

Fighting Inequality in Hong Kong: Lessons Learned from Occupy Hong Kong

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This article provides an analysis of Occupy Hong Kong, the socioeconomic conditions of its emergence, and mainstream media responses to the movement. It gives an overview of the situation of inequality in Hong Kong, from a progressive perspective, using direct ethnographic data supplemented by official numbers, as this situation of inequality is what gave rise to the local manifestation of the Occupy spirit. The article also examines how the local Occupy movement was portrayed by the *South China Morning Post*, as part of a local press known to minimize inequality as an issue and act as an agent of social control. The paper also describes the lessons to be learned from Occupy Hong Kong and its strategy, especially in relation to the press. Before this, the international Occupy movement, Occupy Hong Kong and the local context are briefly discussed.

THE INTERNATIONAL OCCUPY MOVEMENT

The international Occupy movement started with the Occupation in New York City on 17 September 2011 (Chomsky 2012) and quickly spread around the world. The movement was in-

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spired by, amongst other events, the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt (Dean 2011) and can also be seen as part of the mobilization against corporate globalization and resulting inequalities that have been increasing for more than ten years (Smith 2011). The USA was becoming increasingly similar to Huxley's *Brave New World*, with the people doing all the work being lulled into complacency with distractions and advertisement by big business. (*ibid*). At a time when conservative policies were presented under the banner of personal freedom or responsibility, the Occupy movement brought issues of inequality and social justice from the margins of public discourse into the centre of it (Varon 2012; Schossboeck 2012). Instead of continuing belief in the "trickle down effect," the Occupation claimed there was a division between the 99% and the 1% and declared that division to be one of exploitation (Dean 2011); it has provoked some changes in attitudes and beliefs (Schossboeck 2012).

On 17 September, 2,000 people occupied Zuccotti Park with the message that the 99% of the world's population would no longer put up with the greed and corruption of the 1%, protesting the unregulated financial speculation that caused the global financial crisis and fighting for a world based on human need and sustainability instead of thirst for profits (Goodman and Moynihan 2012). Seeing the rising income disparity, nationally and globally, the people realised they had been abandoned by a political system that creates more wealth for the already wealthy at the expense of the regular people using the processes of precaritization and austerity, slowly adjusting the people to insecurity and hopelessness as jobs become temporary, social services are cut down and social democracy is replaced by ideologies of personal responsibility (Butler 2011).

According to Chomsky (2012), this movement was the first major popular reaction to a three-decade-long class war and also the first major public response that could reverse the trend in increasing inequality. This decades-long class war had resulted in the top 1% in the USA seeing an income increase of 275% while almost everyone else saw a yearly income rise of only about 1%. The bodies assembled together in Occupy expressed the message that they are not disposable; they called for a livable wage and demanded justice (Butler 2011), and a fundamental change in the way the socio-economic and political

institutions are ordered (*ibid*). Meanwhile, the mainstream press first ignored and then twisted the voices of Occupiers, as part of a mass culture that sells its construction of society to regular people, while shaping public opinion and protecting the 1% (Davidson 2012).

Despite a lack of national or regional coordination (Varon 2012), the movement spread around the world. Being part of a global movement allowed everyone to resist together, and in so doing, realise they are suffering together and so they began to display the social bond of solidarity that neoliberalism is trying to destroy (Butler 2011).

OCCUPY HONG KONG

As part of the international Occupy movement, Occupy Central, which is also known as Occupy Hong Kong, was mainly initiated by Left21, a group of progressive individuals with an online platform and study group. In brief, Hong Kong as a territory has a government which is closely linked to big business, particularly in finance, real estate and transportation; as such, policies and laws are geared towards increasing wealth and profits for capitalists while politically and economically oppressing workers (which are the large majority) and destroying the environment (InMediaHK 2011). One local goal of Occupiers was to change the way the government worked so that there would be more economic and political equality in Hong Kong (*ibid*); another major purpose was to reflect on the capitalist system, discuss the feasibility of hyper-capitalism and explore alternative systems that could potentially replace it, knowing that without a revolution in the way people think, no revolution would ever succeed, at least not along the correct path (Lam 2011). Other grassroots organizations were contacted and involved, including FM101, Hong Kong's independent, illegal radio station. FM101 was initiated in an environment in which only two companies, Metro Radio and Commercial Radio, control local, non-governmental radio (DeWolf 2010), and FM101 were very much involved in the Occupation. The Occupation began by holding a rally in Exchange Square on 15 October 2011, and then moving to a more "permanent" space underneath the headquarters of HSBC, in the ground-floor, open-air plaza which usually serves as a walkway, at the heart of Hong

