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Resisting Via Hybrid Spaces: The Cascade Effect of a Workplace Struggle Against Neoliberal Hegemony

Florence Palpacuer[1] **and Amélie Seignour**[1]

Abstract

This article adopts a neo-Gramscian perspective to analyze an impactful case of workers' resistance escalating into civil society and the state, over the course of a social crisis triggered by employee suicides at the main French telecom firm in 2009 to 2010. On the basis of press data and interviews with key actors of the resistance, we produce a narrative of hegemonic transformation in three phases: (a) the rise of a new "hegemonic despotism" steering workers' resistance within the firm, (b) the emergence of a counter-hegemony reaching out to the broader civil society, and (c) hegemonic transformation via state intervention. We contribute to the theoretical understanding of resistance by highlighting the role of a "hybrid space" spanning the firm, civil society, and the state in this "cascade effect" of resistance. Hybrid spaces enable the sharing, development, and leverage of discursive and material resources across the three main spheres of neoliberal hegemony.

Keywords

downsizing/layoffs/restructuring, power and politics, organizational behavior

In the summer of 2009, a major media campaign was unleashed in France concerning a series of suicides committed by employees of the main French telecommunications operator. Headlines reported a suicide on 14 July—the 18th since early 2008—which the victim explicitly linked to growing managerial pressures at the company. The case took a broader political dimension when the government intervened in September 2009 to summon the top management of the corporation. Meanwhile, additional employee suicides continued to hit the news. A national debate developed from fall 2009 until spring 2010 on the causes and significance of these suicides, related to changing work conditions, management practices, and broader trends toward privatization and financialization in the national economy. The case stirred the vocal participation of many diverse civil society actors such as professional associations, labor unions, political parties, intellectuals, and religious organizations. This led to the launch of governmental plans, collective framework agreements on stress and violence at work, and a judicial investigation of the legal responsibility of the firm and its top managers. Such widespread media attention, controversies, and regulatory changes did not occur as a spontaneous reaction to the radical actions of individual employees. They resulted rather from the workers' organized resistance, which reached beyond the corporation with the objective of making the issues of work pressures and deteriorating social conditions within the firm visible, recognized, and acted upon at a broader level.

In this article, we ask how a workers' resistance movement could gain such a transformative capacity, escalating from the firm into civil society and the State so as to produce long-lasting changes in workplace practices and regulation across the country. We argue that the literature on resistance does not adequately deal with this question as it tends to focus either on the workplace or on civil society as the main locus of the struggle. As a result, it overlooks the processes through which resistance is able to span these different spaces to achieve systemic changes. To capture these understudied processes, we adopt a neo-Gramscian perspective that allows us to think of social transformation as occurring through what Gramsci (1971) sees as the three pillars of a social order or "hegemony," that is, the firm, civil society, and the State (Levy & Egan, 2003). Seen from this angle, hegemony is neither complete nor stable, but rather continuously challenged and transformed via "relations of force" mobilizing discursive, material, and organizational resources that we seek to analyze in our study of the resistance initiative.

We show how counter-hegemonic forces emerged and successfully opposed the neoliberal hegemony that materialized in the privatization, financialization, and heavy restructuring

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of the French telecommunications operator. Our results are presented in the form of a narrative (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, 2003) that renders the polyphonic and dialogic dimensions of the processes under study (Belova, King, & Sliwa, 2008; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). On the basis of in-depth interviews with key actors of the resistance, a wealth of secondary data, and the detailed reconstruction of the chronology of events that unfolded during the crisis, we produce a narrative of hegemonic transformation in three phases: (a) the rise of a new "hegemonic despotism" steering workers' resistance within the firm, (b) the emergence of a counter-hegemony reaching out to the broader civil society, and (c) hegemonic transformation via state intervention.

Using this approach, our contribution to the literature is twofold. First, our narrative enriches the literature on resistance by uncovering the "cascade effect" (Levy & Egan, 2003) through which workers' resistance can escalate to reach civil society and the state apparatus and produce hegemonic transformation in the country. Second, we contribute to neo-Gramscian studies on hegemonic transformation by showing the role of a "hybrid space" through which resisters produced this cascade effect. In our neo-Gramscian perspective, a "hybrid space" is formed of micro- and meso-organizational processes that enable resisters to share, develop, and leverage both discursive and material resources *across* the three main sites of hegemony, that is, the firm, civil society, and the State. Inspired by Moje et al.'s (2004) work in educational studies, this notion serves to capture the cross-institutional dynamics that give resistance the potential to become broadly transformative. The rest of the article is organized as follows. The first section places our work at the intersection of the literature on workplace and civil society struggles and discusses how the concept of hybrid space could bridge these two literatures in a neo-Gramscian perspective. The second section provides an explanation of our methodology. Empirical results unfold as a narrative of hegemonic transformation in the third section, followed by an exploration of the role of the hybrid space of resistance in this cascade effect. We discuss these results by elaborating on the capacity of hybrid spaces of resistance to induce systemic transformations in the contemporary hegemony, before offering a brief conclusion.

A Neo-Gramscian Reading of Resistance

Critical studies of resistance in organizations have emerged from the observation of social struggles at the workplace, most notably in the Marxist tradition of labor process theory. Resistance was understood as an attempt by workers to regain control and autonomy in the production process, against a background of inherent antagonism between labor and capital (Burawoy, 1979; Knights & Willmott, 1990). Various forms of resistance were studied, from collective upsurges and the rise of the labor movement to informal tactics to subvert managerial rules. However, the key tenets of labor process theory were criticized for offering an overdeterministic account of social struggles at the workplace. Some critics argued that the possibilities for workers' emancipation had been excessively downplayed since resistance ultimately sustained capitalist relations of domination, whereas others pointed out that more subjective forms of resistance had not been acknowledged (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; Mumby, 1997). An alternative line of research subsequently drew on the work of Foucault and others to explore the discursive construction of subjectivities at the workplace and the micro-politics through which employees might be able to resist managerially imposed subjectivities, including outright rejection, feigned acceptance, or pragmatic negotiation (Knights & MacCabe, 2000; Thomas & Davies, 2005). The ascendance of such "radical pluralism" was in turn critiqued for celebrating "localized and heterogeneous struggles" (Carrol & Ratner, 1994, p.7), or a form of "anemic" (Mumby, 1997), "decaf" (Contu, 2008) resistance reduced to the "clever tricks of the weak within the order established by the strong" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 40).

A number of recent contributions have sought to overcome such limitations by arguing that a combination of practices, both hidden and public, individual and collective, could allow resisters to effectively counteract managerial power, thus enabling "productive" (Courpasson et al., 2012; Courpasson, Dany, & Delbridge, 2017) or "impactful" (Courpasson, 2016) resistance to reverse managerial decisions. However, focusing on the workplace meant that the role of external civil society and state actors, although acknowledged for tilting the balance of power between workers and the firm in empirical accounts of the struggles, was not theorized as a lever of successful resistance. Hence, a broader theoretical perspective is needed to embrace the capacity of workers' resistance to produce outcomes not just within but also beyond the firm, by engaging civil society and the State in a broader process of hegemonic transformation.

