
CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS

The preceding analysis interprets contemporary protest against globalisation and war as a coherent cycle of contention spanning from the mid-1990s to the present. A number of continuities are perceptible through three distinct but overlapping phases. The chief characteristic of this ‘movement of movements’ is the coming together of disparate actors in order to critique the global political economy, to fight its most damaging effects and to seek alternative modes of political association. Multiple dimensions of diversity exist within the cycle and I have noted the range of social, economic and cultural backgrounds of movement participants and specific objectives of struggle. My analysis focuses on the diversity of belief structures that ground actors’ understandings of the world and justifications for action. Demonstrating the significance of three particular orientational frames throughout the cycle described, on the one hand, an element of continuity over time, and on the other, a major dimension of diversity across the movements.

The historical context of each orientational frame highlights the way in which strands of the current cycle of protest connect with previous periods of contention, offering evidence that cycles are the “crucibles within which new cultural constructs are born among critical communities... they can serve as sources for the symbols of future movements.”⁷⁹⁶ In comparison with the collective action frames usually identified in the social movement literature, orientational frames are relatively ‘thick’ with propositions. Particular frames offer guidance to activists in understanding complex structures and interpreting novel events. However, each is directed at these subjects from somewhat different angles, with the content of the frame affecting its structure. Identifying multiple frames offers a unit of analysis by which we can compare different strands of the movement, gaining a deeper understanding of the meanings attached by activists to their discourse and action. Furthermore, the discovery of relatively stable tensions between frames offers insight into the dynamics within movement of movements. A brief restatement of three areas of tension is valuable, these relate to: political-economic critiques, visions of social change, and understandings of democracy.

⁷⁹⁶ Tarrow, S., 1998, *Power in Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics – Second Edition*, (CUP, Cambridge), p. 146.

In chapter one I argued that hermeneutic frame analysis offers a way to offer an abstracted account of the structures of ideas being utilised by a particular set of actors over a specified time period. This produces a fruitful analysis of particular instantiations of broader movements. The justification for such work must nevertheless rest partly on the utility of this model for understanding the broader movements themselves. There are two reasons that the work in this thesis may generate more generalised expectations about the ideational content of other instantiations of the same movements, thus suggesting a productive route for further empirical research. First, the frames identified herein emerged from a number of broader meaning-producing trends. The wider historical and political context, experience and discussion of which forms the basis of specific understandings in orientational frames, are ones shared by actors across the UK and, in some cases, beyond. Concretely, tales of particular protests or discussions of particular government action will commonly take place across national or international political communities. However, the degree to which interaction with more local contexts changes the meaning of such discussions is an interesting and open question. Second, the highly intensive level of networking within the current cycle of protest offer a fast route for the transference and comparison of experiences and interpretations. This expands the political community in which discussions are shared suggesting, again, that the elements included in the orientational frames identified are available in a broader context. As is indicated at points in chapters seven and eight, these routes were utilised in the research, offering some indicative evidence of the broader applicability of these frames.

Political Economy, Change and Democracy

The revolutionary socialist frame is particularly grounded in theoretical knowledge drawn from the Marxist critique of capitalism. The binary class analysis has been maintained, despite the shrinking industrial base of the UK, through a broad identification of the working class. Capital and the state are understood to be acting together to retain their power and international financial and political institutions, interpreted in that light, become important targets for contestation. War is understood as inter-state contest for resources and markets required for states' domestic capital base and the US, in particular, is seen as an imperial power maintaining dominance through aggression. The DA frame is partially based on anarchism and a similar critique is thereby discernable. However, the frame's pronounced preference for action over theory allows proponents to utilise a range of critiques. What is constant, however, is a confrontational attitude to corporate and state actors who are understood as maintaining power through the oppression of others. Since the frame is centred on a high value on individual liberty and consequent distrust of authority, the exercise of

power by hierarchical institutions is always likely to be subject to critique. The RL frame arrives at a similar critical perspective to both the RS and DA frames but critiques are often tightly bound to much more specific information about the targeted institutions. Rather than taking an anti-capitalist approach it finds particular power-holders, including both political and economic actors, guilty of particular abuses of power. These specific critiques are supported by a more general set of moral claims centred on a belief in the necessity of protection of certain rights for all people. Furthermore, the identification of neoliberalism as a dogmatic belief structure that dominates thinking in a range of institutions offers an ability to generalise critique. While there is a tension in the mode of critique coming from the three frames, in the context of economic globalisation they have converged on identification of the same enemies. Finding common targets in the international political economy was essential to the broad participation notable in both the alternative globalisation and anti-war movements.

