

Marxism and Social Movements

Edited by

Colin Barker, Laurence Cox,
John Krinsky and Alf Gunvald Nilsen



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2013

@ 2013 Koninklijke Brill NV ISBN 978-90-04-21175-9

Contents

Marxism and Social Movements: An Introduction	1
<i>Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Gunvald Nilsen</i>	

Part One: Theoretical Frameworks

Marxism and Social Movements

1. Class Struggle and Social Movements	41
<i>Colin Barker</i>	
2. What Would a Marxist Theory of Social Movements Look Like?	63
<i>Alf Gunvald Nilsen and Laurence Cox</i>	

Social Movements Studies and Its Discontents

3. The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies	83
<i>Gabriel Hetland and Jeff Goodwin</i>	
4. Marxism and the Politics of Possibility: Beyond Academic Boundaries	103
<i>John Krinsky</i>	

Part Two: How Social Movements Work

Developmental Perspectives on Social Movements

1. <i>Eppur Si Muove</i> : Thinking 'The Social Movement'	125
<i>Laurence Cox</i>	
2. Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Revolutionary China ...	147
<i>Marc Blecher</i>	
3. Contesting the Postcolonial Development Project: A Marxist Perspective on Popular Resistance in the Narmada Valley	167
<i>Alf Gunvald Nilsen</i>	

The Politics of Social Movements

4. The Marxist Rank-and-File/Bureaucracy Analysis of Trade Unionism: Some Implications for the Study of Social Movement Organisations	187
<i>Ralph Darlington</i>	
5. Defending Place, Remaking Space: Social Movements in Oaxaca and Chiapas	209
<i>Chris Hesketh</i>	
6. Uneven and Combined Marxism within South Africa's Urban Social Movements	233
<i>Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane</i>	

Part Three: Seeing the Bigger Picture

Comparative-Historical Perspective

1. Thinking About (New) Social Movements: Some Insights from the British Marxist Historians	259
<i>Paul Blackledge</i>	
2. Right-Wing Social Movements: The Political Indeterminacy of Mass Mobilisation	277
<i>Neil Davidson</i>	
3. Class, Caste, Colonial Rule, and Resistance: The Revolt of 1857 in India	299
<i>Hira Singh</i>	
4. The Black International as Social Movement Wave: C.L.R. James's <i>History of Pan-African Revolt</i>	317
<i>Christian Høgsbjerg</i>	

Social Movements Against Neoliberalism

5. Language, Marxism and the Grasping of Policy Agendas: Neoliberalism and Political Voice in Scotland's Poorest Communities	337
<i>Chik Collins</i>	
6. Organic Intellectuals in the Australian Global Justice Movement: The Weight of 9/11	357
<i>Elizabeth Humphrys</i>	
7. 'Disorganisation' as Social Movement Tactic: Reappropriating Politics during the Crisis of Neoliberal Capitalism	377
<i>Heike Schaumberg</i>	

8. 'Unity of the Diverse': Working-Class Formations and Popular Uprisings From Cochabamba to Cairo	401
<i>David McNally</i>	
References	425
Index	459

Organic Intellectuals in the Australian Global Justice Movement: The Weight of 9/11¹

Elizabeth Humphrys

Just before the WEF [World Economic Forum] happened, we had a meeting here in this room, like the day before it started and it was literally... there were 100 people in this room, believe it or not. It was hard to believe they fitted in – and they were people from everywhere: from The Greens, from socialist groups, from the Left, from local conservation councils. And it was this incredible feeling of – oh my god – like I have never seen this many people representing this many constituencies in the one place, focused on one issue ever before.²

Oh, it was terrible, terrible – and I think it had quite a significant impact on the movement. I remember clearly two thoughts that I had when I saw the news footage of the 9/11 attacks. The first one was like one of awe really... and then almost instantly my thought was like you bastards, you fucked it up for us because very quickly from Seattle things went in Australia from zero to 100... The impact that Seattle had as a catalyst for a new confidence and optimism about change, which was taken up across the West in a

1. This chapter draws heavily from research conducted using semi-structured interviews with 15 Australian GJM participants who were involved between 1999 and 2002, identified here pseudonymously.