Kong's financial district. The camp remained there until members were forcibly evicted on 11 September 2012.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The story of British colonial Hong Kong started with free trade. The Opium War was fought against China under the banner of "free trade", and after China lost this war in 1841, it conceded Hong Kong to Britain (Ropp 2010). In 1997, Hong Kong was returned to China and guaranteed autonomy for 50 years as a Special Administrative Region. Within the list of states the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) considers as having very high human development, Hong Kong's income disparity comes first, making it even higher than the United States' infamous levels (Einhorn 2009); in fact, the territory has a GINI coefficient² of 53.3, ranking fourteenth places worse than China, which has a GINI of 48.0, on the global list (CIA 2013). Neoliberal globalization has left there, as in other places, a superfluous population suffering from lack of income security (Chomsky 2012).

Beneath the glitzy facade of one of neoliberalism's poster children, Hong Kong, lies the wage slavery of millions and levels of poverty even more unacceptable in a highly-developed territory. Despite the economic growth Hong Kong has experienced since the 1970s, a high level of economic inequality has continued to plague the city, and this inequality is growing (Chui, Leung and Yip 2012).

Even though Hong Kong is one of the most expensive places in the world in which to live and is experiencing a surge in real-estate prices (*ibid*), over 50 percent of the population earn less than 11,000 Hong Kong Dollars (HKD) per month (BBC News, 2012, as cited by Chui, Leung and Yip 2012), which is roughly 1,419.34 US Dollars per month.

Unlike others OECD countries, which have faced the financial crisis and European debt crisis, for the past ten years, Hong Kong has continued to experience an economic boom (*ibid*); China and other emerging economies have maintained high lev-

² The **Gini coefficient** (also known as the **Gini index** or **Gini ratio**) is a measure of statistical dispersion, commonly used a way to measure the inequality of income or wealth. (Wikipedia)

els of growth despite the global situation (Drysedale 2012). Despite this, from 2001 to 2010, the income of those in the top 10 percent rose 60 percent while the income of those in the bottom 10 percent not only did not increase at all but decreased by 20 percent (Chen 2012); indeed, employers have been known to use any excuse to cut pay instead of sharing the prosperity with workers (Chui, Leung and Yip 2012). So worker insecurity has increased, in accordance with Alan Greenspan's advice that this precarious existence leads to a healthy economy since their financial insecurity will keep workers from making demands for higher wages (Chomsky 2012). At the same time, housing, education, hospitals, social services, and care for those with special needs have all been falling in standards (Henrard 2012).

CAUSES OF INCOME DISPARITY IN HONG KONG

The large income disparity in Hong Kong stems from different factors, including the following: de-industrialization resulting in a large labor force with low educational levels; monopolism (Chui, Leung and Yip 2012) or plutocracy; low taxation and the lack of government action; property speculation; and an aging population coupled with drops in household size (Henrard 2012). Before discussing public awareness, the following four paragraphs will briefly touch upon these causes of income disparity.

Hong Kong has experienced the same de-industrialization as the US. In the US, companies looking to increase profits in manufacturing shifted jobs abroad, and there was a reverse of the previous trend, that of progress towards industrialization (Chomsky, 2012). The economy shifted from one of productive enterprise to financial manipulation, leading to a concentration of wealth in the financial sector (*ibid*); this in turn led to a concentration of political power, which produced legislation that only accelerated this cycle (*ibid*). Hong Kong is what is known as an oligarchy.

