suppressed possibilities of development can potentially be imagined" (Fuchs, 2010, p. 181)—to disrupt ideological closures and thus open the possibility for critical judgment. It is this potential that allows critical alternative media to present democracy not as a closed set of canons but as a project of open possibilities: unexpected demands, unprecedented challenges, unforeseeable articulations, and audacious decisions. In order to realize this potential, critical alternative media need to "transcend their social context" (Fuchs, 2010, p. 188) and subvert everyday experience by opening themselves up to the global horizons of an unrestricted social imaginary.

Such a conceptualization of critical alternative media as media with unrestricted social imaginary of a global scope is in line with the conceptualization of democracy in radical terms elaborated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) and further developed by Mouffe (2009). Emphasizing the importance for democracy of "a vibrant clash of democratic political positions" (p. 104), Mouffe warns against what she calls the "closure of the democratic space" (p. 77) and advocates its radical openness. "One should realize," Mouffe argues, "that a lack of democratic contestation over real political alternatives leads to antagonisms manifesting themselves under forms that undermine the very basis of the democratic public sphere" (pp. 114–115). In contrast, the radical openness of democratic space, in Mouffe's view, will lead to recognizing unknown or suppressed possibilities, such as the existence of "other just political forms of society," other than neoliberal (p. 62).

Insisting on the necessity of "drawing new political frontiers capable of giving a real impulse to democracy" (p. 118), Mouffe argues that "one of the crucial stakes for left democratic politics is to begin providing an alternative to neo-liberalism" (p. 118). "It is only by opposing to the power of transnational capital another globalization, informed by a different political project," Mouffe asserts, "that we could have a chance to resist neoliberalism successfully and to instigate a new hegemony" (p. 120). Mouffe also believes that in times of globalization, the taming of social injustice cannot be realized at the level of the nation-state.

Informed by the theories of Mouffe and Fuchs, this article conceptualizes democracy in radically open terms that envisage public spheres to be spaces of democratic contestation, dissent, and disagreement where no political alternatives are hidden from the public view. The term "public sphere" is used in plural here to underline its networked nature in respect to a globalized world characterized by "the development of a complex mosaic of differently sized, overlapping, and interconnected public spheres" (Keane, 1995, p. 8). It is this global network of radically open discursive spaces that provides resources

for ideological liberation through reconsideration of "common-sense" assumptions and shattering of previously unshakable beliefs.

One such assumption is that globalization is imagined exclusively as a product of the information revolution—an outlook depriving globalization of its political dimension and presenting it as a historical necessity or a fate to which humankind has to submit. "This type of argument takes for granted the ideological terrain which has been established as a result of years of neo-liberal hegemony and transforms what is a circumstantial state of affairs into a historical necessity" (Mouffe, 2009, p. 119). In order to imagine an alternative, more just and inclusive, project of globalization, the neoliberal hegemony—which gains its strength from the mythology of historical fate—needs to be deconstructed. It has to be shown that neoliberalism, with its "advocacy of free, unfettered competitive markets" and lack of concern "about the inefficiencies and concentrations of power within large corporations" (Bockman, 2011, p. 4), is a political project of unprecedented scale to secure the power of global economic elites and transnational corporations (Harvey, 2005).

It is from this perspective that the OWS protest—however contradictory and ineffective in the eyes of some observers (see, for example, Hedges, 2012)—can be understood as an attempt to challenge the neoliberal status quo by stirring up imagination and opening discursive spaces for the most radical of alternative visions of globalization. In what follows, I explicate my point in more detail.

OWS Protest: Global and Nonviolent

As is well known, the OWS protest started on September 17, 2011, in a private park in New York close to Manhattan's financial district. As Manuel Castells (2012) maintains, the protest was a mobilization "against the system of economic tyranny in a nonviolent manner" (p. 162). There are two key words in Castells' definition that are important for understanding the OWS movement. The *system* points to a global dimension, since the contemporary system of "economic tyranny," being coextensive with the system of financial capitalism, stretches far beyond national borders. *Nonviolent* indicates the fact that—despite their indignation—the protesters shared the dominant Western democratic political culture, which values nonviolence and stresses the importance of people's self-governance. As my review of the scholarship on OWS shows, the global dimension and non-violence of the movement were its two most important aspects.