In their visions of social change both the RS and DA frames are highly confrontational in the sense that they do not believe that current power holders will willingly act for greater equality. However, their visions of how change might be achieved are very different, and partly related to understandings of the agency held by movement participants. The RS frame has a strong affinity for the Russian revolution as the model of large-scale social change through taking control of, first, the state, and then the economy. The power of the working class lies in its economic relationship with capital and requires mass collective action. However, the consciousness of this fact within the working class in the UK is seen as very low because of the successful exercise of hegemonic power by a capitalist state. Participation in small-scale struggles may be understood as steps towards a greater level of class consciousness, but can never substitute for the revolutionary ambition. The vanguard party takes on the essential role of maintaining knowledge of the revolutionary power of the working class, and spreading that knowledge through educational activities, participation in concrete struggles and recruitment to the vanguard. Within the DA frame, small-scale struggles are valued on their own merits. Confrontation carries its own rewards in the outcome of concrete struggles, and in the empowerment of individuals who gain a growing sense of their own agency. Capitalism is not entirely extensive and therefore individuals and groups can find ways to live in alternative spaces. Social change must, therefore, be brought about by people free to choose their own targets, tactics and collectives with which to work. To the extent that the DA frame has a long-term ambition to much wider social change, this is understood as a cultural shift that may be brought about by a progressive increase in the number of people who have become empowered to act on their own behalf. Because the RL frame does not include a binary class division it does

not understand physical confrontation as an essential feature of struggles for social change. The exercise of power is understood as contingent and moral argumentation as potentially efficacious. However, particular structures are understood as enabling the abuse of power, and the frame therefore posits alternative structures for organising social, economic and political life. The cooperative form of organising, for instance, is intended to guarantee power equality and therefore mitigate against the abuse of power. In this form it resembles the DA mode of creating alternatives to capitalism in the present. However, the RL frame is potentially content with broader, less participatory structures that regulate economic relationships such as trade without providing ostensibly non-capitalist alternatives.

For the RL frame, therefore, democracy is understood as a structure that reduces the abuse of power through enabling individuals to protect their own rights. It does not contain a precise prescription for the mechanism by which that would work, finding either participative or representative modes of democracy acceptable. However, since the essence of democracy is understood as equalising power, certain limits to liberal representative democracy are recognised. That is, where those who hold economic or cultural power are capable of gaining advantage in the contest for political power, democracy does not fulfil its promise. Furthermore, because centralisation increases the risk of power abuse, and because those who are affected by a decision are likely to be better placed to make that decision since they have relevant knowledge of their immediate situation, there is a general tendency to adhere to a subsidiarity principle. The RS frame, conversely, sees centralisation as an essential component of democracy. For social struggle to be effective, hierarchical organisation is considered to be essential. Furthermore, a strong belief in the truth of Marxism and the need to apply expert theoretical knowledge to concrete struggle implies that some are more capable than others of making wise decisions. The DA frame is, conversely, fundamentally attached to participatory modes of decision making since it is committed to the maintenance of individual autonomy. Like the RL frame this understanding is related to the importance of knowledge held by those affected by decision making. More importantly, however, elective democracy is seen as creating an oppression of the minority by the majority. Because it does not resort to voting, consensus based decision making is presented within the DA frame as an ideal form that is also practicably achievable.

Despite converging on critique, therefore, the three frames offer adherents markedly different guidance on how to contest their opponents. The operation of different modes of action have been clear throughout the current cycle of contention. However, recognising their common enemy, activists operating with each of the frames

have sought to work together. The modes of action, and the political beliefs they are connected to, have therefore been in frequent interaction. During the anti-war movement, this interaction increasingly took the form of a competition over strategy. On the one hand, the mass march was understood as potentially effective through making a moral claim (within the RL frame) or as a show of strength and unity, and therefore power (within the RS frame). On the other hand, DA frame proponents carried out more confrontational actions seeking to cause direct harm to the government and its military apparatus. Individuals and groups consistently argued for a realignment of the wider movement in this direction. This strategic competition was also affected by the understandings of democracy held by participants, since those operating within the DA frame were critical of the centralisation of the StWC. Perceiving the coalitions as spaces in which Trotskyist organisations would seek to dominate the movement, a significant strand of the movement was underrepresented within coalition activities. However, the central organisations and the mass events they promoted did form the most visible part of the anti-war movement, essentially setting a national agenda around which local groups would organise.