Power is becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer financially privileged people. Just as in the US, the population of Hong Kong living a precarious existence is no longer confined to the fringes of society (Chomsky 2012); last year, out of 2.8 million workers there were 180,600 work-

ers (or 6.4%) earning less than the minimum wage, and inclusive of these, 895,500 workers (31.9%) earned under 40 HKD per hour³ (Census and Statistics Department, 2012: 55). While the working- and middle-class people have gotten by via artificial means, including longer working hours and high rates of borrowing as in the US (Chomsky 2012), wealth has become concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people, leading to these few privileged people having power over the working class and poor people. In such a situation, it is apparent that government policies are not making Hong Kong a more egalitarian place.

Unlike other OECD countries, which are in debt, Hong Kong has a yearly budget surplus of \$71.3 billion HKD (Henrard 2012). Despite this, public spending on social policy issues is relatively low in this territory as the government prefers to encourage people to work (*ibid*). Indeed, Hong Kong is known as a low-tax economy (*ibid*) and poster child for neoliberalism and laissez-faire economics.

Along the same lines, there is little incentive for more long-term, concrete action to alleviate the housing crisis. Hyper-gentrification is taking place in all areas of Hong Kong, with luxury developments cropping up everywhere, leading Hong Kong's median home price to be 12.6 times the annual median income (Demographia 2012); in comparison, the figures for the United States and Canada are just 3.0 and 3.5 respectively (*ibid*). While speculators and real-estate developers have been raking in large profits, the city has in recent years become notorious around the world for having cage homes, which are coffin-sized cages stacked on top of each other with many to a room (Chen 2012).

With the elderly making up more than forty percent of recipients of social security (Fisher 2012), many of the occupants of these cage homes are elderly people. Due to Hong Kong's lack of a sustainable retirement protection scheme or pension plan for its people, poverty is a risk of old age here (*ibid*).

³ 40 HKD = ~ \$5 USD / CAN (As of July, 2013)

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Meanwhile, the author found, through participant observation and interviews with people involved, that the general spirit of the people here is similar to that in the US, as described by Chomsky (2012). Older participants interviewed reported that people in general used to understand they had civic responsibilities, but this has been replaced by rampant individualism. In order to control the population and ensure minimal disturbance to their rule, the dominant class has used public relations to lead society to become increasingly consumeristic, distracted by entertainment news and the like, passive and apathetic.

Despite this, public awareness on the issue of inequality has been spreading across Hong Kong, leading to social discontent (Henrard 2012) and social instability (Chui, Leung and Yip 2012). In response to this growing general dissatisfaction, the government initiated “Scheme \$6,000”, handing out 6000 HKD⁴ to each person who both qualified as a permanent resident and reached the age of 18 before 31 Mar 2012 (Scheme6000 2012); a variety of other one-off relief efforts for the deprived have also been carried out (Henrard 2012). The government also implemented its first minimum hourly wage in 2011, with the minimum wage set at 28 HKD per hour⁵ (Henrard 2012). There is also a new, old-age living allowance scheme (Fisher 2012). However, there is a need for long-term social policies (Henrard 2012), not just temporary solutions.

METHODS

This research work uses ethnography, including participant observation and informal interviews. The data was originally collected as part of the author’s PhD research conducted on a separate topic in the territory. As a supporter, the author attended the inaugural event that started the Occupation in Hong Kong, visited frequently and witnessed various changes in the movement. She also had the opportunity to speak to various members, regular citizens and others in civil society, such as members of local NGOs.