Global dimension. The global frame of reference for OWS is important for several reasons. First, this frame shows that the movement did not come out of nowhere: "It has a prehistory in the alter-globalization protests, the World Social Forum, transnational solidarity movements, and associated activism around the globe" (Weber 2013, p. 125). Second, by establishing bridges between OWS and other protests against social injustice, the frame of global reference unites and provides inspiration: "When people feel solidarity, the feeling, however abstract, however exaggerated, however misleading in some 'objective' sense, becomes, up to a point, a social fact—a cascade of inspiration" (Gitlin, 2013, p. 39). The perception that people everywhere are abused for similar structural reasons adds weight and significance to the protests.

Third, the expanded frame of reference for the OWS protests helps to show that blaming national governments for mismanaging financial crises can be misleading. Such localized tactics can draw attention away from the fact that, by sharing state sovereignty with supra-national institutions such as NAFTA, the WTO, or the EU, national governments lose control over situations within their national borders (Habermas, 2001). A broader frame of reference for the OWS protests is important if we want to reveal connections between the unprecedented growth in social inequality throughout the world and the consolidation of global financial resources into the hands of fewer and more powerful multinational powers (Castells, 2010; Harvey, 2005). Such an expanded frame allows the protesters to be understood not as a crazy mob but as people who challenge the inviolability of the global neoliberal order, who enact resistance, and who openly articulate the common source of oppression. Unlike previous European protests that generally did not target global financial systems but national governments failing to manage financial crises, OWS "shifted the focus. And while one can say many things about the ideological orientation of movement this basic matter of framing was crucial" (Calhoun, 2013). From this perspective, the symbolism of the "occupation" becomes obvious: the occupation of the key node of global financial domination.

Finally, the global frame of reference for OWS protests enables a focus on the lack of public accountability and democratic surveillance over the activities of global economic and financial powers that control people's lives. It shows the nature of global transformations that undermine even further the system of democratic governance, which has always suffered from the systematic exclusion of underprivileged populations and the favoring of those who possess power. Seen this way, the OWS movement appears as an attempt to imagine new global democratic governance—inclusive, attentive to people's concerns, and freed from the power of money. As Castells (2012) maintains, "From its onset, the Occupy movement experimented with new forms of organization, deliberation and decision-making as a way of learning, by doing, what real democracy is" (p. 178). In Castells' view, for OWS protesters, this "real" democracy was not a formal democracy of rigid and thus dead rules. It was an experiment of living democracy connected with a historical tradition of popular gatherings both in Europe and the United States.

Nonviolence. The orientation of the OWS movement toward genuine democratic self-governance explains the importance of nonviolent methods of protest for OWS activists. As Calhoun (2013) maintains, this theme is central to OWS with its claim that the existing system of government is illegitimate because elite interests have captured it. According to Calhoun, through orderly marches and other organized activities, protestors sought to convey that they were not a violent and disorderly mob:

> In Tahrir Square protestors made a point of cleaning up after collective action. In Beijing in 1989 arranging tents in neat rows was a symbolic demonstration of the capacity of "the people" to govern themselves. And so it was in Zucotti Park—though not of course with perfect success. (Calhoun, 2013, p. 6)

Castells agrees and also notes that most of the time the OWS protesters were "boring" because violent actions were rare exceptions rather than a norm:

> In the large occupations, daily life was organized with great care. Tents were set up, then toilets, kitchens, daycare centers, children's play spaces, a community garden, a people's library, and Occupy University where lecturers were invited to address the occupiers, (Castells, 2012, p. 170)

It is because of their peaceful orientation and the ability to maintain order that the protesters were able to make a point—that citizens of a democratic society have the right to self-organization and self-governance. People have a right to occupy public spaces in order to discuss their common grievances and work out possible decisions on how to improve the conditions of their communal life. Because of their ability to make this point, the protesters managed to capture mainstream political discourse and "to push into mainstream public agenda the issue of rampant social inequality" (Calhoun, 2013, p. 35) and "the question of whether actual democratic institutions are really working" (Calhoun, 2013, p. 38). The movement sparked "radical imagination, giving many people renewed optimism about the possibility of progressive change" (Hayduk, 2013, p. 43). OWS was able to change public attitude: Published on November 9, 2011, a *New York Times/CBS News* poll found that "almost half of the public thinks the sentiments at the root of the movement generally reflect the views of most Americans" (*The New York Times*, 2011).