Several features of a neo-Gramscian perspective suggest that it may be suitable to such an enlarged reading of resistance. First, Gramsci (1971) conceived of a social order or "hegemony" as spanning a "historical bloc" allying "the coercive and bureaucratic authority of the State, dominance in the economic realm, and the consensual legitimacy of civil society" (Levy & Egan, 2003, p. 806). Second, neo-Gramscian hegemony refers to a "process of struggle rather than an existing state of consensual domination" (Mumby, 1997, p. 365), whereby social actors draw on discursive, material, and organizational resources in ways that are constrained but not predetermined by established forms of power, thus opening spaces for contestation and hegemonic transformation under the influence of resisting agents (Levy & Egan, 2003). The concepts of hegemony/counter-hegemony are both "sensitive to the material moment of practice, yet also inclined

toward the discursive issues that surround the securing of consent and the advancement of an alternative vision" (Carrol & Ratner, 1994, p. 7). Our choice of a neo-Gramscian approach is thus justified by the possibility it offers of reading power and resistance as dialectical dynamics spanning the firm, the State, and civil society, while also acknowledging the specific historical conditions of the hegemony to be resisted.

Workplace Struggles Against Neoliberal Hegemony

Key tenets of a neo-Gramscian perspective have been mobilized at the macro level to account for the rise of a "global neoliberal hegemony" (Gill, 1997) and the related financialization of Anglo-American and European economies (Bieling, 2013). At the level of the firm, this trend has been traced by following the diffusion of a shareholder value ideology (Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington, 2008; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009) that entails massive workplace restructuring via cost cutting, downsizing, externalization, and the weakening of collective forms of workers' organization (Cushen, 2013; Forsberg & Stockenstrand, 2014; Hirsch & De Soucey, 2006; Salento, Masino, & Berdicchia, 2013; Saltorato & Benatti, 2017). The shift was significant enough to question whether the new order of domination was still based on hegemonic consent or rather relied on "managerial despotism" (Burawoy, 1985), that is, the arbitrary application of coercion. Gill (1997) suggested that "a less consensual order was emerging, one based increasingly on the politics of supremacy and coercion rather than built from broad-based popular legitimacy" (p. 7). Burawoy (1985) qualified the new regime as "hegemonic despotism" whereby

> the interests of capital and labor continue to be concretely coordinated, but where labor used to be *granted* concessions on the basis of the expansion of profits, it now *makes* concessions on the basis of the relative profitability of one capitalist vis-à-vis another—that is, the opportunity costs of capital. (p. 150)

Workers' resistance to neoliberal hegemony has been studied in varied organizational settings such as the airline, engineering, and artistic professions (Cushen, 2013; Forsberg & Stockenstrand, 2014; Fraher & Gabriel, 2016), multinationals' plant shutdowns (Contu, Palpacuer, & Balas, 2013; Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015), or the privatization of public services (Spicer & Fleming, 2007). This body of work has departed from neo-Gramscian readings by focusing on the everyday practices of "resisting subjectivities" (Cushen, 2013; Forsberg & Stockenstrand, 2014; Fraher & Gabriel, 2016), the discursive struggles between "competing narratives" whereby workers collectively engage in resisting (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Spicer & Fleming, 2007), or workers' capacity to "reintroduce a symbolic authority" in a psychoanalytical reading of resistance (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015, p. 987). These theoretical contributions thus addressed micro-practices of resistance that did not openly challenge or unsettle the dominant order and/or left aside a broader context enabling workers' resistance to become more impactful (Fleming, 2016; Thompson & Harley, 2013). By contrast, a neo-Gramscian perspective would acknowledge the role of an enabling context that took the form of a state-based legal apparatus that workers were able to mobilize in their struggle against neoliberal restructuring at the French factory studied by Vidaillet and Gamot (2015), or the "fundamentally different" funding and governance conditions that allowed professional workers to preserve collective skills and identities in the cases studied by Fraher and Gabriel (2016, p. 171).

Hence, workers' capacity to draw on levers and resources located beyond the firm may prove instrumental to challenging neoliberal hegemony, as shown in the neo-Gramscian study of Contu et al. (2013), where the decision to shut down a plant was successfully reversed, thanks to the ideological, organizational, and material support that workers received from the broader civil society and the tribunals where they repeatedly took action. These findings suggest that "productive" resistance might critically depend on understudied processes through which workers can mobilize and develop a variety of tools and resources in and beyond the corporation. Along such lines, Spicer and Böhm (2007) pondered whether "the historically separated realms of workplace politics and civil society have become increasingly blurred" (p. 1683) and envisioned a process of "escalation" whereby workplace movements could "take their struggle into the broader realms of civil society." The authors see escalation as likely to occur when resisters "find few spaces in a workplace to voice their grievances, and issues of the broader legitimacy of management discourses are at stake" (Spicer & Böhm, 2007, p. 1687), a situation that may arise from acute forms of hegemonic despotism.

Civil Society Movements and Hegemonic Transformation

The capacity of resistance to alter contemporary forms of domination has more often been studied outside the workplace. In a neo-Gramscian perspective, broader social movements have been cast as central forces of "counter-hegemony," understood as the "creation of an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society" (Pratt, 2004, p. 332), which conveys "an alternative ethical view of society" (Cohn, 2016, p. 113). The most systematic attempts to integrate discursive, material, and organizational dimensions into the study of counter-hegemony have been made by Levy and co-authors in transnational fields where civil society actors pressed multinationals to intervene on social or environmental issues

such as climate change (Levy & Egan, 2003), access to AIDS drugs in developing countries (Levy & Scully, 2007), economic inequalities in global production networks (Levy, 2008), or standards for corporate social responsibility (Levy, Brown, & de Jong, 2010) and sustainable coffee (Levy, Reinecke, & Manning, 2016).

Yet, counter-hegemonic struggles linking the workplace to civil society have remained understudied, with the significant exception of anti-sweatshop campaigns where activists in Europe and North America have pressured large corporations to support workers' rights at subcontracting factories in the Global South. For Spicer and Böhm (2007), such campaigns epitomize the escalation of workplace struggles that spill over into civil society. However, southern actors—both civil society and workers—have been mainly involved as "secondary subjects" in these transnational campaigns where northern activists tend to play a leading role (Wells, 2009). As a result, we still know little about processes of hegemonic transformation where workers take the lead in driving broader forces of resistance via civil society, or even via the State. The latter has remained largely off the radar of neo-Gramscian organizational studies, which have focused either on the firm or on transnational struggles led by civil society movements.

