"A whole way of struggle?" Western Marxisms, social movements and culture[1]

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Introduction: Western Marxisms, movements, culture

About this chapter

The literature on "Marxism and culture" is forbiddingly large, covering many of the key cultural theorists of the past century, and could hardly be covered in a single chapter except as a very casual overview.[2] That on "Marxism and social movements" might appear smaller, although there is more activist and academic reflection on the topic, if not always tagged with the phrase "social movement", than might be thought.[3]

This chapter, however, has a narrower focus. It reflects on the work of a number of "Western Marxist" writers who have been active as theorists both of social movements and of popular culture, such as Antonio Gramsci and Györgi Lukács, EP Thompson and Raymond Williams, Hilary Wainwright and Peter Linebaugh. In doing this, it deliberately sets itself off from those traditions within western Marxism whose critique of popular culture has been divorced from any analysis of social movement struggles, and focuses on authors whose work has contributed to the Marxist analysis of the relationship between social movements and culture.

Rather than trace each individual contribution made by western Marxists of this tendency to theories of movement or culture (or both), it focusses on three interlinked propositions in their work which are arguably in a particularly direct line with classical Marxist thought

[1] Thanks are due to the participants in the *Protest/Culture* workshops for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

[2] There is no universally recognised Marxist concept of culture (and there is of course a refusal to reify or eternalise such concepts within Marx's own thought). The twentieth-century reorganisations of European capitalism saw figures such as Gramsci attempting to elaborate a way of understanding the ways in which culture was articulated within such societies, and to understand the continuities and ruptures with earlier forms and other contexts, a central theme in the *Prison Notebooks*.

[3] See Barker et al. 2013 for an overview of current scholarship in this area.

and are thus "Marxist" conceptually as well as historically. It attempts to identify these propositions as clearly as can be done without doing violence to the authors in question.

In essence, these propositions are (1) that movement culture is grounded in the material realities of everyday life; (2) that its shaping is neither automatic nor static but a process of articulation, development and learning; and (3) that it takes place in conflictual dialogue with opposing social groups, state power and existing cultural hegemony.

The chapter is thus not an exercise in Marxology (establishing the links between its propositions and classical Marxist thought), nor is it an argument from authority in relation to other social theorists. Rather, it seeks to establish a *prima facie* case for the empirical plausibility and logical coherence of its case, while hopefully also showing its productivity as a research agenda via the authors cited - in my view the only legitimate use of the argument from authority.[4]

While the chapter is theoretical rather than empirical in focus, it is shaped by my own research and political engagement with counter-cultures, alterglobalisation activism, working-class community organising and the history of Irish Buddhism, in particular its intersection with Asian anti-colonial movements (Cox 2011; 2010; 2006; Mullan and Cox 2001).

Defining western Marxisms

The category of western Marxism has been the subject of extensive praise and critique. The category was initially used to define independent Marxisms which were not subordinated to then-orthodox Marxism-Leninism as the official state theories of the Soviet Union and its satellites, and subsequently of the competing centres of state Marxism (thus Kolakowski 2008 or Jacoby 2002 for western Marxism and Mills' (1963) definition of orthodoxy).

If so, western Marxisms might be expected to have a primary orientation to popular organising rather than post-revolutionary states, and hence to give a particular place to human agency, popular culture and social movements (see Gottlieb 1989 for an approach along these lines). Following Gramsci's famous distinction (1971) between the challenges faced by social movements in Russia and western Europe, western Marxisms would be those produced by theorists of the war of position - not only the complexity of "civil society" (including popular culture) but also the challenges of mobilisation, alliance-

[4] See Nilsen 2009 and Cox 2011 for more narrowly conceptual formulations.

formation and conflict. The authors discussed here have typically also been movement participants, and from a Marxist point of view – where theory and practice are understood to inform each other – this shapes their analysis.

Matters are of course more complicated than that, and any schematisation of some of the most significant thinkers of the twentieth century is bound to leave gaps. Many western Marxists, represented perhaps most visibly by the Frankfurt School, tended towards a critical analysis of modernity which left little space for popular agency – although Marcuse, and in a second generation Habermas and his students such as Cohen, have returned to the theme of social movements. Althusserian structuralism similarly tended to dismiss popular movements (although again the poststructuralist second generation returned to the theme). Conversely, autonomists have exalted agency in the abstract but struggled to analyse actual processes of political organisation (Cox 2001).