This shift in public opinion was partly associated with a boost in positive coverage in corporate media, noted by some observers. According to Mark Bray, an OWS activist, "the level of positive media coverage that Occupy has received is unprecedented in my twelve years of political organizing" (2012, p. 5). However, as Bray also makes clear, the "increased level of positive coverage" was not equal to understanding. "As I suspected," Bray maintains, "once the apparently positive mainstream coverage emerged, its moderate liberal orientation revealed an anti-democratic undercurrent whose implicit function has been to circumscribe Occupy within establishment politics" (2012, p. 6). This "anti-democratic undercurrent," according to Bray, manifested itself in paternalistic advice to translate emotional outbursts into the actions of "policy intellectuals" and professional politicians. Here, Bray makes an interesting observation:

> Whereas conservative commentators are fundamentally reluctant to acknowledge the possibility that beneficial social change could spring from protest movements, liberal commentators often attempt to use the political cache they accumulate from legitimising the notion of protest in order to domesticate it. (pp. 6–7)

Calling this attitude "the silencing discourse of expertise," Bray notes that it significantly narrows the contours of what is considered "legitimate" political action (2012, p. 8). Even acknowledging that the economy is built for the benefit of the one percent, liberal mainstream journalists were unable to conceive that the solution could possibly come directly from the ninety-nine percent. Bray's observation is in line with the claims of other critical thinkers who argue that in the corporate media environment even "liberal" voices defend the status quo, while truly alternative outlooks are excluded.

Protest Paradigm as a Manifestation of Corporate Logic

Mass communication research provides a lot of evidence to argue that mainstream corporate media often diminish, marginalize, and delegitimize social movements for democratic change and their protests against political, social, and economic systems of domination. By focusing on protesters' appearances rather than their issues, emphasizing protesters' violent actions rather than their social criticism, pitting them against the police rather than their chosen targets, and downplaying their effectiveness, media employ the so-called "protest paradigm" of framing social movements, which leads to support of the status quo (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

As media experimental research shows, media framing can produce significant effects on audience perceptions. Media framing of poverty in terms of personal responsibility may lead to blaming the individual rather than the system of social relations; if presented in terms of economic conditions and policies, the issue of poverty may be evaluated by audiences in broader socioeconomic terms (Iyengar, 1991). Media research also shows that specific framing may influence audience judgments about social activists and the efficacy of their struggles and affect audience perceptions of the legitimacy of the protest (McLeod & Hertog, 1992).

The employment of the protest paradigm by media workers can be conditioned by multiple factors that fall into several basic categories: the biases of individual journalists; professional conventions, practices, and ideologies; organizational imperatives; economic ties; sociocultural worldviews; and hegemonic ideology (McLeod & Detenber, 1999). However, because corporate media are embedded within the structures of power, many critical thinkers tend to explain the employment of the protest paradigm in terms of conscious editorial decisions rather than as unconscious ideological or cultural preferences (Bennett et al., 2004; Bagdikian 2004 Herman & Chomsky, 1988). From this critical perspective, corporate media—by systematically marginalizing, delegitimizing, and excluding truly critical voices—reduce the range of debate, squeezing it into a narrow "liberals vs. conservatives" frame from which truly critical voices are excluded (McChesney, 2011). This outlook is supported by numerous contemporary empirical studies (Boykoff & Laschever 2011; Boyle, McCluskey, McLeod, & Stein, 2005; Weaver & Scacco, 2013).

As a result, the abridged public sphere loses its capacity to provide space for all-inclusive and open discussions on matters of public interest. By being attentive to elitist concerns and deaf to demands of marginalized populations, mainstream corporate media do not serve as media of a democratic public sphere as discussed at the beginning of this paper; rather, they corrupt the very idea of it. Because this anti-democratic essence of corporate media is embedded into the system of power and domination, the existence of critical alternative media is vitally important. As I have already discussed, such media create competing public spheres where the seeds of discontent can give growth to alternative ways of seeing the world and solving its problems.

However, as the following sections of this paper show, not all alternative media can cope with this task. Taking a critical stance towards local authorities and struggling against localized abuses of power, some of them may perform uncritically in systematical way in respect to structural injustices

situated in the global neoliberal order: when reporting global events, they align themselves not with alternative media criticizing neoliberalism but with corporate media that are an integral part of the global neoliberal system.

Echo of Moscow: "An Echo in the Dark"

Since Gorbachev's *perestroika*, Echo has been seen as a flagship of independent quality journalism in Russia. "Echo in the dark"—this is how David Remnick from the *New Yorker* refers to Echo, pointing out that "in the authoritarian ecosystem of Vladimir Putin, Echo of Moscow is one of the last of an endangered species, a dodo that still roams the earth" (2008). In the eyes of Remnick and numerous other observers, what makes Echo "the last of an endangered species" is its editorial independence and history of antagonistic relations with Kremlin rulers. Alexei Venediktov, Echo's editor-in-chief, is famous for his confrontations with Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, two presidents of post-Soviet Russia. In both cases, the essence of the argument was the right and obligation of Echo to perform its journalistic duties impartially and objectively, without taking the Kremlin's side.