Exploring "Hybrid Spaces" of Resistance

As previously discussed, the studies of workplace resistance to neoliberal hegemony have mostly focused on micro-practices located within the firm and have thus overlooked the levers and resources that resisters could successfully mobilize in the spheres of the State and civil society. On a broader level, hegemonic transformation has mainly been studied through the prism of movements and struggles among broad groups of players—that is, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), corporations, governmental institutions—an approach that ignores the more micro processes through which resisters could launch new forms of struggle either within or across such groups. The spillover of workers' resistance into civil society and the State could thus be seen as situated "in between" these two perspectives, in the micro- and meso-organizational processes whereby resistance could span the three main sites of neoliberal hegemony and induce transformations in these sites.

The notion of in-betweenness has attracted interest in the "Third Space" literatures where it serves to define a "hybrid" space created through the encounter of already existing spaces and where new forms of knowledge, discourses, and identities could emerge. These literatures are typically concerned with the processes at play between a predominant "first" space and a "second" less apparent or more marginal space, giving rise to a "third" space. In Soja's (1996) work on political geography, the third space serves to capture the construction of contemporary humans as "intrinsically spatial beings" via the encounter between physical and socialized spaces. From the postcolonial, discursive perspective of Bhabha (1994), the third space symbolizes a place where multiple meanings, appropriations, and translations of the same linguistic signs and cultural symbols may occur, thus challenging the privileged position of the colonizer's ways of knowing. In educational studies, Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Alvarez, and Chiu (1999) see the third space as offering access to a multiplicity of meanings and knowledge that students can use as a bridge, or scaffold, between their community's or home-based discourses and school-based discourses, so as to develop stronger understandings of the natural world.

It is in the latter field that Moje et al. (2004) set out to integrate these varied contributions by conceptualizing the third space as a "navigational space" in which to gain the skills and expertise to negotiate different discourses and to "cross discursive boundaries"; a space where different knowledge and discourses will "coalesce" to generate new knowledge and "expand the boundaries" of official discourses; and a bridge, or "supportive scaffold," between marginalized and dominant discourses, helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop stronger understandings and strengthen their future social and cognitive development (also see Calabrese-Barton & Tan, 2009). Such perspective may offer some guidance in exploring the spillover of resistance throughout the three spaces of the firm, civil society, and the State, to assess how resisters may develop a hybrid space whereby to "generate," "navigate," and "leverage" not just new knowledge and discourses, as analyzed in Third Space studies, but also material and organizational resources, in line with our neo-Gramscian perspective, to challenge and reshape the dominant hegemony.

Research Setting and Method

The resistance movement at the French Telecom company (hereafter FT) lends itself particularly well to a single case study approach, designed to explore the complex processes through which resistance may spill over from the workplace to civil society and the State. The exceptional reach of resistance further makes this case "unusually revelatory" (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), casting FT as a fairly "unique exemplar" (Gehman et al., 2017) of workplace-led hegemonic transformation. While such features may induce limitations in the replicability of the transformational achievements to be observed, we believe that the theoretical insights derived from this case-based research can be useful to practitioners and scholars of resistance alike, as they offer clues on the question, "What are the activities you actually have to engage in overtime to produce it [transformational resistance]" (Langley, p. 6, in Gehman et al., 2017).

We started analyzing the social crisis at FT in December 2009 as it was unfolding in the media. Our initial interest was in identifying the managerial policies that might have

Table 1. Interviews and Interviewees by Organization and Date.

Organization	No. of interviewees	No. of interviews[a]	Dates	Codes
FT Labor Union SUD	3	6	2011, 2012	UN-SUD
FT Labor Union CGC	3	5	2011, 2012	UN-CGC
FT Labor Union CGT	2	2	2012	UN-CGT
FT Occupational physicians	3	4	2012	OC
State Department of Labor	2	3	2012	STA
French Press Agency × Independent Journalist	2	2	2012	MED
Consultant for FT EC, Obs. Scientific Council	2	3	2011, 2012	EXP
NAJE Theatre company (The Impacted)	1	1	2011	NAJ
Total	18	26		

[a]Ten interviews were conducted face-to-face, 13 were conducted by phone, and three follow-ups were done by email.
Note. FT = French Telecom; SUD = Solidaires, Unitaires, Démocratiques; CGC = Confédération Générale des Cadres; CGT = Confédération Générale du Travail; EC = Enterprise Committees.

contributed to the rise of the employees' ill-being stigmatized by the series of suicides. We observed that FT had undergone the kind of transformation we had studied in other major French multinationals where financialization and a neoliberal regime had deeply unsettled work identities and social relations at the workplace (Palpacuer and Seignour, 2012). FT had experienced a particularly stretching shift in status: From a state administration in the late 1980s, it had become one of the largest publicly traded corporations on the French financial market, with state ownership reduced to 27% at the onset of the crisis in 2008. The corporation had grown abroad while massively restructuring and downsizing in France, cutting more than 60,000 jobs or 40% of the national headcount in a decade (Minella, 2009). FT could thus be seen both as exemplary of the shift toward financialization and managerial coercion occurring in the new hegemonic regime, and as a radical manifestation of this same shift due to the acute form of transformation that the firm had experienced.

The media crisis generated an abundant flow of information and discourses in the press and on the Web, and no fewer than seven nonacademic books about the crisis and its premises (Decèze, 2004; Diehl & Doublet, 2010; Du Roy, 2009; Champeaux & Foulon, 2012; Dervin, 2009; Ledun & Font Le Bret, 2010; Talaouit & Nicolas, 2010). We were able use this material to trace the transformation of the firm via financialization, restructuring, and neoliberal rhetoric. During this first phase of research, our attention was drawn to an important source of information on work-related issues within the firm, the Observatory of Stress and Forced Mobility, which some of FT's labor unions had set up as a nonprofit association. Preliminary interviews indicated that the Observatory (referred to as the "Obs" by the resisters) was the organizational arm of an innovative resistance initiative, playing a key role in feeding and steering the national debate. This prompted us to conduct a series of 26 interviews in 2011 and 2012 with 18 actors who had been involved in the resistance and its outcomes (Table 1). These retrospective interviews were conducted at a time close enough to the crisis to allow respondents to produce vivid accounts of factual events, while a postcrisis context made them more inclined to reflect on what had been a rich experience of resistance, but also an intense, politically sensitive, and humanly trying one for most of them. Most interviews lasted from 1 to 3 hr and followed an exploratory, open-ended approach so as to allow interviewees to recall in their own words and perspectives what had happened and how they had been involved in the events under study.

Our sample comprised key people involved in launching resistance within FT, spreading the debate in the broader civil society, and acting within the State in response to the media crisis. We identified them either incrementally from the initial interviews or from their visibility in the media. We were also careful to include enough diversity in our sample to allow for contrasted perspectives to be recorded on the initiative under study. For instance, we interviewed labor representatives who had refused to take part in the Observatory, as well as civil society outsiders who were critical toward this initiative. We used additional interview data published in nonacademic sources to complement our primary data and, when relevant, for the purpose of triangulation.