Nonetheless we can identify a century-long tradition of writers – from Gramsci and Lukács in the founding years of the Comintern through to Rediker and Linebaugh in contemporary academia – who have paid substantial attention *both* to social movements *and* to the theme of culture. While the academic reception of theorists from Gramsci to Williams has often recognised them as major contributors to debates on popular culture, it has often missed the extent to which - as political activists and adult educators (Mayo 1999) - their reflections drew on and fed back into the experience of popular movements. As O'Connor (1989: 125-6), notes of Williams,

> Williams' resources for hope include the organized working class but also the new social movements: ecology, peace, and women's organizations. He writes this but these political intentions and movements write him.

In particular, I will argue, this experience leads this kind of western Marxist theorist to highlight the ways in which social movements articulate popular culture, both being shaped by it and helping to develop it further.

Meanwhile, from a different direction – harder to articulate theoretically but well-developed as research practice – "history from below" (MARHO 1983), the work of British and French Marxist historians (Kaye 1995) and much oral history (Paul Thompson 1982) have paid significant and influential attention to the cultural underpinnings of historical social movements. From a Marxist standpoint, where practice is the ultimate test of theory, it is important to pay attention to less conceptually-oriented authors whose deployment of Marxist research methodology has opened up fruitful new directions in research.

These two approaches – the theoretical and the empirical – combine, I will argue, in a directional reading of popular culture and social movements which is tied up with a historical awareness of the rise and fall not only of movements but of class consciousness and independent popular organisation of any kind, as well as with the situation of practitioners, attempting to teach, organise, construct identities, build alliances, support other activists, maintain networks and so on.

The intensely *active* nature of popular culture and social movements, the effort involved in developing them and the bitter experience of defeat have all led such movement-engaged Marxists to highlight processual and developmental approaches to popular self-activity in ways which are often absent not only from many academic perspectives but also from state-centred and "mandarin" forms of Marxism.

Three western Marxist propositions

Because of the great diversity of situations which western Marxists have engaged with as researchers or movement participants, there seems at first glance to be an equal diversity of different literatures: continental activist writers like Antonio Gramsci and Györgi Lukács, associated with the failed revolutions of the immediate post-WWI period; British-based "history from below" from Christopher Hill, EP Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, George Rudé and Sheila Rowbotham to contemporary US-based authors such as Peter Linebaugh, Marcus Rediker and James Holstun; present-day Marxist theorists of social movements such as Chik Collins, Colin Barker and John Krinsky who draw on Vygotsky, Volosinov and Bakhtin to articulate dialogical theories responding to the "linguistic turn"; and less readily classifiable figures such as CLR James, Raymond Williams or Hilary Wainwright.

It would clearly be impossible to articulate a detailed conceptual framework which all these authors could be said to subscribe to. However, I want to argue that there are three important general propositions which can be identified running across many of these more specific theories and which together constitute a relatively coherent western Marxist analysis of social movements and culture; one which, moreover, has shown itself over time to be a very fertile source of research intuitions and political inspiration:

1) The cultural modes of social movement organisation (from the moral economy of the food riot via the techniques of piracy to the languages of popular unrest) draw on and reflect the broader everyday structure of their participants' lifeworlds, in particular as

these are shaped through their material situation – their struggle to meet basic needs and their relationships with each other and with other social groups.

2) This is a developmental rather than a static perspective: *organising* rather than organisation, culture-making rather than culture-being. Social movement cultures articulate the bottom-up learning processes inherent in this process, as groups develop the "local rationalities", "tacit knowledge" or "good sense" involved in daily survival and in conflictual relationships with other groups, finding a way of thinking more adequate to their experience, a way of being which is more adequate to their daily struggles and needs, and developing appropriate organisational cultures[5].

3) This developmental process runs into limits set by dominant institutions at various points and is thus (conflictually) dialogical: that is, it cannot be understood separately from the encounter with power, exploitation and cultural authority or as distinct from the attempt to form alliances, generalise movements and construct alternative possible worlds in dialogue with relationships both of consent and coercion.

It will be seen that this is a logical order rather than a chronological one, distinguishing three aspects of a single process which can be understood as *culture-in-movement* rather than "movement culture" as a noun. As I will suggest, this processual or directional approach is what distinguishes the western Marxist perspective from its non-Marxist offspring. I say "offspring" because the authors covered here have been enormously influential – or, to put it another way, this perspective has shown us another way to read the social world which has proved convincing and illuminating in a very wide range of different contexts. So much so, in fact, that many non-Marxist authors have borrowed heavily from it, knowingly or otherwise. This in turn strongly suggests (which is all that can be done in a chapter of this length) that assent to any of these propositions in isolation does not depend on being a Marxist, but is a reasonable conclusion for social researchers looking at a particular aspect of the relationship between social movements and culture.