⁴ Approximately \$774 USD

⁵ ~ \$3.60 USD

This research also uses a thematic analysis of English-language news articles from the top-rated local paper, the South China Morning Post (SCMP), which also happens to be targeted at expatriates and higher-income individuals. The articles analyzed were published during the period of 1 October to 31 October 2011, which includes the fifteen days before and the fifteen days after the first day of the Occupation in Hong Kong and 27 August - 26 September 2012, which include the fifteen days before and the fifteen days after Occupy was evicted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: INEQUALITY IN HONG KONG

The lack of affordable dwellings is a pressing concern for people in Hong Kong, mentioned by informants, presented as a major social justice issue in protests and brought up even in the mainstream media; for example, a collection of photos is available from the newspaper, *Tai Kung Pao* (Lau 2012), and 2012's Hong Kong Artwalk featured an exhibit named "Sojourning as tempura - Inadequate Housing Photo Exhibition" (Society for Community Organisation 2012). Due to the high profile nature of this social issue, it has become common knowledge that whole families sometimes live in squalid rooms, and different people live in cage/coffin homes; these places can exist in the same neighborhoods as luxury developments, which have cropped up even in low-income areas. Many adults can barely financially provide for themselves and any children they may have, let alone their elderly parents. As a result, many old folks, along with other vulnerable people, live in cage/coffin homes; with rents for these spaces being around 3000 HKD a month, as reported by informants and seen in Lau (2012: 18), many people have to work as rag pickers or janitors during the day in order to have a cage home to sleep in at night. Rag pickers, such as an elderly lady the author spoke with in Shum Shui Po, can receive 10 HKD for a trolley full of cardboard, and sometimes, they trade their found recyclables for rolls of toilet paper or other daily necessities instead.

A local informant conveyed to the author that many of these older people living in poverty bought into the dream that education would raise their children out of poverty, and through hard-earned life savings, and even borrowing from loan sharks,

they put their children in college just to find out that there was no living-wage available. These elderly people are losing hope and express feelings of great despair. This echoes Chomsky's (2012) observation of the American people; where there used to be a sense of hope in the future, now there is just a sense of despair (*ibid*).

Meanwhile, the large shopping centers and businesses are strangling small businesses, not only obliging the general population to buy from their over-priced venues, but also forcing workers and owners to lose their livelihoods. According to one informant in social work, in response to the overpricing of commodities, there are illegal market places in which the poor can buy, for example, half-used bottles of soy sauce and other used items. This informant and others mentioned that some elderly people have been forced to go through garbage cans to find scraps of food to eat, and others have been pressed to steal food from street vendors just in order to prevent starvation; when the author witnessed an elderly man caught stealing fruit, the owner of an adjacent stall mentioned to her that the elderly man was so pitiful and the situation occurs "all the time."

As a result of the general loss of livelihoods, there is a desperately vulnerable supply of extremely low-cost labor. The minimum wage, which only came into effect in 2011, is currently 28 HKD per hour (Henrard, 2012). Just to illustrate, in order to rent a coffin/cage home alone, one of these workers would have to work over 100 hours per month. As if 28 HKD per hour is not a low enough wage, some job seekers are forced to take even lower-paid "internships", with employers having a "take it or leave it" attitude. Most local workers, not just those in the blue collar working class, have become accustomed to working six days a week and even multiple jobs just to make ends meet; others have become rag pickers and illegal vendors, such as the elderly woman selling cakes on days when her disabled husband was feeling well enough to come along with her in his wheelchair; and some have been pushed into black-market jobs and prostitution.

Although television reports indicated the general population was very happy with receiving the one-off payment of 6,000 HKD from the government, almost everyone the researcher spoke with, from taxi driver to medical doctor, thought that the

scheme was a ridiculous band-aid solution. Everyone agreed that the money should have been spent on social programs, such as those to help the elderly; they believe that the amount is neither necessary for the wealthy nor adequate for the very poor to escape from the cycle of poverty.

OCCUPY HONG KONG AND THE MAINSTREAM PRESS

According to *Occupied Times* (2012), once a symbolic movement is considered newsworthy, it begins to lose control over its story. In the US, the mainstream media coverage of the Occupy movement has included two main messages. The first message is that those involved, who are unemployed, should return home and let everyone else's lives return to normal (Chomsky 2011). The second one is that the movement does not have a political programme (*ibid*). In Hong Kong, the message was equally derisive, although the themes from the coverage at the beginning of the Occupation to the end did differ.