We chose to construct our results as a narrative, inspired by scholars who claimed that resistance could be "enabled and collectivized, in part, by (. . .) narrating moments when the taken for granted social structure is exposed and the usual direction of constraints upended, if only for a moment" (Ewick & Silbey, 2003, p. 1329). In this vein, narrative scholarship is seen as "overtly political" in its capacity to "give voice to the subject" (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 199), in this case embodied by the resisters. This choice further allowed us to account for the polyphonic and dialogic dimensions of the resistance initiatives under study (Bakhtin, 1984), which left space for a diversity of voices to be heard in our rendering of the story (Belova et al., 2008; Humphreys & Brown, 2002).

Borrowing from Todorov (1968), our story captures the three typical phases of a narrative: out of an initial situation of relative stability, a disruptive event occurs—a tipping point in the history of the firm, here embodied by the restructuring plan NExT (New Experience in Telecommunication); this triggers actions—in the form of workers' resistance, culminating in broad civil society debates; after which calm is restored via a transformation of the initial situation—the CEO is dismissed and regulatory tools are established to detect and prevent psychosocial risks at work in the country. Inspired by a neo-Gramscian perspective, our account highlights relations of force unfolding through the corporation, civil society, and the State, by successively giving prominence to one of these sites and its key players in the sequences of the narrative. The three phases of (a) "hegemonic despotism" within the firm, (b) "counter-hegemonic resistance" in civil society, and (c) "hegemonic transformation" via state actions are closely interwoven, as schematized in Figure 1.

These three sequences were further substantiated by systematically coding our interview material so as to characterize the discursive, organizational, and material aspects of the actions and interactions under study in each sequence of the narrative. Drawing on abundant secondary data, including the press releases from the French Press Agency (AFP), we first elaborated a precise chronology of events occurring at or around FT before and during the crisis (Abbott, 2001). This led us to record more than 100 events between the beginning of FT's transformation in 1990 and the postcrisis announcements made by its new CEO in July 2010, 22 of which are shown in Figure 1.

The sequential structure of the narrative is particularly well-suited to capture the interplay of agentic forces and broader contextual elements in the processes under study, enabling the examination of "how the actions of one period lead to changes in the context that will affect action in the subsequent period" (Langley, 2009, p. 919). Further iteration among our narrative and the neo-Gramscian literature led us to conceptualize hegemonic transformation as a "cascade effect" of resistance. We then set out to explore in more detail how this cascade effect had been produced by resisters, which led us to mobilize the concept of "hybrid space" to highlight the cross-cutting dynamics of resistance throughout the firm, civil society, and the State. The literature on hybrid space inspired us to locate the source of the cascade effect in resisters' capacity to share, develop, and leverage discursive and material resources across the three spheres of Gramscian hegemony.

A Three-Stage Process of Hegemonic Transformation

The Rise of Hegemonic Despotism Within FT

The transformation of FT from a public service into a global corporation was part of a broader shift toward a French form of neoliberal hegemony based on financialization. The French State stimulated the growth of financial markets and encouraged the entry of foreign investors through two waves of reforms in the 1980s and 1990s (Coriat, 2006), whereas the managerial elite endorsed a shareholder value-oriented ideology (Goyer, 2006; Morin, 2000; Schmidt, 2003). Top executives retained significant autonomy vis-à-vis financial markets and continued to collaborate closely with the government elite (Clift, 2004), a pattern that Lubatkin, Lane, Collin, and Very (2005) describe as "centralization based on personal relationships." Three laws were passed between 1990 and 2003 to allow for the progressive privatization of the telecommunications firm (Du Roy, 2009). FT engaged in the kind of international growth that most French multinationals were pursuing at the time, reaching a Number 2 position on the European market. Meanwhile, the firm drastically downsized and reduced the share of employees with public servant status from 90% to 70% of the workforce (Minella, 2009). In this setting, Didier Lombard took over as CEO in 2005 to launch a strong international acquisition policy under the Orange brand and a restructuring plan (NExT) designed to shift FT from its technical focus on being a "network access provider" to the commercial orientation of a "service access provider." On the financial side, Lombard established a low target of €7 billion of annual cash flow in the period 2006 to 2008, of which 40% to 45% would be distributed to shareholders. This material turn in the distribution of wealth was backed by strong adhesion to the ideology of shareholder value and by cultivating close relationships with the financial markets (Chabrak, Craig, & Daidj, 2016).

The implementation of NExT was to play a central role in the 2009 crisis. Downsizing objectives were particularly ambitious with a target of 22,000 job cuts over the period 2006 to 2008. This was coupled with a large-scale mobility plan aimed at switching people from technical jobs to commercial jobs in Orange boutiques and call centers. Tight procedures were established and harsh pressure was exercised by intermediate and human resource managers to push people through mobility procedures. These organizational forms of coercion were discursively manifested in the address given by the CEO and HR Director to top executives at a mid-term review of NExT in October 2006, when the program was found to be below targets. Didier Lombard announced that in 2007 he would "implement the departures, one way or another, either through the door or through the window" and that he strongly backed the "crash program" presented by HR Director Olivier Barberot to accelerate mobility via "systematic identification and compulsory registering of people at the development space." Such stringent measures induced widespread bullying of FT workers, causing suicides to proliferate in a context of deep disruption of FT's historical culture and social regulation (Chabrak et al., 2016).

NExT was implemented in an unusual context as 70% of FT employees retained their civil servant status, that is, subject to administrative laws that differed significantly from