2. Interview with Paul.

pretty dramatic kind of way, Australia included, that momentum was really sort of knocked out of us by those attacks.³

The Global Justice Movement (GJM) that emerged at the beginning of last decade, while lasting only a few years, represented a break from patterns of social movement activism of recent decades. It went beyond single issue campaigning to take an anti-systemic orientation, and brought together previously disparate networks of participants around a shared set of causes. It was also resolutely transnational in focus; it transcended 'postmaterialist' new social movement claims around identity and rights with an explicitly political-economy framework and, most importantly, it fostered the rapid political development of a wide layer of activists while providing a strategic space in which divergent views could be debated without immediately threatening the movement's unity. It was such characteristics that led Gramscian international relations scholar Stephen Gill⁴ to suggest that the GJM represented a 'postmodern prince', a contemporary solution to the Italian Marxist's stress on the need for a new type of organisational form to cohere and lead a united subaltern struggle for hegemony.

Gill's contribution both directly and indirectly raises the relevance of Gramsci's conceptions. In this chapter, I wish to examine, through Gramsci's theoretical framework, the trajectory of the Australian arm of the GJM, and, in particular, how it rapidly demobilised in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. After a brief description of key movement developments, I will examine the factors that led to its decline, linking them to movement participants' own views on these questions. By looking at these views, there emerges an unanticipated finding, that participants' mode of explanation tends towards one of two activist types, which I term movement 'campaigners' and movement 'networkers'.

By reviewing Gramsci's proposals about how subaltern resistance is built, it becomes possible to reflect on the relevance of Gill's thesis to the GJM as well as its limitations. In particular, Gill's silence on the role of 'organic intellectuals' in cohering struggle misses how such participants strive to overcome the problems created by heterogeneity within a movement. The examination of those activists in the Australian GJM closest to Gramsci's conception of organic intellectuals – the movement networkers – provides a basis for understanding how such a layer develops in a living movement. It also shows how, depending on their level of clarity, such participants may or may not adequately theorise a moment of movement impasse and resolve it through practical intervention.

3. Interview with Mark.

4. Gill 2000.

From Seattle to the Twin Towers

In the wake of the 30 November 1999 (N30) Seattle demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation, activists in Australia organised to blockade the Asia-Pacific Summit of World Economic Forum (WEF). They looked to harness growing disaffection with neoliberalism⁵ and the hope that a different world was possible.⁶ Twenty thousand protesters descended on the riverside conference venue at Crown Casino in Melbourne from 11–13 September 2000 (S11). The protest was extremely successful: the blockade tactic was effective, and two hundred delegates were unable to attend the first day of the conference; the key dinner was cancelled, as many other delegates could not get out of the venue (where they were accommodated); an address by Bill Gates to five hundred school children could not proceed; Australia's then Prime Minister John Howard was only able to get around the blockade by police boat, and there was saturation media coverage across the country.⁷

The protest was a flow on from previous global events – such as Seattle, the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, and the 'j18' 1999 Reclaim the Streets mobilisation – congealed by a growing anti-systemic critique⁸ and the wider involvement of transnational NGOs such as Jubilee 2000 in actions against the WEF.⁹ Impinging on this global context were local issues, especially around labour rights, environmental questions and the rights of indigenous people. A general enemy had been located in corporate globalisation, and an accessible target identified in the WEF.

Success did not seem guaranteed in the early hours of the first morning of the protest. A sudden downpour of cold rain left many soaked to the bone and temporarily deflated. That was until the venue's entrances were overwhelmed with demonstrators, and calls for people to cover a particular location became superfluous. The large numbers of police deployed to prevent a blockade were rapidly overwhelmed by its size. While the first day was solely a mobilisation of the blockade, on 12 September trade unions organised a mass rally that marched to an adjacent location. Although the unions did not officially join the blockade, many workers and officials did and the protest peaked. The final day,

5. Neoliberalism is more commonly known in Australia as 'economic rationalism' (Pusey 1991), a term deployed by its critics to refer to a range of economic priorities and decisions such as privatisation, deregulation and free trade.