Most articles in the *South China Morning Post* were not blatant in their criticism. Instead, they were, as Chomsky (2012) described the American media's portrayal of the Occupy movement, dismissive; they used innocuous ways of lowering the public's perceived validity of the Occupy Central movement itself. One way of doing this was to call the movement "Occupy Central," conveying via the quotation marks the impression that they were the so-called Occupy Central. Another tactic was to discuss the movement in the context of charities which it might disturb or whose cancellation was blamed on Occupy Hong Kong, as if Occupy Central were the very anti-thesis of charity.

In these articles, the paper did not bother to criticize the global Occupy movement, but instead, it chose to invalidate the local Occupy by saying it was not really part of the international movement. Participants of the local Occupy were portrayed as mindlessly copying an international fad. It was even stated that the local Occupy was just another routine protest and redundant as Hong Kong already had activists and movements. This is as if American cities did not have progressive movements and groups before the start of Occupy. In fact, as a grassroots movement, individuals anywhere in the world who

feel the local environment requires an Occupy movement are free to start one and become part of the global phenomenon.

Instead, Occupiers were portrayed as having no coherent message and just repeating meaningless slogans. As a media outlet, the *Post* failed to acknowledge to the public that all the Occupations around the world have sprouted from previous grievances; rather than acknowledging that the international Occupy movement is about social issues that many care about, the editorial line has consistently tried to separate Occupy from the social issues it tries to address, preferring to portray it as a spectacle. This frame, in fact, is used by media around the world to distance the general population from social movements (Barker 2008) and give the impression that political engagement in general is not effective (Smith 2011).

Along the same lines, the Occupiers were also frequently portrayed as just experimenting on self-governing in their commune. This plays on the us-versus-them mentality, making it difficult for the general public to relate to the Occupiers, who are cast as the “them”. In fact, Occupy Central was not described as a whole grassroots organization but, rather, a disperse gathering of commune dwellers who fail to agree on a message. The hint to the public was, “Why would anyone want to support them, when they do not even support themselves?”

Around the time that the movement ended, some of the same themes were still used, while some new ones were invented. There was no acknowledgement of the fact that the Occupy movement as a whole had increased the Hong Kong public’s recognition of the territory’s income inequality and had made the issue a systemic, public matter, rather than an individual one. A theme that continued to be used was that the Occupy movement was not valid, just an Occupy with quotation marks, a so-called Occupy; other new themes also appeared, as discussed in the paragraphs below.

The general essence was that the Occupiers were finally being “swept” or “turfed out” (Cheung and Lee 2012), as if they had been trash to begin with. In fact, *Apply Daily* (2011) mentions that the protestors were often referred to as “useless youths” and told to “get a job.” The members of Occupy were described as having protested at the expense of the people’s convenience, when in reality, the movement was about the peo-

ple to begin with. Instead of being seen as raising awareness, it was described as being a disturbance to everyone, with all its “antics”; instead of being framed as activists organizing in a meaningful way as part of an international movement, they were constructed as children playing house.

Again, to distance the reader from the movement and prevent any sympathies, the us-versus-them framework was used. In the message that “we have been tolerant towards them”, the term “we” was used to refer to HSBC, the government, the general public and even the foreign domestic workers who regularly use the space under HSBC on Sundays; the term “them” referred to the Occupiers (Lo 2012).

The movement was portrayed as a failure, because even the aforementioned foreign domestic workers, those who shared the space with the Occupy camp during the period of Occupation, had no idea why the Occupiers were there at all. At least, that was what the newspaper’s quote from one domestic worker suggested; the newspaper did not include any quotes from domestic workers who did understand what the Occupation was about (Choi 2012). Indeed, the author learned from the Occupiers that there were various cases in which reporters chose to use quotes from outliers on purpose to convey a negative image about the movement; there were complaints that one outlet had interviewed many Occupiers about their idea of what would help alleviate the income disparity in Hong Kong, and then this outlet proceeded to choose to only report the opinion of one particular person, whose answer was, “Love.” This deliberately misleading presentation conveyed to readers that Occupy Central was a gathering of “hippies” who had little grounding in reality.