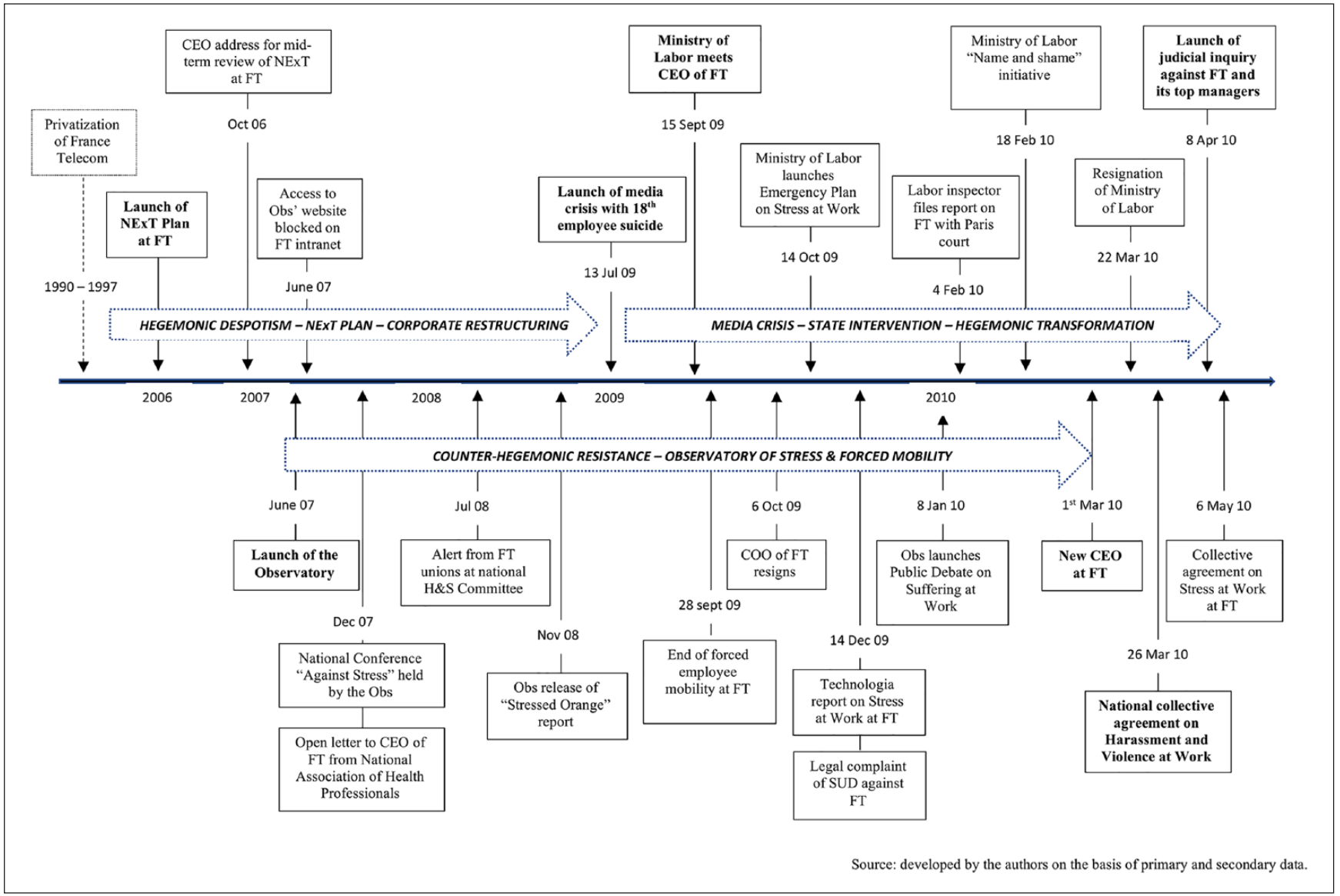


Figure 1. Main events through the three phases of hegemonic transformation.
Note. NExT = New Experience in Telecommunication; FT = French Telecom; SUD = Solidaires, Unitaires, Démocratiques.

the labor code applied to employees under private contracts. This situation resulted from labor union negotiations to preserve employees' statutory protection when FT was privatized in 1996. This had created a legal vacuum in which the top management could turn a blind eye to legal social constraints and early signs of the social crisis. "They had a feeling of total impunity," recalled a labor inspector (STA2). At a national meeting with occupational physicians in 2008:

> It was surreal. He [HR Director] comes in, sits down, puts his feet on the table and starts by saying "labor doctors, what's that for?" (. . .) We were in full crisis, it had not yet come out in the media but it was terrible. And (. . .) he didn't care at all. (OC3)

Labor unions also played a role in the rise of managerial abuses by failing to act as a counter-power during the restructuring plan. In fact, the unions did not form a unitary front against the "despotic" managerial pressures, as they were undermined by a series of restructuring programs, the decline of the workers' collective identity based on technical skills, and deep internal divisions during the privatization process. The institutions of private labor law, such as Enterprise Committees (ECs), Health and Safety Committees, labor inspections, or even private employment contracts, had only recently been introduced, if at all, within the firm, and the unions lacked the skills and knowledge to operate them. Collectively bargaining over the mass departures under the mobility plan would also have required symbolically acknowledging that the protective civil servant status—for which the FT unions had fought hard over two decades of privatization—had become more of a myth than a reality. Mirroring top managers' denial of the early signals of the crisis, the unions refused to recognize the ideological shift of the corporate elite and its organizational consequences ("We could not imagine that *our* leaders would start acting like minions of Wall Street," UN-CGC1).

Emergence of a Counter-Hegemonic Front

While NExT unfolded, taking the "drunken boat" (STA1) of FT to "insane" heights (OC4) of managerial violence, a number of resistance initiatives were launched. These were mostly spearheaded by the labor union SUD (Solidaires, Unitaires, Démocratiques) set up at FT in 1989 in opposition to the firm's privatization. As a founding member of the French alter-globalization movement, SUD had been created as a platform of unaffiliated unions in the early 1980s with the aim of renewing the French labor movement. It gained in strength during major strikes and public demonstrations in the 1990s around themes such as the defense of public services, solidarity, democracy, and work enrichment (Biétry, 2007). Concerned about the limits of established forms of union militancy, SUD had initiated critical debates and actions on the question of work organization and suffering at work within the firm in the early 2000s (Decèze, 2004). The union had also started to solicit labor inspectors, who went on to play a key role during the crisis.

The most influential resistance initiative at FT would prove to be the Observatory of Stress and Forced Mobility (hereafter the Observatory, or the Obs) established by unionists from SUD and the CGC (Confédération Générale des Cadres), a union that had seen new leaders emerge during FT's start-up acquisitions in the late 1990s (Delmas & Merlin, 2010; Du Roy, 2009). The Obs brought together CGC constituents, mostly managers and engineers under private employment contracts, and SUD members, that is., activist public sector technicians. This rapprochement came about mainly, thanks to an original entente forged by the unions' central delegates—Patrick Ackerman at SUD and Pierre Morville at CGC—who acted as spokespersons for the Observatory. Via the Obs, two labor groups with distinct identities formed a unified front against managerial abuses, financialization, and CEO Didier Lombard, who had come to embody these drifts ("The top management was amazed that we became allies," UN-CGC1). Backed by the relatively abundant material resources of the two unions—a legacy of generous labor union endowment at FT—and a dedicated team of about 20 people, the Obs sought to assess and expose the managerial violence unfolding at FT through systematic analysis and communication. To do so, it drew on the expertise of a scientific committee comprising academics from a variety of disciplines—mainly sociology—to produce a large amount of surveys and research ("We wanted to involve academics in order to legitimize work on which the labor unions were not at ease," UN-CGC2). The diffusion of information was simultaneously geared toward FT employees, labor unionists, and an outside audience that was reached through the Obs' website, conferences, meetings, and sustained interactions with the media.[1]

The rise of employee suicides triggered internal debate on whether the phenomena should be addressed by the Observatory, and how. A decision was taken to cast suicides as an extreme manifestation of a broader phenomenon of the employees' ill-being caused by a pathogenic form of management. This framing acknowledged "new forms of suicide that appeared at FT, political suicides . . .. These suicides were signed and put in relation to work" (UN-SUD6). However, not all labor unions supported this surge of resistance. Neither the CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail) nor the well-established CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) joined the initiative. Interunion rivalries played a role in this resistance to resistance, as did tensions between this innovative and the more traditional forms of labor action embedded in FT's historical bloc. Union representatives who opposed the Observatory favored a posture of "negotiation," that is, making specific collective demands to the FT's management, rather than a

more radical but open-ended posture of "denunciation" on topics new to labor unions ("We always said that we wanted to open negotiations. The priority was to talk with the firm in order to change things and not just to contest," CGT2).