In 1993, to Yeltsin's resentment, Echo aired an anti-Kremlin tirade by Aleksandr Rutskoi, leader of an oppositional coalition. In 2011, Echo offended Putin by providing extensive coverage of mass anti-Putin protests that came as a result of "massive fraud and ballot box stuffing" during Russia's parliamentary elections (Loiko, 2012). The tension between the radio station and the Kremlin reached its peak at one of Putin's regular meetings with editors-in-chief of leading media, in which the president of Russia told Venediktov: "You pour diarrhoea over me day and night" (BBC, 2012). Putin also accused Echo of serving the interests of foreign states.

The deterioration of the relationship with the president of Russia was accompanied by attacks from unknown hackers who tried to block Echo's website. According to a report from *Reporters Without Borders*, the wave of cyber-attacks, which started right at the beginning of the oppositional protests, "paralyzed sites critical of the government before and during the vote, apparently to silence the dissidents" (Reporters Without Borders, 2013). Echo was one of the 13 "dissident" sites listed in this report.

According to many observers, Echo's editorial independence is unique for Putin's Russia. This independence appears paradoxical when one considers that Echo is owned by *Gazprom*, an energy conglomerate that is one of the bases of the Kremlin's economic and political power (Kiria, 2012). For Benjamin Bidder, a *Spiegel Online* correspondent, there are at least two major explanations for this phenomenon: "The Kremlin can point to Echo whenever countries in the West criticize press freedoms in Russia. Second, even as the station is held in high regard by the country's intelligentsia, it has little influence over the voting masses" (Bidder, 2012). Scott Shane (2012) from *The New York Times* agrees: "Mr. Putin devised a new model of media management…providing a steam valve to the intelligentsia and a display of tolerance to foreign critics."

This outlook is also supported by academicians. "Some media outlets [in Russia] may be more critical, as they have a news agenda that differs from that of the official media. Such media serve the informational needs of a very narrow group of socially active people," maintains Ilya Kiria, a professor in Moscow's Higher School of Economics, who includes Echo on a list of media that serve the needs of "socially active people" (2012, p. 456). His observation is in line with the findings of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, which researches the role of the Internet in Russian society. According to this study, Russian bloggers—one of the most politically active populations within Russian society—"demonstrate a slight preference for more independent, foreign, and even oppositional news sources than Russian news sources overall. *Echo Mosckvy* [Echo of Moscow] for instance is ranked 6th among bloggers and 20th among Internet users" (Etling et al., 2010, p. 29).

As evidenced from this brief review, Echo enjoys the reputation of a medium that acts as an important node in a network of communication among socially active publics striving for the democratization of Russian society. "Echo of Moscow," Venediktov boasts, is "a radio of influence, rather than a mass radio station…" (Remnick, 2008). Echo thus prides itself on being an alternative news outlet that serves as an important resource for the Russian democratic movement. In the eyes of thousands, Echo's leading commentators are reputable experts on the issues of democratization and political liberalism; Echo is also famous for providing a public platform for oppositional leaders and activists for democratization.

However, as the next section demonstrates, despite its reputation as an important node within the network of those struggling for democracy, Echo did not extend a hand of solidarity to their international partners in democratic struggles. In fact, Echo's framing of the OWS was typical "protest paradigm" framing that corporate media usually employ when covering social protests (as discussed in the previous section).

Echo's Framing of OWS

Framing analysis. In total, from September 17, 2011 (the first day of the occupation), to November 18, 2011 (three days after the protesters were forced out of Zuccotti Park), Echo aired 73 hard news pieces on OWS protests. My research was based on a content analysis of the entire universe of these 73 news pieces released within the indicated 63-day period. Only hard news stories were included in my study; no sampling was involved. The data for the research were collected from the Internet site of Echo of Moscow (echo.msk.ru). The unit of analysis was a news story.

In my framing analysis of Echo's coverage of OWS protests, I used Gamson and Modigliani's (1987) conception of the media frame as "a central organizing idea or story line" (p. 143) that provides meaning to phenomena or events. I also followed Entman's (1993) elaboration, according to which this story line should promote particular problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations. In order to identify the recurrent themes or story lines of the news pieces, I sorted articles according to the following criteria: How is the problem defined? What is the main problematic issue? Who interferes with its solution (villains)? Who helps to solve it (heroes)? What should be done to improve the situation?

Because each story could contain more than one frame, every theme in a story was coded as either *dominant* or *secondary*. The dominant frame was the single main theme of the story, while secondary frames were identified as supplementary ideas. Most often, secondary frames or themes bolstered the main frame. Stories could have one dominant and several secondary frames.