Here, it must be said that the *South China Morning Post* did not have the most negative reporting about Occupy Central. Based on first-hand accounts from the Occupiers, the researcher learned that various reporters from different outlets had appeared to be sympathetic to the cause and then turned around to write high insulting pieces. In quite an outrageous example, one seemingly friendly reporter instructed the community members to make friendly poses for the photographer, and then later, she published a highly-insulting article claiming that Occupy Hong Kong was a big orgy or party made of university students

chilling out. The author located the article as one written by Hui (2011).

In the coverage examined, reporting was within the “protest paradigm”, as coined by Chan and Lee (1984, as cited in Barker, 2008). One aspect of this paradigm is working to separate protesters from non-protesters (*ibid*). Another aspect is giving the impression that protests spontaneously appear and are not in the interest of the general public (Goldlust, 1980, as cited in Barker, 2008).

As a result of the negative, distorted coverage, on 15 August, 2012, Occupy Central officially declared on its Facebook page that it would no longer be doing any mainstream media interviews (Occupy Central 2012). Reliance on the Mainstream media, whether by trying to control its message or letting press response define a movement’s actions, takes resources away from direct action and the use of alternative media (Davidson 2012).

LESSONS LEARNED FROM OCCUPY HONG KONG

The coming together of Occupy Hong Kong itself was a big achievement, in the researcher’s opinion. Their display of an egalitarian community in the midst of Central, the financial heart of Hong Kong, was highly symbolic. In the words of Chomsky (2012), it fought the message of selfishness, countering it with that of community.

In the US, a major achievement of the movement was that it raised public recognition of income inequality to higher levels than ever (*ibid*), refocusing the debate from debts and deficit to income inequality (Waldron 2012). For the first time since the Great Depression, the issue received “front-page” attention from both the mass media and politicians (Chernus 2012). Occupy changed public conversation, which is required before policies are changed (*ibid*). No matter how Occupy Central was portrayed by the media, it succeeded in getting coverage and bringing issues of inequality more into discussion, even if it did not, according to Leung (2012), make its purpose known to the lower classes.

No movement is perfect, and there are always lessons to be learned, because the struggle towards equality requires long-

term, dedicated work and learning through participation (Chomsky 2012). The fight requires activists play the “long game” since meaningful policy change can take years (Chernus 2012).

#1. KEEP STRONG LINKS WITH OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

On the first days of Occupy Hong Kong, there was much support from various civil society groups, such as those of foreign domestic workers; this showed that Occupy had succeeded in reaching out to these organizations, which felt that Occupy’s message reflected their beliefs. The researcher herself joined one group of migrants as they marched from HSBC to the US Consulate and then went to join the official Occupy event in Exchange Square. Another group that showed support included the Anti-Lehman Brothers protesters, comprised of investors who had lost their savings due to the institution’s scandalous bankruptcy. Various progressive political figures, such as Leung Kwok Hung, who is popularly known as Longhair and from the League of Social Democrats, and Sally Tang from Socialist Action, who set up booths and/or came to show physical support for the movement. However, after the initial period, support quickly tapered off as the Occupiers were regarded as being closed to cooperation, such as via jointly called actions.

Although the Occupiers did show up at some civil society events, even when they joined under the banner of Occupy, it was perceived by groups that they were no longer reaching out and were not receptive to opportunities to cooperate. Numerous political and NGO groups, such as those working with migrants, had tried to approach them, but these groups communicated to the author that they had felt shunned.

The lesson here would be that other groups with common goals are allies and their members are potential supporters. It is necessary to keep dialogue and cooperation open with these community groups. While there is a need to accentuate the class division between the 1% and the 99% (Dean 2011), there is also a need for the 99% to stand together in solidarity. In order for progressives to be ready to challenge the system, their communities must be closely linked (CrimethInc. Workers’

Collective, n.d.a). When participants and witnesses personally experience mass action, news about the action and its message is spread through word of mouth, social media and other non-corporate communication channels (*ibid*); this not only makes it difficult for the mainstream media to ignore the action without losing credibility (*ibid*), more importantly, it allows movements to reach out directly to the general public.