By framing and spreading critical views of managerial practices at the workplace, this resistance paved the way for the major crisis of 2009:

> The suicide that provoked the shift happened on July 13th in Marseille. It was summer, news was scarce, and the regional TV was covering the event, especially when the guy left a letter that the family insisted on reading aloud at the funerals. (UN-CGC1)

The Observatory was suddenly in daily contact with the press, radios, and TV channels, playing a key role in feeding the media with information and analyses. Considered a legitimate source on FT suicides, it regularly confirmed or denied, via its union constituents, the work-related nature of employee suicides that continued to hit the news.

Under the impulse of the Obs, the opposition between managerial and resisting actors inside the firm spilled over into the broader civil society through heated debates during the fall of 2009. Neoliberal views that public sector employees were too "fragile" and had been overprotected by the State clashed with denunciations of rising managerial violence at the workplace. Representatives of leftist parties demanded the resignation of the CEO of FT and the opening of a governmental mission on suicides at work, pointing to broader systemic issues of management and restructuring practices in the country. Polemics developed around whether the motives for the suicides could be linked to the company and whether suicides could be considered statistically more significant at FT than in the broader national population. A dense sequence of events followed until the spring of 2010, closely relayed by the media and punctuated with new suicides and suicide attempts in the firm's workforce.

Hegemonic Transformation Via State Intervention

The social agitation triggered several responses from the State. First, strong media coverage prompted the government to intervene to "stop the crisis." Faced with a radically new situation, the Department of Labor was "in panic," "nobody knew what should be done" (STA2). A key player in this situation was Minister of Labor Xavier Darcos, who regularly intervened in the media to push for greater action on the part of FT and other large corporations in the country. Summoned by the government, the CEO announced a number of managerial measures, including the end of forced mobility, which compelled employees to systematically change job every 3 years, and the launch of a vast internal survey on work conditions. Several interim reports were released between December 2009 and March 2010 with large-scale media coverage, revealing that the majority of employees felt under pressure or distressed at work and had experienced deteriorating work conditions in recent years. The survey confirmed the Obs' findings and was instrumental in shifting public opinion in favor of the workers' view that the firm's responsibility was involved in the crisis. Meanwhile, the government pushed for Lombard to resign and flanked him early October 2009 with a spin doctor, Stéphane Richard, a former director of the Private Office of the Minister of the Economy and Finance, who took over as CEO in March 2010. Richard drastically changed the communication style of top management. Several antistress and work management plans were announced in the weeks following his appointment. The shift was acknowledged by resisters: "Richard is not Lombard and his arrival has put an end to the crisis" (UN-SUD2); "his discourse centers on the human side, the public mission, recruitment and the end of massive downsizing plans" (UN-SUD1); "the situation is totally different" (OC3). SUD and CGC came back to the negotiating table, and in the following months Richard successfully concluded collective agreements on stress at work with most FT unions—but not SUD. The consensus was incomplete and, at best, reluctantly embraced. Some protagonists of the historical bloc continued to side with Lombard as a symbol of the technical and engineering tradition of the firm: "I always say: Lombard knows what a phone is, Richard knows what a bank is" (CGT2).

The State also took a second line of action. An informal collaboration emerged between labor inspectors covering FT's 450 sites in France and the General Directorate of Labor (DGT) of the French Ministry of Labor. This led to the inspectors agreeing to communicate field information to Hervé Lanouzière, the DGT's technical counselor in charge of work conditions. This pooling of information shed light on critical aspects of FT's human resources management, which Sylvie Catala, the labor inspector in charge of FT headquarters, was able to compile and analyze in a comprehensive report on psychosocial risks at work within the firm. The report qualified the implementation of NExT as pathogenic and documented the link between work conditions and 15 employee suicides. The inspector framed a discourse on psychosocial risks at work by building an analogy with asbestos exposure:

> Psychosocial risks, it's a bit the same. You take people, you impose restructurings on them, they lose their bearings, they are denigrated . . . and out of ten, one will commit suicide, four will get depressed, and the others will make it through. (STA1)

Submitted to the criminal court in February 2010 and widely commented on by the media, the report supported a claim under Art. 40 of the French penal code that FT management was "endangering others by implementing forms of work organization capable of producing severe damage to workers" health. SUD filed a complaint against FT and the three senior officers—the CEO, HR Director, and COO—who

Table 2. Sequences of Hegemonic Transformation.

	Hegemonic despotism	Counter-hegemonic resistance	Hegemonic transformation
Main events	Rise of managerial coercion in "outlaw" zone at FT (2006-2009)	Denunciation of managerial pressure at the workplace (2007-2010)	State intervention to restore social political stability (2009-2010)
Major sites	Corporation	Civil society	State
Lead actors	Top managers	Labor unionists	State activists
Ideological dimension	Neoliberal financialization Suicide of the "fragile"	Anti-financialization "Political" suicides	Protective role of the law at the workplace
Organizational dimension	NExT Restructuring Plan	Observatory of Stress and Forced Mobility	Network of labor inspectorate Name and shame Nationwide collective agreements
Material dimension	Cash flow maximization Forced employee mobility	Reports, meetings, trainings Unions' financial resources	End of forced mobility at FT Dismissal of CEO Judicial proceeding
Broader context	Elite-driven financialization of French capitalism	Social movements against neoliberal globalization	European framework for psychosocial risks and violence at work

Source. Developed by the authors.
Note. FT = French Telecom; NExT = New Experience in Telecommunication.

had been in charge of the NExT plan, prompting the launch of a judicial proceeding by the tribunal of Paris in April 2010. Over the course of the following months, other FT unions joined SUD in the legal battle. This type of judicial inquiry was a first in France, where the responsibility of a firm, let alone its top managers, had never before been under legal scrutiny for pathogenic management.