6. Bramble and Minns 2005; Burgmann 2003, Chapter 5.

7. Mier 2001; Rundle 2000; Sparrow 2000.

8. Callinicos 2003, p. 15.

9. Hunt 2002.

13 September, saw a march from the blockade around the streets of Melbourne, stopping at various key corporate and government targets.¹⁰

Like at Seattle before it, and Prague and Genoa after, there was a vicious and deliberate police response. Some two thousand police were on duty to deal with protesters throughout the three days,¹¹ and while day one saw the police seemingly confused as to how to deal with the effectiveness of the blockade, 12 September was different. Police charged blockade lines at dawn and dusk, both to force buses of delegates through the crowds and more generally to impress upon protesters their ability to exact a physical consequence.¹² As complaints and witness statements taken during and after the demonstration by the legal support teams detail, officers trampled on sitting protesters with horses, beat activists with batons, struck them with their fists (including on their heads), performed headlocks and chokeholds,¹³ and removed their name-tags so as not to be identified.¹⁴

511 was a successful demonstration, but its wider significance was threefold. Firstly, as discussed below, 511 led to clear self-awareness for the movement of a collective identity and a common project. Secondly, there was an immediate impact on public debate as a result of the success and spectacle of the blockades (in turn, giving the movement confidence). And thirdly, the movement came to view itself as one on the offensive for a better world, as opposed to defence around particular issues or attacks by élites.

Movement identity has always been a major area of interest for social movement scholars because it is key to movement formation and sustainability over time.¹⁵ The GJM already had a number of common aims; it was opposed to corporate globalisation and saw this as a problem created by multinational corporations and neoliberalism. What was yet to emerge was a well-developed internal collective identity as a movement. As Flesher Fominaya points out, the best understanding of collective identity is not simply in regard to the ultimate 'product' of a social movement, but as an internal process (or dialogue) that is common to members. She states quite aptly, with regard to the GJM in Australia, that this conceptualisation is 'particularly useful for the study of groups who are in the early stages of developing an emerging collective identity' and for studying the GJM in particular 'because of the movement's heterogeneity, its emphasis

10. In the days prior to the blockade there was a festival and series of counter-summit events organised by the trade unions, Jubilee 2000, the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network and various other NGOs. While not officially participating in the blockade, members of these organisations participated as individuals.

11. Grenfell 2001; McCulloch 2000, pp. 10–11.

12. Lawson 2000, pp. 14–16; Lynch 2001, p. 3.

13. Lynch 2001, p. 3.

14. The author of the present piece was herself injured in the course of a dawn police action on day two. See also Victorian Ombudsman 2001, p. 194.

15. Melucci 1995.

on diversity being the basis for unity (“the movement of movements”).¹⁶ GJM activist Timothy argued:

I think a large amount of what that movement was, was about the construction of identity as well. So there’s a whole bunch of elements going on and construction of identity was a really significant part of it... and it was about creating subjectivity.

Following S11, the movement took various forms. ‘M1’ protests occurred in various Australian capital cities on May Day 2001 and 2002, with demonstrations at major corporations and blockades of stock exchanges, at times in collaboration with the labour movement through joint central rallies. The movement was diverse, with events like weekly blockades of the Nike superstore in downtown Melbourne,¹⁷ an active queer segment of the movement that played a leading role,¹⁸ and significant independent media activity including around the Indymedia network.¹⁹ The environmental movement played a important role, and was of the key networks involved in major protests.²⁰ There was a significant focus on the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, with one protest at Easter 2002 at the Woomera Detention Centre in the Australian desert helping detainees to break out.²¹ Protests were also organised for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2001, and took place as a protest against the impending invasion of Afghanistan when the summit was cancelled in the wake of 9/11.²²

9/11: the weight of the event

If you think back to when Afghanistan was being attacked, demonstrations were actually quite small and the [one] we had in Melbourne would have been