The result of this qualitative analysis was a classification system with two dominant story lines; dominant frames were coded as "Social Justice," "Disorder," or "Other." The coding key for these frames is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding Key: Dominant Frames for Reference to OWS Protests.

#	Frames	Description of Frames
1	Social Justice	The protest is presented as: • Mobilization against social injustice in a nonviolent manner • Movement to genuine democratic self-governance
2	Disorder	The focus is on: • Protesters' appearances rather than their issues • Protesters' violent actions rather than their social criticism • Protesters' clashes with police rather than their disputes with opponents
3	Other	• The focus is not on the protests per se but on some other events unfolding against the background of OWS protests

Secondary frames of reference for the protests were also identified through the qualitative content analysis of the news pieces. These story lines fell into the following categories: "Domestic Politics," "Corporate Greed," "The Rich vs. the Poor," "U.S. Imperialism," and "Other." Table 2 presents the coding key to these frames.

Table 2. Coding Key: Secondary Frames of Reference for Reference to OWS Protests.

#	Frames	Description of Frames
1	Domestic Politics	The following sources of the deteriorating economic situation are identified: • National governments • National political parties
2	Corporate Greed	• Corporations, banks, and other business and financial institutions are identified as parties at fault for deteriorating economic conditions, but • No explanation is given on how exactly these institutions contributed to the deterioration of the economic condition; and • No structural/systemic reasons for social injustice are identified.
3	The Rich vs. the Poor	• Rich people in general are said to be responsible for the worsening economic situation, but • No explanation is given for *why* the rich are to blame; and • No structural/systemic reasons for social injustice are considered.
4	U.S. Imperialism	• U.S. global dominance is mentioned as a reason for increasing social inequality globally, but • No explanation is given as to how exactly the U.S. contributed to global injustice; and • No connection between U.S. imperialism and the global neoliberal system of inequality is presented
5	Other	• The reasons behind OWS protests fail to be clearly outlined; • No parties at fault for the deteriorating economic condition are mentioned.

Dominant Framing. The results of my research show that Echo depicted OWS protesters mainly as violators of public order. As Table 3 shows, out of 73 news pieces that Echo devoted to OWS world protests, 44 (60%) framed the protesters within the context of public disorder.

Table 3. Framing: Dominant Frames of Reference for OWS Protests Employed by Echo of Moscow.

Social Justice	19 (26%)
Disorder	44 (60%)
Other	10 (14%)

N=73 (100%)

The main focus of the "public disorder" stories was clashes with police and the arrests of the protesters because of their attempts to undermine the normality of city life: to "paralyze," "crowd," "litter," "block," "attack," and so forth. Here are some examples:

> Demonstrators are accused of hindering transport traffic, violating public order, and resisting arrest. One person is charged with attacking a policeman who, according to an official report, received a shoulder injury. (Echo, 2011a)

> "People need to work and attend schools!" said New York mayor Michael Bloomberg. He could not restrain his indignation: "These protesters drum at night and urinate in the street!" (Echo, 2011m)

> One of the participants of the movement "Occupy Vancouver" died in the tent camp in the center of the city. Presumably, the death came as a result of drug overdosing. (Echo, 2011o)

Focusing on the disruption of "normal life" and failing to address deep structural reasons for the protests, Echo failed to present the protesters as legitimate representatives of their communities who raised important issues central to democratic self-governance. By matching OWS with the disruption of "public order," Echo not only juxtaposed the protesters with "normal people" (represented by city mayors and other officials) but also challenged the OWS's attempt to present itself as a movement of responsible citizens capable of governing themselves. Indeed, none of Echo's news pieces on the protest reported on the attempts of the protesters to organize life in their "occupied" public spaces: there was no report on community gardens, daycare centers, and people's libraries. This part of the story went unnoticed by Echo's editors.

Secondary Framing. Presenting the U.S. protests to its readers, Echo mentioned several major parties at fault for the deteriorating economic situation. Table 4 summarizes the findings.

Table 4. Secondary Frames of Reference for OWS
Protests Employed by Echo of Moscow.