A third line of government action addressed the crisis at a broader level. In October 2009, Darcos launched an emergency plan to push forward the national collective agreement on stress at work that major employers and labor organizations had signed in 2008, as late adopters of the 2004 European framework agreement on work-related stress. Darcos aimed to have the 1,500 largest corporate employers in France engaged in its implementation by February 2010. At the suggestion of Lanouzière, he adopted a "name and shame" tactic and published a list of companies on the government's website under green, orange, and red tags depending on the progress made in launching an internal plan. The "black list" caused strong reactions in corporate circles and was withdrawn within 24 hr, and Darcos resigned a month later. His push to strengthen the regulation of work conditions in the country nevertheless led to the signature of a national agreement on harassment and violence at work in March 2010, as a transposition of the European framework agreement of 2007. It resulted in a societal and legal recognition of employees' exposure to psychosocial risks and sent a signal to the managerial elite that they should "add a supervisory system in their cockpit" (EXP2) to detect and prevent these risks, a move made by most large corporations in the aftermath of the crisis.

The crisis symbolically ended in March 2010 with the arrival of Richard at the head of FT and the signature of firm-level and country-level collective agreements. Although cases of employee suicides continued to hit the news, their frequency greatly diminished. The media coverage of FT declined and the Observatory slowed down its activities. Table 2 sums up the overall process of hegemonic transformation by highlighting key events, major sites, lead actors, and the main ideological, material, and organizational dimensions of these three sequences.

Explaining the Cascade Effect of Resistance

To explain how workers were able to trigger changes in work practices and regulation both within and beyond the firm, we need to further characterize what can be seen as a "cascade effect" of resistance. The image is borrowed from Levy and Egan (2003) who reflected on hegemonic change: "small perturbations can often be absorbed and accommodated with little impact on the overall structure. Periods of relative stability, however, are punctuated by discontinuity and change, as fissures split open and cascading reactions lead to major system-wide reconfiguration" (p. 811). In our case, the "fissure" opened when FT was privatized while employees retained the status of civil servants. This created an "outlaw zone" between public and private labor regimes, that is, a space where arbitrary managerial coercion could unfold without meeting collectively defined limits. Cascading reactions occurred when actors outside the dominant alliance, that is, newly formed or recently transformed labor unions, organized a counter-hegemonic front that extended beyond the firm via the Obs and the media into the broader civil society, where heated debates on work conditions and employee suicides destabilized the established consent structures in society. A systemic change was achieved when the State

reentered the loop to reestablish hegemonic consensus by setting limits on managerial abuses and by restoring workers' rights via collective agreements, the dismissal of FT's CEO, and a legal inquiry into managerial responsibility in the FT crises.

However, this cascade effect was in no way mechanistic or structurally predetermined. Rather, our narrative highlights the key role of resisting agents in launching innovative forms of resistance across the firm, civil society, and the State. The threads of this cascade effect can be pulled together by thinking of the Observatory as a "hybrid space" through which workplace resisters could escalate their struggle into civil society and the state apparatus. We elaborate on this perspective to suggest that the Obs developed three dynamics of resistance enabling workers to combine, develop, and leverage not just discursive, but also material and organizational resources, to escalate their struggle into civil society and the state apparatus.

Escalation Into Civil Society

First, the Obs offered a space to navigate through the knowledge and discourses produced by distinct social groups located inside the firm—SUD and CGC—and in the broader civil society—for the most part, social scientists. As the Obs was set up on the terrain of civil society, outside the direct control of dominant groups and under the legal status of association, it was able to reduce the barriers between the workplace and other spheres. As such, the hybrid space was constitutive of a capacity for resistance, allowing the resisters to mobilize a broader spectrum of resources—the scientific expertise of academics, contacts with journalists, labor inspectors, and union members, and funding provided by SUD and CGC. Importantly, it also enabled them to develop navigational skills across discursive boundaries. This was notably the case in the discussions about workers' suicides, when the boundaries between private and public spheres were revisited in view of political action. The hybrid space was itself an outcome of the navigational skills that it came to support collectively, as observed in the union leaders' capacity to launch and sustain the Obs over several years. Pierre Morville, an atypically left-wing unionist at CGC, and Patrick Ackerman, a SUD activist who considered allying with a managerial union, were both aware of the relevance of academic knowledge to the workers' struggles.

Second, the hybrid space generated new knowledge, discourses, tools, and acts of resistance. Research participants recall witnessing "the collective elaboration of a grammar and a discourse adapted to the situations experienced at FT" during the Obs' national meetings, thus redefining the "borders between what can and cannot be morally and tactically said on sensitive issues" (Delmas & Merlin, 2010, p. 40). The scientific capacity to "observe" was mobilized not simply to develop a new understanding of the situation experienced by workers but also to act upon it, as expressed in the slogan *Observer, Comprendre, Agir* (Observe, Understand, Act), devised in response to criticisms by hostile unions that the Obs lacked the capacity to engage with management. Hence, the Obs produced surveys, reports, meetings, as well as training sessions for labor unionists.

Third, the hybrid space was subversive. Academic activists depicted a Foucauldian struggle

> on the battle field of power-knowledge. On one side, the camp of law, order, and truth, with all its privileges, its technologies, its global discourses and their power effect. On the other, the camp of small, dispersed, confiscated, silenced knowledge. The position asserted by the Obs was to detect, decipher, buried knowledge in order to put them in insurrection against the despotism of managerial knowledge. (Burgi & Gojat, 2009, p. 2)

The Obs was thus to "serve as a tool for labor unions and enable workers to reclaim the overall project of a true work collective, enable them also to rebuild self-esteem and give meaning to their harrowing experiences" (Burgi & Gojat, 2009, p. 6). Having common counter-hegemonic purpose did not mean that the hybrid space was devoid of internal tensions, as observed, for instance, between the pragmatic expectations voiced by labor unionists and the analytical orientations inherent to academics' contributions (Delmas & Merlin, 2010).

Escalation Into the State

The hybrid space extended into the state apparatus, primarily via the labor inspectorate where connections were forged with key players such as Sylvie Catala, who received early evidence of the situation at FT and also mobilized her expertise for the Obs' educational activities. The navigational space trickled up the State's hierarchical lines, notably via two former labor inspectors—including Lanouzière—who acted as technical counselors of the DGT Jean-Denis Combrexelle and Minister of Labor Xavier Darcos. Neither of these high-ranking officials had the same social and educational background as the French elite and both were deeply concerned by the series of suicides ("Darcos was an important figure and a strong support," UN-CGC3). The pooling and integration of knowledge across government, civil society, and corporate borders also fueled an intense productive activity in the hybrid space in the form of a decisive labor inspection report, the ensuing court case, and the "name and shame" initiative inspired by Anglo-Saxon tactics.