However – and here is where directionality becomes important once again – what sets off the non-Marxist writers mentioned here is that each of them acknowledges *one* aspect of the western Marxist approach without making the connections to the others.

[5] I do not here mean that there is an obvious or pre-given outcome of any of these learning processes. Indeed, they are often internally contested as people argue over how to speak, how to behave and how to organise; but these arguments are won or lost in relation to people's apprehension of their situation and needs.

Thus, for example, a relationship between movement culture and daily life is admitted, without theorising how the one is produced from the other. Alternatively, movements are conceptualised in learning terms but without this learning being related back to material situations. Or again, the symbolic dialogue with power is acknowledged but without a sense that the dialogue can go one way or the other, that in a revolutionary period a new common sense from below can overthrow the once-hegemonic discourse of the old masters, while in a period of movement defeat popular discourses can be disaggregated, silenced and colonised by the rulers. My discussion of non-Marxist writers is thus double-edged: they add to the *prima facie* case for taking this interpretation seriously, but also show what is distinctive about the processual Marxist understanding.

In discussing each proposition, I first present it in substantive terms; secondly I show its partial acceptance by non-Marxist writers; thirdly I show how western Marxist authors integrate it into a wider perspective.

1) Social movement cultures and everyday lifeworlds

How we organise reflects who we are: this is in a sense completely unsurprising. No doubt there are times when we create something completely original, times when we are schooled in a particular organising tradition and times when we are inspired by a movement elsewhere. In each case, however, these initial models are passed through the filters of how we attempt to make these ideas make sense in our own context and with the people we are organising with. More commonly, of course, social movement actors do not instantly think of themselves as doing something radically outside the ordinary (or seek to avoid the perception that they are asking something unprecedented and perhaps illegitimate of each other) and so tend to draw on modes of interacting, everyday life skills and ways of thinking which are already familiar in the lifeworld within which they are organising.

Thus, for example, it is unsurprising if medieval peasant movements reproduced much of the particularism, faith in distant rulers as against immediate exploiters and religious morality of the world they sprang from. At the opposite end of the scale, Linebaugh and Rediker’s work (2000; Rediker 1987, 2004) on the politics of the Atlantic working class shows neatly how the practice of piracy sprang from the work relations of the commercial sailing ship, how the transmission of skills among political radicals followed trans-oceanic trade patterns and how the internationalism of these radicals reproduced that of the new Atlantic economy. From the sublime to the less grandiose, I have found in setting up

alternative kindergartens that organisational patterns all too often reproduces the friendship politics of the kinds of parents who become involved; an experience paralleled in Avrich's (2005) analysis of anarchist school projects.

More formally, western Marxists have regularly sought to show how social movement cultures are intimately related with the popular cultures and everyday lifeworlds of their participants (Thompson 1991). Putting the same point in a different way, they have equally sought to show the implicit politics of popular culture (Hall and Jefferson 1991), the extent to which popular religion can be organisation by another name (Hill 1975), and so on. For western Marxists, then, "social movement culture" is not something *separate* from popular culture. Effective social movements draw on neighbourhood networks, workplace skills, popular music, local emotional repertoires and shared symbolic references.

Non-Marxist writers have often agreed (see also Ullrich / Keller and Baumgarten, this volume). Nancy Naples' (1998) oral history of women community organisers in poor and Latino communities in East Coast US cities shows how their "activist mothering" extends caring relationships beyond their own families to the young women organisers whom they mentor, as well as more broadly an ethic of care for their communities. Lichterman's (1996) ethnography of distinct modes of environmental organising draws similar conclusions for anti-toxics campaigners in poor communities, who resist being distinguished from their neighbours as "activists". Conversely, the white service-class members of the US Green Party whom he studied shared that class's extreme mobility and disconnection from family and community of origin, constructing new kinds of elective families in ways not dissimilar to Maffesoli's (1996) "urban tribes".