Domestic Politics	19 (26%)
Corporate Greed	37 (51%)
The Rich vs. the Poor	8 (10%)
U.S. Imperialism	4 (6%)
Other	6 (7%)

N=73 (100%)

Here are some examples showing how the responsibility was attributed:

- National governments and political parties (26% of Echo's stories):
  The activists of Occupy Wall Street are dissatisfied with the actions of the U.S. government that helped the biggest American banks get through the financial crisis with taxpayer money from the U.S. federal budget. (Echo, 2011p)

  Protesters are dissatisfied with Republicans who traditionally defend the interests of the rich. (Echo, 2011b)

- Banks and corporations (51% of Echo's stories):
  …A protest of those who are dissatisfied with the greed of American corporations that do not want to pay attention to the welfare of the nation. (Echo, 2011d)

  People protest… against large-scale corporations and their managers who go on making big money while the living standards of the majority of Americans do not improve. (Echo, 2011d)

- The rich in general (10% of Echo's stories):
  The activists of the movement 'Occupy Wall Street' marched against millionaires. Hundreds of the demonstrators flooded Fifth Avenue where the houses of the richest Americans are located. (Echo, 2011c)

  This is an international day of solidarity against the corruption of the richest 1%. (Echo, 2011f)

- And, finally, 7% of Echo's articles *failed to clearly identify* the reasons behind OWS protests and their meaning. Here are examples from two such news pieces:

  An American teacher decides to follow the example of the activists of "Occupy Wall Street" and suggests occupying Tundra. The woman, who works at Alaska

> University, posts solo pickets in the middle of Tundra. It is difficult to say why she is doing this. (Echo, 2011h)
>
> A new film about Batman is going to be shot against the background of the protests of Occupy Wall Street…The creators of the movie note that the imagined city where all Batmans act ideally matches New York, while anti-globalization protesters are good decorations for the scenes of unrest and disturbances… (Echo, 2011l)

Associating the protests with marginality, abnormality, and illusion, the latter category of stories only accentuated what was already evident in other news pieces: none of Echo's news constructions of the OWS offered a meaningful explanation as to what was going on in the streets of New York and other cities in the U.S. and throughout the world.

None of Echo's articles pointed to the neoliberal essence of contemporary capitalism as a source of people's misfortunes. Pointing to the responsibility of national political parties or national governments in 19 news pieces, Echo diverted the attention of its listeners and readers from deeper structural causes for the deterioration of the living conditions of people within the U.S. and across the world. Although banks and corporations were indicated as the sources of the deteriorated economic situation in 37 news pieces, these stories failed to point out any systematic reasons why the protesters occupied Wall Street; instead, they tended to frame the responsibility of banks and corporations in vague terms of "greed," "avarice," and "avidity." Using these words employed by the protesters themselves, Echo news did not make an attempt to explain to their listeners the actual meanings.

For example, Echo never mentioned that "the share of U.S. income of the top 1 percent of Americans jumped from 9 percent in 1976 to 23.5 percent in 2007" or that "the pay of a CEO was 50 times higher than that of the average worker in 1980, and 350 times more in 2010" (Castells, 2012, p. 157). Without these or similar figures on the growth of social inequality and its connection to the rise of the neoliberal global order, the meanings of *greediness*, *avarice*, and *avidity* lose their socio-economic dimension and move into the spheres of psychology or morality. But psychological disorders or moral degradations of certain corporate managers do not imply the sickness of the entire corporate system; isolated cases of malady do not presuppose the necessity of systemic treatment.

In order to see *systemic* reasons for the deterioration of the economic situation, Echo should have deflected its attention from separate corporations and considered the bigger picture of why these different corporations and their managers were "greedy" in a similar fashion: What were the common reasons that stimulated their greed and allowed it to flourish at the expense of the millions? Only through such an expanded outlook could Echo have shown that the root of many, ostensibly local, American injustices is in the very system of neoliberal capitalism—which does not respect borders and brings austerity to people's lives regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, or skin color.

Echo's coverage failed to point out this global dimension of the OWS protests, which is so important for understanding the movement. Even in its reports on international manifestations that

followed the New York protests, Echo did not discuss their common roots while focusing on the responsibility of separate national governments and states. Here are some typical examples:

> Israel: "Protesters demanded introducing amendments to the budget of the next year, which would make provisions for social expenditures." (Echo, 2011n)

> The Philippines: "In Manila, demonstrators gathered in front of the U.S. embassy with placards "Down with American imperialism!" and "The Philippines is not for sale!" (Echo, 2011g)

According to Echo's coverage, these protests were connected not by the theme of the neoliberal roots of global injustice, but—again—by the motif of corporate greed:

> The most massive demonstrations under the conditional name "Occupy Wall Street" took place this Saturday in Italy, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. The protesters are against unemployment and governmental financial policies calling them "financial terrorism." Saturday was christened to be an "international day of solidarity against greed and corruption." (Echo, 2011n)

None of Echo's stories made an attempt to explain what exactly the term "financial terrorism" meant or how the financial policies of different state governments could be united under this "terroristic" umbrella. Nor did any of Echo's stories explain how the greed of corporations was connected to governmental policies. The word "corruption" hinted at some unequivocal relations between governments and corporations; however, by implying that the problem was in separate (although omnipresent) cases of governmental misconduct, this frame distracted attention from another layer of the problem—the neoliberal roots of the radical non-transparency, non-accountability, and non-democracy that characterize the latest socio-economic transformations on a global scale.