The foregoing summary highlights several of the purposes of the identification of orientational frames in this thesis. This approach, firstly, allows the de-reification of social movements, enabling understanding of the different motivations and ambitions of those engaged in collective action. Frames are important because they play a role in the broader processes that encourage social movement formation. For instance, grievances and opportunity structures can only inspire and enable collective action to the degree that individuals' perceived grievances as unjust and opportunities as available. Explicating the content of the frames is important, secondly therefore, to recognise these processes occurring. Third, the political content of frames is relevant to the political theorist because here we see political beliefs that are clearly related to ideologies in their practical application. Ideologies are always action-oriented, but their study often removes them from their purposive context, i.e. that of encouraging social action. Fourth, the content of orientational frames has a notable effect on internal movement dynamics resulting in particular forms of public action from movements.

Ideational Shift in the Movement of Movements

The chapters in Part II displayed the convergences and tensions that had a significant effect on the shape of the movements that they were a part of, demonstrating the value of one dimension of comparison within this study. A second dimension of comparison is made available by the case studies in Part III which are based on strips of activity relating to two distinct phases of the current cycle of contention. Globally, the beginning of the social forum movements preceded that of the

anti-war movement. There was a large degree of overlap in participation, evidenced both by the inclusion of discussions of the war on terror at all the large social forum events after 9/11 and by the concrete anti-war planning that occurred at the 'assemblies of social movements' at the end of the social forums, particularly prominent at ESF I. Locally, however, activities for Sheffield Social Forum only started once the anti-war movement had begun to dissipate. Significant differences between these strips of activity relate to characteristics internal to the movement of movements and to features of the wider social context.

Most obviously, the mode of action within the anti-war and social forum movements is very different. Anti-war activity exhibited 'classic' movement characteristics through the use of mass popular protest, argumentation through a wide range of media, pressure on political institutions and more direct confrontation with authorities. The categorisation of activities surrounding the social forums as a social movement may be questioned: its action is almost entirely discursive and its proponents self-consciously strive to link a diverse range pre-existing struggles, playing a specific role in the 'movement of movements'. Thus, the creation of a particular kind of 'open space' is a novel form of collective action that does not fit easily within standard definitions of social movements. However, the organisation of social forums is, in itself, a sustained period of politically oriented collective action in which participants seek social change. Difficulties over conceptualisation of the social forum indicate one area of further research that might profitably emerge from this thesis. As the new social movement theories examined identity-based movements in the context of changing class structures, social theory that explores the links between the social forum as a mode of political action and wider societal shifts may be highly profitable. For instance, the knowledge generating function of social forums may be linked into conceptualisations of the 'information society' and their networking focus bears comparisons with understandings of the 'network society'.

The anti-war movement operated by confronting, either symbolically or directly, centres of power in the government and military. The urgency felt by participants when faced with the 'war on terror' led to a continued focus on a negatively defined campaign. Despite a shift in emphasis from economic to political actors, unity in opposition has been shown to be a relatively easy outcome of the orientational frames that had already been developed. The social forums, conversely, developed by separation from centres of power political or economic power. This must be understood as a result of a number of dynamics. The increasing violence of confrontations was, for many participants, a serious flaw in the alternative globalisation movement. Especially in the post-9/11 world, activists sought to avoid violence wherever possible. In any case,

the meetings of the institutions of economic globalisation were increasingly located in venues selected for their inaccessibility and, sometimes, the repressive nature of host governments. Critiques of the alternative globalisation movement as being unable to agree on positive propositions that emerged both within and without the movement also spurred participants to seek more in common than identified targets. Furthermore, at least at the level of rhetoric, such institutions appeared to be responding to some of the critiques of the movements.

In seeking a new form of organisation capable of linking many diverse struggles the development of the social forum movement indicates a new relationship between the local and the global. The alternative globalisation movement did successfully link a number of national and local struggles where they were clearly related to global institutions. However, the spectacular global demonstrations were criticised as a distraction from concrete local activity. Within the anti-war movement local campaigns were understood as a direct contribution to a much wider movement, and took their cues from national and international events. Within the social forum movement, however, the local activities appear to be based on the self-conscious preservation of autonomy from the larger events and structures. Indeed, the networking of local social forums in the UK displayed a critical attitude to mass events.

Contention within the social forums represents a struggle over the future of the 'movement of movements'. Because the social forum itself has come to represent potential for generating future social change, the different prescriptions for action found within the orientational frames utilised by participants collide. In chapter eight I suggested disagreements over ESF III brought proponents of the RL and DA frames closer together, and in opposition to proponents of the RS frame; this potentially signals the emergence of a new orientational frame. Clarifying what is at stake in such a claim offers a way of testing the boundaries of orientational frames, and additionally suggests a useful direction for further research.