16. Flesher Fominaya 2010, p. 380.

17. Whyte 2001, p. 11.

18. Humphrys 2007; Pendleton 2007, pp. 51–71.

19. Montagner 2002.

20. Arvanitakis and Healy 2001.

21. Maksimovic and Barnes 2002, pp. 28–9.

22. However, one notable feature of the Australian GJM was the uneven involvement of the mainstream workers’ movement (in particular when compared with Europe). For example, while the union movement did not formally support the S11 blockade, the construction industry union in New South Wales funded buses to transport people to it and the Victorian branch coordinated and funded the first aid for the demonstration. The union movement also worked with churches and fair-trade organisations around public forums and a counter conference. On September 10, the day prior to the blockade, they helped organise the ‘Other Values, Other Voices’ festival in a park near the WEF venue. After S11, but prior to 9/11, it was clear that the union-movement was grappling with the implications of the wider GJM and how it could relate to it (as argued by the trade union leaders interviewed).

no more than about 1,000 people. I do think that some of that was characterised by fear, and I think it was also sort of shrouded with incomprehension about what actually was going on. I think it bewildered a lot of people. I think it was quite hard to make the argument to people that it was just pure war-drive and that we had to be against it.²³

Utilising the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington as a critical event in the trajectory of the GJM in Australia, my research with activists in the movement explored the movement's formation, growth and changing dynamics. It sought to draw out areas of agreement and divergence by listening to activists' experiences, opinions and points of view so as to illuminate what had happened and why.

Similar to the starting point of Hadden and Tarrow regarding the United States, my research focused on a 'seemingly paradoxical sequel' to S11, in the weakening of the GJM in Australia.²⁴ Such decline was not universal, as the movement thrived in Europe in the same period. Australia's movement rose and fell more quickly than many activists imagined was possible. The euphoria of the mass protest action and networking was, overnight, replaced by disorientation, retreat and fragmentation.

It is understandable that analysis of the GJM in Australia has been preoccupied with the events on S11,²⁵ often with a particular focus on the police violence at the demonstrations²⁶ and the role of mainstream and alternative media.²⁷ Most significantly, given the movement's collapse in the wake of 9/11, analysis has been almost silent on the impact that the terrorist attacks had upon it. Observations have been made about their presumed influence,²⁸ but there has been limited exploration with activists themselves of what impact the attacks had and how they interacted with other tensions and developments.

In speaking with the activists, it became clear that any simplistic notion that the events on 9/11 caused the decline of the movement was inexact. While a number of activists agreed that 9/11 had been the key factor in the demise of the movement, a significant proportion argued that its trajectory was also shaped by pre-existing political weaknesses within the Australian movement. It was not the case that 9/11 was responsible either for everything or for nothing, but that

23. Interview with Amanda.

24. Hadden and Tarrow 2007, p. 359.

25. Bila-Gunther 2001; Bramble and Minns 2005; Burgmann 2003; Carlyon 2000; Iveson and Scamler 2000; Mier 2001.

26. Grenfell 2001; Griffiths 2000; Heath 2000; Powell 2000.

27. Cahill 2001; Meikle 2003; Montagner 2002.

28. Couch 2003; Couch and Sullivan 2006.

the GJM's deterioration was the result of a combination of internal and external factors contingent on 9/11 but not created by it.

External factors

The external factors can be usefully delineated as material and ideological influences. Material pressures included manoeuvres by élites to wrongfoot activists, such as by moving summit venues to remote locations or incorporating dissenting voices into bodies like the World Trade Organisation. Those I interviewed also said that the space for debate in mainstream media and civil society was squeezed out. For example, Claudia argued:

[I]t created a new environment with which those who want to challenge how society is organised, [are directed] away from certain things that we were talking about, around economics primarily and global justice, into a frame where we have to debate war and conflict and state power... [I]t directed us away from [where we wanted to be]

Activists also highlighted the impact of the decline of the movement overseas, in particular in the United States, alongside the drive to war.