By failing to address the most important aspect of OWS's global dimension—its mobilization against the neoliberal order of things—Echo failed to support the OWS struggle for a global democracy in which economic decisions that influence the majority of people's lives would be accountable to the majority's will and best interests. By employing localized and personalized frames of reference for the protests, Echo reproduced "protest paradigm" framing, such as is usually employed by mainstream Western media embedded within the system of global corporate relations.

Discussion

Alternative, But not Anti-Corporate?

As my analysis shows, despite its image as a critical alternative radio station, Echo covered OWS protests by employing the "protest paradigm," which is typically used by global corporate media. It emphasized protesters' violent actions rather than their social criticism and downplayed protesters'

effectiveness by narrowing the frame of reference to the OWS movement: from global to local, and from thematic to episodic.

This finding can be explained by the fact that in comparison with contemporary Russia, which has a reputation for not respecting political liberties, the West in general and the United States in particular may look like models of democracy, tolerance, and freedom of expression—at least, for those who struggle against Putin's authoritarianism. Comments that listeners of Echo left on its website support this suggestion. Here are some examples:

> What is the difference between the protests in New York and Moscow? A mayor there asks people to break up for just one day to clean the park! Can you imagine anything like that here? (Echo, 2011e)

> If they [protesters] tried to live like we do, their own life would appear to them as heaven. (Echo, 2011i)

> It is necessary to organize for the protesters an excursion over to Russia…Let them see and compare… (Echo, 2011j)

As my research shows, this vision of the West as a model of democracy is shared by many users of Echo's website who strive for Russia's democratization.

Such comments come as no surprise given that the West has traditionally served as a model for imitation and a source of inspiration for modernization endeavors in Russia and other post-Soviet states (Baysha, 2014a). The positive view of the Western system of governance is an important cultural resource exploited by leaders of the contemporary democratic movements in Russia and other post-Soviet states to mobilize their followers. In the eyes of many people striving for democratization, the West represents a societal condition that is much more just and humane than the system of social relations established in the post-Soviet cultural space. Strategically, for the purpose of mobilization, social movements for democracy in Russia need to keep this Western advantage in focus while washing out all complicating nuances.

The outcome looks paradoxical: a progressive medium that strives for democratization depicted OWS protesters as the disturbers of public order and failed to acknowledge their systemic concerns. Instead of supporting the OWS struggle for democracy, Echo echoed the most conservative global media voices who "focused on the scale of disruption, as well as issues of public order and security" (Weber, 2013, p. 24). Echo's online discussions abounded in similar representations of OWS protesters:

> The majority of the protesters are professional idlers, scoundrels, and drug addicts. (Echo, 2011f)

> Lumpens are raving. They are against reductions of social programs—the programs that
> allow them to dawdle…and demand other social goods that they do not deserve. (Echo,
> 2011i)

Many online commenters confessed that they "cannot possibly understand: What do they [protesters] want?" (Echo, 2011g). Given the abridged and distorted coverage of the OWS movement employed by Echo, this lack of understanding is not surprising.

An Isolated Case or a Trend?

On the one hand, this research, conceptualizing alternative media as nodes within global networks of resistance, confirms what is already well known: the identity of alternative media is highly elusive and does not allow for a strict dichotomy between the "alternative" and the "mainstream" (Bailey, 2007; Groshek & Han, 2011; Kim & Hamilton, 2006). As John Downing and his colleagues note, "everything, at some point, is alternative to something else" (Downing, Ford, & Stein, 2001, p. ix). Contemporary media research suggests that the identity of a medium and its positioning vis-à-vis other players within the journalistic and political fields are ultimately determined by constantly shifting sociocultural and political contexts.

It is this instability of the postmodern social matrix and the elusiveness of media identities stemming from it that make it possible for alternative media in some cases "to violently critique hegemony" and in other cases "to playfully use and abuse the dominant order" (Bailey et al., 2007, p. 28). According to Bailey and her colleagues, this interplay between critique and cooperation "does legitimize the utilization of the label of transhegemonic media." Transhegemonic media do cooperate with the market and the state for strategic and tactical purposes; however, they do not lose their autonomy completely and "can still be seen as potentially destabilizing" (Bailey et al., 2007, p. 28).