There are significant claims to ideational novelty within movement discourse around the social forum. It is understood not only as a new mode of collective action, but also a set of beliefs about the world that is claimed to be "post-marxist and post-liberal."⁷⁹⁷ This self-understanding can not be dismissed lightly, since the presentation of ideas in this way is an important part of the reproduction of beliefs. Orientational frames are effective because they are the accumulated product of many presentations of

⁷⁹⁷ Conway, J., 2005, "Social Forums, Social Movements and Social Change: A Response to Peter Marcuse on the Subject of the World Social Forum" in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(2), p. 427.

particular connections between ideas and the more often such statements are made, the more likely it will effect the way that activists think and act. However, there cannot be a formulaic method by which we can measure the impact of such statements; it is rather, through interpreting the everyday discourse of activists that we find the particular belief-structures that motivate and inform. I argued that in the networking of local social forums, in the contest between horizontals and verticals, and in writings that interpret the world social forums, there does appear to be a novel belief structure in use. Novelty is discernible through the centring of the network form as the motor of social change, which has ramifications for the understanding of democracy and of social movements themselves. Picking up the notion of prefiguration from the DA frame, we find the argument that networked groups can perform all kinds of productive work and thus offers a model for a more just future society. In order to produce that change, the alternative has to be lived in the present. However, in comparison to the DA frame as described in chapter four, we find a new emphasis on a particular relation of power to knowledge and an openness to the kinds of action that networked groups may find success with that both appear to stem from the RL frame. Since it is through the interconnection of ideas that meaning is produced, the rearrangement of ideational elements constitutes the novelty of participatory pluralism.

Nevertheless, participatory pluralism has developed in a particular context, and the extent to which it can transcend that context can be questioned in two ways. First, this belief structure is particularly directed against the perceived failings associated with the RS frame in order to win an argument about the future of a movement-focused discursive forum. Specifically, it attempts to deal with the problem of connecting diverse struggles in a way that preserves the identity of those struggles, while finding some collective strength. It can, therefore, appear as a rather inward-looking attempt to deal with issues particular to the movement of movements. The second, related, problem is that it is difficult to discern the degree to which these ideas are being utilised outside of the social forum movement. There is some evidence that, at the global level, the contest over the nature of the social forum is moving progressively in the direction indicated by participatory pluralism. In particular, the increasing stress on the forum as facilitator of self-organised events, and the experimental plan to hold WSF 2006 in multiple locations suggest that this is the case.⁷⁹⁸ The organisation of the

⁷⁹⁸ Wainwright, H., 2005, "Report on the Methodology of the WSF and its Possible Relevance for the 2006 ESF" on Transnational Institute Website, available at: <http://www.tni.org/archives/wainwright/methodology.htm>; last accessed: 20/11/05.; WSF, 2005, "World Social Forum 2006 Will Be Spread Out" in *WSF News*, available at: http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias_01.php?cd_news=1548&cd_language=2; last accessed: 20/11/05.

social forum is, of itself, an effort in social change. But the real impact of participatory pluralism will come if the social forum succeeds in multiplying and strengthening struggles that take on its own values. Whether it is appropriate to understand participatory pluralism as a new orientational frame will depend on how widely held the particular emphases on diversity, participation and the democratic power of the network form become and to what extent these serve as a motor of action for social change. Unless it offers benefits for activists in understanding their own life circumstances and their agency, participatory pluralism is unlikely to survive beyond the life of the social forum movement. Partly because of their historical connections with previous movements, the orientational frames identified in Part II offer answers on a wide range of political issues. It will only be through the broader application of the novel connections in participatory pluralism that it may become sufficiently thick to serve as an orientational frame in many contexts. In other words, if, in criticising some features of the political economy, activists return to other orientational frames, such as the RL or DA frames, then participatory pluralism does not offer sufficient meaning to motivate collective action. If, on the other hand, participatory pluralism allows activists to reinterpret their critique and their understanding of action for social change, then it does offer sufficient and novel meaning. Which of these is the case must be a subject for future study as the ideas wrapped up in participatory pluralism become more widespread. While some activists may already be interpreting the world through a new lens, others will undoubtedly continue to use others. The spread of ideas depends, not only, on individuals gaining access to convincing presentations of particular understandings, but also on the availability of experiences that confirm those understandings, and a willingness to question one's own thought. Ideational development appears, therefore, from the interplay of historical circumstance and individual creativity.