Similarly, McKay's (1996) historical account of radical subcultures in Britain uses classic British Cultural Studies models of analysis, which routinely highlighted the political aspects of apparently cultural phenomena (Hall and Jefferson 1991), to show that they can be equally applied to subcultures with an overtly political edge; while Hetherington (2000) makes in some ways the same point in reverse when he describes British New Age Travellers in terms of a style subculture. In all these cases, what is being said is that how we organise reflects who we are, quite normally and naturally.

Materialist implications

A Marxist analysis of social movement culture underlines this point, drawing out a series of materialist implications. One is that "who we are" is shaped by our material

circumstances and struggles: at the most basic, social movements are part of the "political economy of labour" (Lebowitz 2003), the attempt to survive and thrive in the face of relations of exploitation. These relations are not only classed, but also raced and gendered, as socialist feminist critiques of the left (Rowbotham et al. 1979) and black critiques of white feminism (hooks 1981) have observed[6]. Even within the context of the global "movement of movements", overcoming the ways in which movement practices are shaped by social origins has proved extremely difficult (Conway 2011, Hewitt 2011, Juris 2008, Flesher Fominaya, this volume). Culture, in this reading, is materially determined (in Williams' 1980 sense of "setting limits and exerting pressures").

A second point gives purpose to the Marxist tradition of class analysis: not only do some social groups have more reason to mobilise around certain issues than others (it makes less sense to campaign on feminist issues in male contexts, as Messner 1997 has shown) or have more potential for disruption (Piven 2008) than others, but different social groups have different organising capacity and potential. This need not be eternal or essential to be decisive at any given point in time: at present, for example, it is clear that indigenous populations in several Andean countries possess a crucial political potential which has made them central to movement developments (Zibechi 2010, Cocco and Negri 2006). Different cultures, then, are political in different ways (including, perhaps, in hostility to change or in inability to act effectively).

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, how a given lifeworld is organised is *already* political (Thompson 1991). It is not that we first have an apolitical lifeworld (whatever that might look like), and then (perhaps with the addition of "culture" or "politics"), social movements arise – or that, as Habermas (1981) suggested, movements represent the defence of (private but authentic) lifeworlds against the logics of economics and the state. Rather, how people conceive of, and struggle to meet, their needs is itself a politics, which may take a range of forms: clientelism, institutional loyalty, religion, protest and so on – grounded in their material situations but with wider-reaching effects (Gramsci 1971).

These situations are themselves routinely contested: if there is a simple opposition between the politics of "keep your head down" (Scott 1990) and that hostile to "ragged-trousered philanthropy" (Tressell 1993), there may well be competing clientelist networks along with movements attempting to assert popular power outside of elite mediation; or a

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[6] With Gottlieb (1989), I see the integration of feminist, anti-racist and world-systems perspectives as a deepening rather than a contradiction of materialist perspectives which were often originally expressed primarily in relation to social class.

working-class community or family may be divided between religious and political modes of organising. If everyday culture in this sense is at the same time everyday politics, it is not homogenous; and this is the point of Gramsci's *Southern Question* analysis (1978) – organising depends on contradiction.

In this first proposition, culture appears primarily as a "whole way of being", a way of "doing" the everyday, including everyday organising (or everyday music or religion with political implications). What is highlighted is the relationship between these two apparently separate terms, culture and social movements.

2) A developmental perspective on social movement culture and knowledge

There is, it will be evident, an intellectual problem at this point. What might be called a base-superstructure model of movement culture would presumably propose that social movement activism is a superstructure, reflective in some sense of a base in lifeworlds themselves structured in material ways (for example, of class, gender and race). If, however, lifeworlds are *already* political with a small p - that is, the way we act has implications in terms of broader power relations within society - and if this politics is contested, it is clear that the relationship between lifeworld culture and movement activism cannot be simply of the kind "A produces B" (Williams 1980).

A more workable analysis is then to say, as Alf Nilsen and I have argued (2005; Nilsen 2009), that we can see social movement culture and institutions as being developmental: articulating further rationalities which are expressed in popular lifeworlds and attempting to meet needs which require action beyond the lifeworld.

These "local rationalities" are *local* because they are organised around particular, situated, material relationships of exploitation, power and cultural hierarchies. They are *rationalities* because they are ways of doing things which respond to something real: the need to feed children, the pressures of workplace management, the assertion of human dignity in the face of racism – but also because they may be more or less adequate to these needs (Lebowitz 2003). People's material situation is a necessary, but not sufficient, explanation for social movements; what makes the difference is how people understand, respond to and attempt to transform that situation. Movements *move* in precisely this space: from fear to action, for example (Nilsen 2012).