For the state resisters, reestablishing employee protection against arbitrary managerial pressures meant opposing the neoliberal logic promoted by the Ministry of the Economy and Finance, representing the State in its shareholder role. Hence, the hegemonic struggle redeployed itself *within* the state apparatus through the formation of a "diarchy" (CGC1)

between the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of the Economy and Finance. This formation was not monolithic, but rather infused with continuous movement and political maneuvering as, for instance, when Hervé Lanouzière built a "cordon fence" around Sylvie Catala, which allowed her to move forward with her report under Art. 40 of the French Penal Code. Social gains were obtained by the Labor arm of the diarchy in a context of continuing influence of the shareholder State and aligned interests in corporate and civil society circles, as illustrated by Richard's choice to replace Lombard, the quick halt of the name and shame tactic, and the slow progress of the legal procedure launched against FT and its top managers.

Hybrid Spaces of Resistance as Levers for Systemic Change

"There is nothing inherent in a social situation that will automatically prompt resistance" (Fleming, 2016, p. 107). Even though management practices were acknowledged to be particularly destructive in the case under study (Chabrak et al., 2016), workplace bullying has become pervasive and work-related suicides are estimated to be on the rise in major industrial economies (Waters, 2017), underscoring the brutal "logics of expulsion"—from jobs, houses, land, and in our case, life itself—which Sassen (2014) sees as a defining feature of our times. It is rather due to the characteristics of the resistance per se that this case could stand out as exemplary. What is remarkable is the way in which the workplace struggle escalated beyond the firm and gained leverage in civil society and the state apparatus, bringing about hegemonic transformation in the form of collective agreements on stress and violence at work, the launch of new corporate procedures on psychosocial risks, and a pending court case engaging the penal responsibility of the firm's management for harassing workers. A neo-Gramscian perspective allowed us to account for the "cascade effect" of this resistance, which we further explained by highlighting the multifaceted role of a hybrid space, situated at a meso-level between individuals and dominant institutions, and spanning the three sites of hegemony/counter-hegemony.

We highlight three processes of "sharing," "generating," and "leveraging" not only discursive but also material resources, which occurred in what we see as a hybrid space of resistance. To do so, we drew inspiration from the notion of hybridity offered by Moje et al. (2004). We recast this notion and extended it to a neo-Gramscian perspective where it serves to highlight the cross-institutional nature of the resistance across the firm, civil society, and the State. As a result, our perspective on hybridity could account for a "fourth" rather than a "third" space, as it has the capacity to integrate actors and resources across the three main sites of hegemony/counter-hegemony.

Such features distinguish our neo-Gramscian perspective on hybrid spaces from the related notion of "free space" (Evans & Boyte, 1986), which has been mobilized in studies on workplace and civil society resistance (Courpasson et al., 2017; Polletta, 1999). Free spaces are seen as small-scale settings located outside the control of dominant groups, which are "voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization" (Polletta, 1999, p. 1). The fact of being located outside the firm's managerial control, in the realm of civil society, was certainly important to the Obs' capacity to launch and sustain a counter-hegemonic movement. Nevertheless, our neo-Gramscian take on hybrid space does not presuppose the informality and marginality of a free space vis-à-vis hegemonic institutions. It rather signals the capacity to mobilize resources and launch actions across the core institutions constituting the hegemony. By doing so, it provides for two broad types of contribution to the literature.

First, in Gramscian terms, civil society is seen as *the* main field of "interest articulation and social struggle," where the alignment of hegemonic forces can be destabilized through political contestation (Carroll & Ratner, 1994, p. 6). From the perspective of neo-Gramscian studies, a core contribution of our research is thus to show that political contestation may lead to systemic change when—and if—it is prompted from within a hybrid space that interconnects resisters not only within civil society, but also in the spheres of the State and the corporation. Our account of the resistance at France Telecom underscores the alliances that resisters had to build across the main sites of neoliberal hegemony, as well as the tensions they faced within each of these three spheres, particularly—but not exclusively[2]—in the firm and the State, so as to achieve hegemonic transformation. Our findings support the assumption that "counter-hegemony has to start from that which exists, which involves starting from 'where people are at' . . . [and] involves the 'reworking' or 'refashioning' of the elements which are constitutive of the hegemony" (Hunt, 1990, p. 136, in Ewick & Silbey, 2003, p. 1335). We emphasize the cross-institutional hybridity of the micro processes that enabled such counter-hegemony to become broadly transformative.

Second, by offering a narrative of the hegemonic transformation that people were able to induce through a hybrid space of resistance, we help to bridge the gap between workplace and civil society resistance studies. Our rendering of the hybrid space acknowledges features that have been observed in both sites insofar as the "meaning" it served to elaborate was not "innate and predetermined" but remained "fluid and multivalent" over the course of the struggle, which itself took multiple forms: "a struggle to form, a struggle against power, a struggle that involved power, and an internal struggle" (Hardy, 2016, pp. 103-104). Our contribution adds to these perspectives by offering a practical theory of resistance based on the three core processes of "sharing,"

"generating," and "leveraging" discursive and material resources *across* the three sites of hegemony/counter-hegemony: (a) "sharing" or "navigating through" diverse cultural, procedural and discursive resources, in our case among labor unionists, civil servants, academics, journalists and other resisters; (b) "generating" new resources, that is, new political views on suicides and psychosocial risks at work, new legal and managerial procedures at the workplace; and (c) "leveraging" these resources to transform dominant discourses and practices as conveyed, in our study, by the Ministry of Finance and the firm's top management. We suggest that this scheme could offer a blueprint for new practices of—and research on—resistance, if and when such resistance is geared toward achieving systemic change.

Concluding Comments

In troubled times, when new forms of hegemonic despotism are becoming pervasive in the workplace and the concentration of wealth and power continues unabated in global patterns of production and organization, how can resisters make the invisible, visible, and the unspoken, a subject of debate, so as to drive concrete political changes in the living conditions of workers and more broadly, of people and other living beings who are affected by these changes? We believe that our case study of resistance at France Telecom offers relevant theoretical and practical insights on this question, by tracing the sequences of hegemonic transformation that occurred within this firm and beyond, and by highlighting the hybridity of the space of resistance that served to curb hegemonic despotism and to establish new norms and practices at the French workplace. Cutting across the three main pillars of hegemony, that is, the firm, civil society, and the State, was instrumental to the transformative capacity of the hybrid space, as was the engagement of resisters in launching new ways of sharing, generating, and leveraging material and discursive resources, both from within, and by stretching beyond, their established role and position in the three sites of neoliberal hegemony.

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Notes

1. National conferences were organized in December 2007 and November 2008, gathering 200 to 300 participants for workshops, debates, and information dissemination. A network of journalists specialized in social issues was formed around the initiative, who commended the work of the Observatory.
2. We gathered anecdotal evidence that such tensions also occurred within civil society, most notably in the media where some journalists faced pressures to stop divulgating—and as a compromise, to euphemize their rendering of—the suicide events at French Telecom company (FT). For instance, in the midst of the social crisis, it was decided at a major French media that the practical protocols by which FT employees killed themselves—which could be, at times, very spectacular—would not be specified in further suicide announcements.

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