#2. HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS THE MAINSTREAM PRESS

For those seeking social change, the media is a line of the fight (Occupied Times 2012). The media is known to shape public opinion in a way that protects market interests and the status quo (Davidson 2012; Occupied Times 2012). Although it is understandable that Occupy Central was annoyed with the press for negative and distorted portrayals, this type of coverage is to be expected from the mainstream media, and there is nothing to be gained from either antagonizing the media by officially cutting them off or playing to them. The suggestion is to ignore the spin and not let it define activists' actions (Davidson 2012; Occupied Times 2012). Instead, movements need focus campaigns less on the mainstream media, and more on their own creativity and proactivity in reaching the public (Davidson 2012).

Instead of being defined by the media, the movement needs to creatively use it as a tool for subversive empowerment, to raise awareness and liberate the mind (*ibid*). For example, knowing the nature of the mainstream media, it is important to act swiftly, go undetected and catch them off guard so that they broadcast events without being prepared (CrimethInc. Workers' Collective, n.d.a). At the same time, it is also necessary to understand that, given the mainstream media's interest in preserving the status quo, subsequent actions will not receive as much coverage since the media will be prepared (*ibid*).

Instead of relying on the mainstream media to speak out, activists need to find alternative ways to speak to people directly and counterbalance the mainstream construction of a movement (Occupied Times 2012). While some say there is a need for activists need to work together to improve the mainstream media,

which they seem forced to work within (Barker 2008), others argue that—instead of trying to beat the mainstream media at their game—there is a need to expand underground or alternative channels (CrimethInc. Workers' Collective, n.d.b).

It is clear that what movements need are not just “product placements” within the mainstream media but direct action (Occupied Times 2012). Activists need to use direct action activities outside of the main political channels, such as radical visual events (Schossboeck 2012) and community-based actions, engaging the street through popular theatre and other, less mediated, formats. A sketch of further ideas for direct action follows.

#3. REACH OUT TO THE PUBLIC

Although internal discussion is important in a community of freedom (Chomsky 2012), there seemed to be too much focus on these internal debates at the beginning, when the movement had more support and could have used that momentum to gain even wider, further support from the public. According to Leung (2012), the public became quite indifferent to Occupy Hong Kong, and he attributes this to the failure of the local movement to reach out to the general public and come to a common understanding with them. To motivate people to act for themselves, they must be contacted more directly and touched personally (CrimethInc. Workers' Collective, n.d.b).

According to Chomsky (2012), there is a need for activists to go out and join the public wherever they are, getting involved in their activities and reaching out to the general community. There is a need for movements to not only hold protests, but also to carry out direct action, such as growing food and providing free child care (CrimethInc. Workers' Collective (n.d.a). This is what many, both individuals and NGOs, proposed that Occupy Central do from the beginning. Several Occupiers conveyed to the author their wish to start a separate Occupy camp within Hong Kong in order to do so, but they either did not receive enough support or had to attend to other responsibilities taking them away from the territory. For example, foreign domestic worker groups had suggested linking Occupy with the surrounding foreign domestic worker community, which regularly spent Sundays in the financial district, but this

never happened. Although nearing the end of the Occupation, there appeared a new member who located edible food items which had been discarded by supermarkets, and then handed this food out to the homeless in Hong Kong and invited the homeless to stay at the camp; but by that time, it was too late.

Due to inaction in this area, the general public did not feel like the movement touched their lives in any way; unless they happened to go to the financial district—which many people in Hong Kong generally do not do—and walk by the Occupy camp, the mainstream media provided most of the information they knew about Occupy.

CONCLUSION

The situation of poverty on the ground, which serves as both the background and the very reason for Occupy Hong Kong, is dire and heart-breaking. The situation of most could be termed wage slavery. For a place that claims to be a world-class city, Hong Kong's *laissez-faire* attitude towards the vulnerable is nauseating.