This reading has normative implications: that social movements are not as arbitrary as the postmodernist reading (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) proposes, but bear a certain *situational* justification in relation to their lifeworlds of origin. The implications of this critical realist position (Collier 1994) have been teased out particularly neatly by Wainwright (1994).

Wainwright argues that non-powerful participants in society come to hold various forms of unofficial or tacit practical knowledge which represent the “slave” part of Hegel’s master-slave relationship: outside the ken or theology of managers, policy-makers, international financial institutions and so on but nevertheless key to everyday survival as expressions of unmet needs, “illegitimate” experiences and unofficial coping strategies. Crucially, such knowledge is best articulated *collectively*. Using the paradigmatic example of feminist consciousness-raising, she argues that it is such knowledge that social movements develop into challenges to the existing order.

In other words, a materialist understanding of social movement culture sees it not just as situated. It also sees culture in general, and *a fortiori* those aspects of culture which we can distinguish as articulated social movements, as attempts to be adequate to this situatedness. These attempts might be more or less successful – in the eyes of an academic observer or, more urgently, in the eyes of local participants who argue over how to do things as well as working things out less consciously in relation to their actual situations.

The outcomes of these arguments are not a foregone conclusion, and should not be reified theoretically. In contrast to the conservative implications of Scott’s (1990) “hidden transcripts” argument[7] (based in part on fieldwork in Malaysia after the British counter-insurgency campaign), for example, the argument does not assume that hidden transcripts *must* stay hidden - the fear of repression which is central to Scott’s analysis is a historically specific condition which can be overcome (Nilsen 2012). At times, the oppressed do rise up; at others, they do not.

But if - for example - a peasant organiser has to convince other peasants that the landlords or their military backers are neither God-given, trustworthy or invincible - how can we theorise this kind of complex consciousness?

Gramsci’s (1991) analysis of peasant consciousness, drawing in large part on his own reflections on Sardinian life (Nairn 1982), offers a useful contrast between “common

[7] This highlights the ways in which subaltern groups grumble, joke, gossip, mock and otherwise give backstage expression to their feelings about the powerful but treats this (and the relative absence of overtly expressed opposition) almost as a human universal.

sense" and "good sense". Within consciousness - and within the lifeworld - many different forces co-exist, including *both* Wainwright's tacit knowledge and the official, hegemonic perspectives (and, indeed, those represented by the "traditional intellectuals" of older social situations such as the village priest or lawyer and those represented by the "organic intellectuals" of rising groups such as peasant activists).

"Good sense", for Gramsci, then represents that core of "common sense" (the actually-existing mixture of hegemonic attitudes, practical good sense and historical residues in everyday consciousness: Ytterstad 2011) which actually expresses one's own material situation - and hence the needs, experiences and problems contained in it. Ideas, practices, movements and institutions which are subject to fewer constraints of external power and exploitation enable this good sense to be more fully expressed. Marxist writers on culture have developed this analysis into fields as widely-differing as popular religion (Barrow 1986) and working-class Marxist theory (Macintyre 1986).

This, incidentally, is another way of stating Lukács' often-misunderstood position on class consciousness (1971, 2000), which he explicitly presents as a Weberian ideal-type construction: given particular interests and a particular context, a certain logic of action is likely to be followed, *all else being equal*. Of course historically all else is very often not equal. Since the rise of industrial capitalism, for example, workers have routinely attempted to improve their situations (as Thompson puts it, "no worker in history ever had surplus value taken out of his [sic] hide without finding a way of resisting" (1966: 115)), but the forms which this has taken and the outcomes of those strategies have been anything other than neatly predictable.

Another approach, this time highlighting the development of *institutions*, is Lebowitz' "political economy of labour" (2003), which sees human needs (understood as socially-determined and themselves developmental rather than abstractly given) as continually and necessarily giving rise, on the part of those who do not control the means of production, to attempts to meet them. Thus family and community solidarity are just as much a part of this process as are "cultures of solidarity" (Fantasia 1988) or membership of unions and socialist parties; "our common history" (Paul Thompson 1982) consists to a significant degree of the constantly-disrupted attempt to extend this logic as far as possible within current situations. Not, as Williams, once put it, a "whole way of life", so much as (EP Thompson) a "whole way of struggle" (Hall 1989) .