Additionally, they saw ideological shifts in wider society as having an important influence on the movement, in particular that global élites had been emboldened by the War on Terror and had made a confident assertion that we were 'back to the real world'. As the *Wall Street Journal* editorialised in the immediate aftermath of 9/11:

Remember the antitrade demonstrations? They were the top item in the news before terrorists attacked the World Trade Centre. Now they have receded to the netherworld where we have tucked all the things that seemed important then.²⁹

Moreover, participants argued that an environment of fear was consciously developed. This was highlighted by many activists, often quoting George Bush's words that 'Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists'.

Finally, in this context, they argued that the drive to war led to an ideological environment emphasising race and nationalism, with a new, post-Cold War ideological binary emerging around the 'clash of civilisations':

I think that is the most significant thing, that and that's what I was trying to say before about state legitimisation, you have the Cold War ideology which dominated for fifty years gone, and this space opened up where global powers

29. *Wall Street Journal* editorial, 'Adieu Seattle?', printed on 24 September 2001 and quoted in Dan Hind 2007, p. 17.

didn't have an ideological mechanism if you like, to control people, what people thought and they were flailing around for one for about a decade. I think that opened a lot of opportunities and you know, we were flailing around for quite a while too, it took us a while to get our shit together and you had those few years at the end of that decade and then 9/11 happened. Then the 'War on Terror' replaces the Cold War.

Internal factors

Issues internal to the GJM created organisational and ideological complexities with which the movement found it difficult to deal. Importantly, those interviewed argued that it was largely the internal factors, as opposed to external factors, that were most significant in the collapse of the movement in Australia. Organisational issues largely related to its lack of cohesiveness and infrastructure to assist networking across coalitions, the inability to adapt to new circumstances, the lack of 'space' or 'structures' within which to strategise, and participants taking increasingly intractable positions on key tactical questions. Arguing that when agreement could not be reached, certain sections of the movement simply walked away so they could pursue their desired activities, Paul stated:

[I]f you remember that the movement is very broad and there is always the radical end who will firmly believe its tactics are right no matter what. There are elements of our movement that are very poor at self-reflection, but there is a big chunk of that movement which is much more nuanced and much more [thinks] the appropriateness of tactics changes according to the external circumstances. So I think people just [thought] the times are different and the tactics are different. And in many ways, that's a big chunk of what this movement is, those people, and so they went off and did other things and then at the more radical end, I think a lot of them focused very strongly on the resulting anti-war movement. So people kind of walked away for a variety of reasons.

This question of intractable positions (on tactics, in the above example) was further hampered by the lack of space for the movement to collectively strategise and come to agreement on positions. Mike argues:

I think there was a crisis of tactics as a result of the police violence around the world at anti-globalisation protests, and I think there was a crisis of confidence arising out the September 11 2001 New York attacks. But I think a third factor was that people, perhaps myself included, got protest fatigue and there was an incapacity to sustain diverse coalitions that had real internal contradictions...

This issue of spaces within social movements to strategise, more generally, emerged from the interviews as a key concern and is returned to in discussing Gill's proposed 'postmodern prince'.

The ideological weaknesses hampering the movement included a confused and/or changing view regarding the world (who is 'with' us, and who is 'against' us), the lack of a clear alternative vision and an inability to meld anti-systemic struggles with critiques of Western imperialism and the US-led invasions. A number of activists argued that it was either easy, or necessary, to reduce the anti-systemic concerns driving the GJM into a more narrowly focused campaign against the invasion of Afghanistan, and later Iraq. Henry noted:

So in that period the whole movement basically was an anti-war movement, peace movement, and it kind of shifted totally. I suppose in that sense it not only changed global politics, but it changed the shape of the movements as it were. So it went from being an anti-globalisation movement to being this defensive stop-the-war kind of movement.

Movement 'campaigners' and 'networkers'

As interviews progressed, and transcripts were reviewed and analysed, a distinction emerged amongst the activists, relating to how they understood the trajectory of the movement.³⁰ Despite all activists being heavily involved in the movement, with it occupying a significant amount of their lives, two poles of narrative and analytical approach became clear. Some activists described the movement's trajectory very much in terms of their sectional experience of it, focusing on the needs and concerns of their own campaign, party or affiliations and often unable to articulate a broader view of its components and dynamics. Other activists were better able to articulate the breadth and diversity of the movement as well as how it operated as a differentiated unity, accounting for points of friction as well as agreement.