In a city with astronomically expensive rent and low wages, the regular people have been reduced to living a subsistence existence. While many slave away as janitors or rag pickers just to live in cage/coffin homes, they can look around nearby to see the luxury in which those who have benefited from their exploitation live; the expensive condominiums and shopping centres have cropped up everywhere, thanks to government preferences favouring the development of luxury buildings over public housing which has a many years-long waiting list, and these more spacious condos are not for the regular folk. Often, they are actually cheaper per square foot. In the past, people might have looked to these buildings and hoped to one day live and shop in them, but there is no longer the sense of hope as the gap between rich and poor is only getting wider. Old people who did whatever they had to in order to guarantee their children an education and improve their future have discovered that there are not enough living-wage jobs to go around; while they live in horrible conditions, some say all they look forward to is dy-

It is in this context that, as part of the global Occupy movement, Occupy Hong Kong came along as a movement that tried

to help to change things. The *South China Morning Post's* reportage was within what Chan and Lee coined as the “protest paradigm” (1984, as cited in Barker, 2008). Instead of being portrayed as members of the working poor, which many of the participants were, they were framed as *petit bourgeois*, university students or children with little better to do than to play house, pretend be part of an international movement and disturb the rest of the population, including the poor they were trying to represent. The Occupiers had been framed as the “them”, and somehow, all the poor and oppressed people had become “us” with the privileged and powerful.

In the face of such income disparity and financial oppression, the development of Occupy Central was especially commendable. However, as with all movements, there are lessons to be learned for next time.

There is a need to keep strong links with other community organizations and stand together with other progressive people as part of the 99% fighting the 1%; Occupy Central became increasingly isolated as it was perceived by other groups that they were no longer as open and receptive to cooperation. Standing together not only builds critical mass but also allows a movement and its message to spread through word of mouth, social media and other channels outside of mainstream media, forcing the mainstream to cover the issue.

At the same time, movements must have realist expectations towards the mainstream press, who act as protectors of market interests and the status quo. Instead of fighting for “product placement” in the press, being disappointed with mainstream narratives and then officially cutting off contact with the press, it is best to understand that this is the way the mainstream media operates and ignore their reportage instead of letting it define future actions. Other alternatives include using the media creatively, expanding alternative media channels to communicate to the public and using direct action. Using methods such as street theatre, radical visual events and pirate radio stations, movements can bypass the mainstream media and raise awareness more directly and spark critical thinking.

Movements must also reach out and touch the broader general public with direct messages rather than focusing too heavily on the specifics of internal debates. Many NGOs and indi-

viduals, both within and without the local encampment, had suggested this, but these recommendations were ignored. Due to inaction in this area, the general public received most of their information from the mainstream media and did not feel the movement had touched their lives. Examples of possible alternatives mentioned above include community-based actions, whether these be in neighborhoods or workplaces which address immediate needs, such as by growing food, providing childcare and reaching out to the homeless and isolated. These actions not only allow for movements to circumnavigate the Mainstream media but also allow for meaningful dialogue breaking down the artificial separation between the general public and members of the movement.

With Hong Kong's disgraceful situation of income disparity and injustice, it needed a local Occupy movement, and it was admirable that people were brave enough to lead the way and start one there. The struggle for more equality does not end when authorities have removed one's camp, and this struggle must continue in Hong Kong in various forms, taking into account the lessons learned from this experience. Indeed, with plans for Occupy Central II in 2014, this time in the form of a road blockade to fight for universal suffrage in the territory, the movement continues to be the centre of public discussion in Hong Kong (But and Cheung 2013). Around the world, there need to be more and more of the 99% that stand together to demand change from governments, both via global movements, such as Occupy, and local, community-based actions centred around neighborhoods and workplaces, for example. There needs to be recognition that the world is increasingly being divided into two classes, the elite and precariat, and the precariat need to work collectively instead of competing to climb the social ladder, harbouring unrealistic dreams of becoming one of the elite. The fight for the oppressed must go on, as it is a long, continuous project, while each should remember that people with power don't give this power up unless they have to (Chomsky 2012).

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