Thompson's understanding of the development of the English working class as a learning process has been powerfully explored by Vester (1970; see also Cox 2013). Cox (2011) explores another approach to this Marxist analysis of social movements, according to which social movements are developmental expressions of the materially-grounded "local rationalities" of the social situations which give birth to them (Nilsen 2010).

Here I want simply to note the value and the limitations of this analysis. Its value is in offering a coherent and socially-situated analysis of the genesis, persistence and general direction of social movements, as outlined above. Its limitation is that it does not, and cannot, account for the specific history of a particular movement, campaign or organisation. From the point of view of "movement-relevant theory", however, what this means is that this approach does not see the path followed by a particular movement as inevitable; rather, it posits the *movement* as necessary and its specifics as the outcomes of internal struggles - and provides, in the notions of local rationality, tacit knowledge, needs and so on - a yardstick by which to measure whether the organisations and strategies currently being pursued are helpful and appropriate or not.

Non-Marxist writers have also attempted a cognitive / learning analysis of social movements, whether in terms of the development of alternative movement knowledge (Eyerman and Jamison 1990); health and emotional practices (Anne Scott 1998) or counter-cultures (Buckner 1971). However, without a sense of a material base, non-Marxists lack the directional and evaluative components identified above which make it possible to go beyond blanket celebrations or dismissals of movement institutions in terms of their supposed intrinsic qualities - and ask how far they succeed in expressing the popular needs and understandings which underpin the movement or when, and in what circumstances, they can enable substantial social change.

Social movements, culture … and revolutions

Finally, we can note that the Marxist tradition proposes a specific role for *revolutionary* and social movement experience in transforming "common sense" into "good sense": Marx and Engels (1971: 53) proposed that it was only in such contexts that a whole class, rather than simply individuals, could shift the "muck of ages", the hegemonic perspectives instilled into them, and come to see the world anew.

Feminism, or black pride, could not grow "one individual at a time". It took mass movements which shook the world to transform the ways of seeing and thinking of a whole

generation and to open new possibilities for their children. One key reason for this, of course, is that local rationalities are local: it takes the encounter with other, parallel rationalities - in the formation of social movements, and then of alliances between social movements - to abstract from the local and construct a good sense which is not simply a restated particularism or clientelism.

This analysis, then, enables us to say something substantive about events such as the Arab Spring (Shihade et al. 2012), the "pink tide" in Latin America (Zibechi 2010) or the revolutions of 1989 (Dale 2006) that goes beyond comments on "Twitter revolutions" and the like. Without needing to deny their limits, ambiguities and problems, it becomes possible to understand these continent-wide transformative moments as linked by more than their surfaces, with shared "tacit knowledges" and a multiplicity of "local rationalities" coming together in movements and revolutions to remake the social order (McNally 2013).

Parts at least of the "muck of ages", even parts which claimed to be Marxist, were jettisoned and new understandings developed and fought out: as I write this, in Tahrir Square and Egyptian ballot boxes, for example. This, too, is part of the Marxist analysis of culture and social movements: the understanding that revolutions are necessarily also major cultural events. This is why oral histories of the civil rights movement (Hampton et al. 1995), 1968 (Fraser 1988), early feminism (Sebestyen 1988) and other transformative moments (Kenney 2002) make such powerful reading: they show this process in the most dramatic way, as the remaking of culture in individual lives.

In this second aspect of the western Marxist approach, then, culture appears as the developmental, contested, learning process of attempting to develop "a whole way of struggle": it is precisely the learning, the development and the contestation which are highlighted.

3) Speaking (back) to power

All of this brings us to the social totality. If, as I have proposed above, social movements represent the attempt to meet popular needs, express tacit knowledge, distil "good sense" from "common sense" and create more adequate institutional orders, they do this in the teeth of exploitation, hegemonic cultural orders, and political power (Thompson 1976, 1993). *Pace* Holloway (2002), there are limits to "changing the world without taking power". One cannot simply "speak truth to power" (Havel 1990), literally or

metaphorically: as we know from our everyday experience, power will bite back when challenged (this is why, if movements are absent or repressed, Scott's hidden transcripts stay hidden).

A more formal way of stating this is that social movements naturally encounter dominant institutions, or indeed counter-movements (such as racist movements, anti-feminist backlashes, fascist mobilisation, religious fundamentalism and so on). There is, as these examples suggest, a substantial extent to which these conflicts are fought out on the terrain of coercion or domination: people are sacked, beaten up, vilified, killed and otherwise punished for opposing the social order, and in these situations (as too where the forces at stake are massively uneven) solidarity and support becomes the order of the day (Olesen 2005), and the relevant institutions - be they workers' militias, civil rights lawyers, support networks of feminist scholars, or Zapatista solidarity - are a normal part of certain movement situations.