Though it may seem logical from the vantage point of rhizomatic imagination (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the "transhegemonic" condition of contemporary media may appear problematic, if evaluated in terms of the anti-corporate and anti-neoliberal struggle for global social justice conceptualized in radical terms. The state of radical non-fixation that manifests itself through heterogeneity, multiplicity, and the asignifying rupture of the rhizome is not the same as the state of radical non-fixation that is required by a pluralistic democracy open for clashes of different positions.

In Mouffe's view, celebrating *any* type of compromise, *any* type of deterritorialization, and *any* type re-signification (a "total pluralism," as Mouffe calls this) would be detrimental to democracy because it would lead to violence going unnoticed. Total pluralism in terms of the dissolution of boundaries and radical openness to all sorts of compromises leads to the impossibility of distinguishing "between differences that exist but should not exist and differences that do not exist but should exist" (Mouffe, 2009, p. 20). By making invisible the relations of power, this would prevent us from recognizing that some differences are constituted as relations of subjugation and must be therefore challenged.

Fuchs's ideas on alternative media as critical media, discussed in the introductory part of this paper, are in unison with Mouffe's position. By emphasizing the need for alternative critical media to avoid fixations in both their content and form, Fuchs argues that they should take an anti-corporate stand. In other words, Fuchs is in line with Mouffe's acknowledgment that only by coming to recognize the dialectical tension between openness and closure (inclusion and exclusion) as a central characteristic of the globalized condition can we cope with the challenges of neoliberal globalization. There are no hegemonic articulations without frontiers; similarly, there can be no struggle for global social justice against neoliberal hegemony without determining anti-neoliberal fronts.

By propagating the ideas of political liberalism and using them as a tool in their struggle against Putin's authoritarianism, Echo chose not to confuse its followers by discussing the negative aspects of economic liberalization or any aspects of political liberalism as a whole. By closing its discourse in such a manner, Echo drew a frontier separating it not from corporate institutions but from those challenging neoliberal hegemony. What is more important, Echo's choice to close the democratic space appears not to be occasional, but systematic. As I have previously noted, the pro-Western stance it demonstrates ("the West" being represented here by the institutions challenged by OWS demonstrators) seems to be a condition of its existence (Baysha, 2014b). This respectable West—with its belief in liberal political institutions and traditional neglect of those whom these institutions silence and exclude—inspires and supports Echo's own democratic struggles. The articles about Echo from Western media that I cite in this paper illustrate Echo's integration into the network of global freedom fighters that do not necessarily align themselves with the radical challengers of neoliberalism.

There is an important implication suggested by this finding. The structural character of the closure of Echo's discourse towards radical ideas that challenge the neoliberal status-quo indicates that this problem may not be specifically Russian. It is quite possible that other alternative media within totalitarian or authoritarian contexts of the non-Western world may also refrain from criticizing the foundations of the global neoliberal order and stress its positive rather than negative aspects—democratic systems of government that, despite all their imperfections, still serve as normative yardsticks for many democratic fighters within non-Western milieus.

While it is impossible to make any far-reaching conclusions drawing on one case study from a specific sociocultural milieu, it is quite possible that the problem brought forth by this study is important and deserves investigative attention. If the findings of this research are not an isolated case, critical alternative media, as defined by Fuchs, will find themselves bounded within the tiny community of Western radical thinkers whose fight for democracy is anti-neoliberal and anti-corporate in its essence. What are the prospects of a global-scale democratic struggle if it is not supported by a global coalition of democratic forces? Are the frontiers between "us" (critical alternative media as defined by Fuchs) vs. "them" (mainstream/corporate outlets) too rigid? Should we reserve more space for "softening the antagonistic relationships" and destabilizing of "rigidities and certainties," as the rhizomatic imaginary prescribes (Bailey et al., 2007, p. 28)? Or should we stand for some unshakable boundaries that "cannot be eliminated from a radical politics aiming at the democratization of society" (Mouffe, 2009, pp. 111–112)?

Far from being new, these questions gain new relevance in times of permanent deterritorialization. When considering them, we should keep in mind that established ideological boundaries block the way not only for opportunistic coalitions but also for broader democratic unions. On the other hand, we should also remember that the "softening the antagonistic relationship" accomplished by alternative media "for reasons of survival" (Bailey et al., 2007, p. 28) may actually kill alternative outlooks by silencing or distorting them. This seems to be exactly what has happened with Echo's framing of OWS. Is this indeed an isolated case? This question has yet to be answered.

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