More important from the point of view of movement *culture*, however, is the symbolic dialogue that develops. As Rediker's (2004) analysis of the "dialogue of terror" between pirates and navies shows, such dialogues are not absent from situations of coercion (ní Dhorchaigh and Cox 2011); they are, however, strategically central where what is at stake is the search for consent. Thus Barker's (2006) analysis of the struggle over language when hospitals are closed in the name of "community" and through processes described as "consultation" highlights how movements attempt to reclaim the language of the state for their own purposes. These particular terms, of course, like those of democracy, were once popular languages, and the state's use of them is intended to elicit consent through this symbolic land-grab. Similarly, Wainwright's (2009) *Reclaim the state* describes in bitter and hilarious detail the struggle by Luton's Exodus Collective to exercise "participatory" and "community" agency in the teeth of a local state committed in theory to furthering both and in practice to preventing any *actual* participation by local movements.

That movements and the state are in symbolic dialogue with one another - or struggle for ownership of terms like participation, democracy, consultation, community - is not simply a question of linguistic piracy or privateering, nor is it simply a question of participants internalising someone else's discourse (Baumgarten and Ullrich 2012), any more than the religious radicalism of the English Revolution (Hill 1975, Holstun 2000) simply represented a capitulation to the power of religion. At times, of course, it is both, as well as a dialogue with potential allies.

Most centrally, however, it is part of the process of making and remaking the social world, as both social movements and the state seek to fill legitimate *words* (such as democracy) with opposing *practical* content, in different kinds of social organisation. A classic document of this was a study (Nexus 2000) carried out in the Irish working-class estate of Ballymun highlighting the contrasts between what the local state understood by the term "consultation" and what community organisers understood by the same term. The point here - represented in part by the commissioning of the document by Ballymun Community Action Programme - was the attempt to force the state to operate, within the same language, in different ways.

Similarly, as Tovey (1993) has shown, many rural struggles over development are not in opposition to "development" as a word but rather represent an attempt at an alternative development, in forms and directions which meet local needs, within the same language. Of course the same is routinely true in public struggles over expert scientific knowledge or legal cases: the language of the struggle is given in advance, but what is at stake is the content to be given to that language. Is it legitimate to destroy a military plane which is to be used in an illegal war, as the Catholic Workers' "Ploughshares" actions claim? Often, in Britain and Ireland, juries agree that it is.

Even military conflicts routinely have aspects of this contentious dialogue, from the Zapatistas' reworking of Mexican national-developmentalist rhetoric to the Italian Resistance's use of the language of legitimacy. This is not, then, a culturalist approach *as opposed to* a political approach (Melucci 1989, 1996); rather, it is one which sees politics as inherently cultural (and vice versa): the battlefields of consent, alliance-formation and the "war of position" (Gramsci 1971) cannot be understood without reference to both.

Approaches such as frame theory acknowledge an element of this, but in limited ways. In their original formulations (leaving aside the subsequent extension and inflation of the concept) they reflect the situation of US social movements seeking to have their legitimacy (what the "dynamics of contention" approach now calls WUNC) recognised by the dominant order, in the first instance through "public opinion" as constructed by mainstream media. Of course – as we are seeing in the Arab Spring – the boot can at times be on the other foot, and established elites can attempt to remake themselves in terms of participation, consultation or even democracy under pressure from below. Or, as with anti-austerity movements, there can be outright conflict between the neo-liberal discourse dominant in mainstream politics and financial institutions and the very different languages within which movements opposed to austerity speak.

Most visibly in this third case, but no less in the other two, we see the relationship between social movements and culture as part of the "war of position": the attempt by a reformist movement to insert itself within existing hegemonic frames, the acceptance of a new discourse (but not practice) by elites struggling to hold onto power, or the battle between such elites and radical movements over popular consent, fought out in multiple arenas and often with very different tools (the cynical tone of popular opinion in pub conversations as against the authoritative tone of official expertise on television, for example).

In this third sense, culture is a field of conflict, something essentially contested, part of the process of social change (Williams 1981).

Conclusion: the value of a western Marxist approach

This chapter has proposed that Marxist approaches to culture in social movement are relational and developmental. Firstly, the ways in which people interact when they develop social movements express their own lifeworlds and material situations. Secondly, movements constitute themselves as practices, ideas and institutions which further articulate popular ways of being. Thirdly, such complexes of practices and institutions find themselves in cultural as well as political dialogue and contestation with opposing, and often more powerful, forces.

If everyday culture is necessarily drawn on in movement organisation, the extent to which movements are in a position to develop their own institutional forms or engage in symbolic dialogue is far more constrained by broader relationships of power and conflict. From a Marxist perspective, movements are successful to the extent to which they are able to develop and engage with opponents while still expressing the needs, experiences and knowledge articulated in popular lifeworlds.

As the names of Gramsci, Hill, James, Thompson, Williams or Rediker suggest, this approach to the subject is capable of handling large-scale explanatory questions which more micro approaches to culture often avoid or take for granted, and is immensely fertile in generating practical research. Indeed, social movements research in the form of figures like Tilly (e.g. 1986) and Tarrow (e.g. 1998), strongly influenced by the British and French Marxist historians, arguably draws on this tradition in ways which their successors typically fail to acknowledge (see Hamm, this volume, on dominant trends within social movement studies). So too does cultural studies, whose foundational points of reference

include Gramsci and Williams in particular, although here the relationship is both critical and acknowledged (in British if not always in American cultural studies: Hall and Jefferson 1991).

Implications for research

Intellectually, this Marxist approach to social movements and culture justifies itself in enabling an *explanation* of cultural and movement categories which static sets of concepts often naturalise. The relationship between organising modes and lifeworlds, between popular needs and movement demands, between the institutions of movement milieux (Taylor and Whittier 1992) and the "hidden transcripts" they express, or between the competing meanings given by movements and official institutions to the same concepts, can be thought as aspects of the contested development of popular needs and lifeworlds through movements' own ideas and practices to the encounter with more powerful institutions. Movement culture, in other words, can be thought through with *moving* - developmental and dialogical - categories, rather than in the conceptual equivalent of dictionary definitions, isolated and static.

Such an approach does not *require* participatory research methodologies. However, its focus on movement organising and strategy enables engaged researchers to draw on and tackle forms of practice-oriented thought and experience which more formalised models often rule out; to that extent it meets Bevington and Dixon's (2005) call for "movement-relevant theory" (see also Barker and Cox 2002).

More generally, Marxism has always highlighted the interrelationship between theory and practice, and this is true for Marxist writing itself. The more theoretically articulate writers in this tradition, such as Williams or Gramsci, are nonetheless often metaphorical in their theoretical attempts to articulate research problems, and without the example of the rest of their writings they would hardly have inspired such an extensive range of successors. Conversely, Thompson (1978) was openly hostile to overly-schematic theoretical writing, but was immensely influential in a range of approaches to history precisely because of the strength of his research practice (MARHO 1983). These examples of good practice have had successors out of all proportion to the degree to which they, or critics, have analysed their overt theory (substantially in the case of Gramsci; in very limited ways for Williams; barely at all for Thompson).

There are good reasons for this, in that (as Thompson put it) we as writers or researchers do not live these situations. We may be more *fluent* and *confident* in how we articulate the needs and experiences underlying a particular movement, the everyday cultures and learning processes involved, or the complexities of the symbolic dialogue with power, and we may have a greater *breadth* of information and comparisons available to us (not always!), but we typically lack the *depth* of lived experience of *this particular situation*, and all the aspects (some only half-recognised or tacitly assumed) which practitioners are attempting to juggle and think through as they change how to do things.

Theorists in this tradition contribute by asking *questions* – about how adequate a particular strategy is to a particular problem – rather than arbitrarily importing external criteria. Such questions return the initiative to movement participants in their identification of what the issues are, their arguments over how to achieve the goal and their reflections on what their purposes are, and encourage a greater articulation and discussion around these. If there is an external criterion, it is that movements do need to work out something, take things further – that they are *movements*, not a static entity to comment on but a fraught attempt to *do something*.

It is appropriate, then, that writing in this tradition rarely if ever takes the form of an authoritative pronouncement "this is how things are", and tends instead to the use of metaphors, the identification of relationships and processes, in ways which people in *other* movement situations again can recognise themselves – offering a language whose main role is to be reworked by others as they struggle to articulate their own needs, develop their own movements and fight their own battles.

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