I termed the tendencies observed amongst Australian activists movement 'campaigners' and movement 'networkers', in order to highlight the distinction in framing and practice between them.

This distinction did not arise from the formal politics of the interviewees, or whether they were engaged in more or less radical actions and tactics, but

30. While these characteristics were emerging during interviews, it became particularly clear as NVIVO analysis was undertaken. The use of coding nodes for a range of factors, confirmed the distinction and highlighted the connection between activists' activity in the movement and their wider conception of it.

rather was connected to *how* activists went about their activity and how they conceived of and networked within the GJM. For example, some who espoused a revolutionary political position and were, at a formal level, more committed to enhancing the anti-systemic character of the movement, were definitely ‘campaigners’. Meanwhile, some apparently conservative activists were clear ‘networkers’, seeking to unite with more ‘radical’ movement elements and willing to set aside specific disagreements in order to build the largest and most diverse movement.

In their work with Canadian social movements, prior to the GJM, Carroll and Ratner identified the presence of political economy master-frames,³¹ which was associated with cross-campaign collaboration. Within the Australian GJM, post-Seattle, all activists interviewed held such an outlook (which was unsurprising, as they were consciously involved in an anti-systemic movement). Carroll and Ratner’s distinction is not enough to explain why there was significant differentiation among activists in Australia.

There was, instead, a correlation between three factors: 1) the more clearly an activist described seeking to deal with overcoming barriers to unity and developing the widest possible collection of campaigns and groupings; 2) the more they were able to describe a far-reaching conception and map of the movement; and 3) the more clearly they were able to provide a nuanced description of the trajectory of the movement and how that fitted into wider social developments. The ‘campaigners’ were at one end of this spectrum – tending to have more limited interest in negotiating across divisions, seeing the movement much more from their corner, and describing the GJM’s trajectory in less nuanced and socially integrated terms. The ‘networkers’, on the other hand, tended to have been very concerned with the ‘how’ of building broad-based alliances and spoke of the movement very much as a (differentiated) whole, holding nuanced views of movement dynamics and how they integrated with wider social developments.

Notably, the research appears to indicate not two distinct ‘types’, but rather a continuum whose extremes help define its spread. This suggests that internal differentiation is not a clean break, but a crystallisation that occurs in the process of struggle. The relevance of a Gramscian framework to this distinction, as well as the overall trajectory of the Australian GJM, is considered in further detail below. In particular, these findings help to provide an alternative line of analysis to that proposed by Stephen Gill’s invocation of the Global Justice Movement as a contemporary solution to Gramsci’s search for a Modern Prince.

31. A ‘political economy’ view in terms of Carroll and Ratner’s research asserts an injustice frame, where power is ‘viewed as systemic, institutional, structural, and materially grounded’ as well as ‘concentrated, not dispersed, and this concentration is fundamental to injustice’. See Carroll and Ratner 1996, pp. 415–16.

Looking forwards, backwards to Gramsci

Since the 1960s, debates about social movements in the academy have in general terms followed parallel paths on either side of the Atlantic. Resource Mobilisation Theory and Political Process Theory have been dominant in the United States, with New Social Movement Theory dominant in France and, later, elsewhere in Western Europe.³² However, in the period after Seattle, those debates took something of a back-seat to engagement with the emergence of the GJM, as researchers attempted to grapple with the new environment.³³

This new movement possessed two characteristics that stood in sharp contrast to the dominant pattern of social movement activity in the preceding two decades. Firstly, the GJM brought together numerous campaigns and struggles – old Left, new movements, human rights bodies and others not falling easily into the established academic categories – and raised claims against a perceived common global corporate and financial enemy. Secondly, it went beyond any of the individual issues it fought over by making totalising anti-systemic claims.³⁴

In this vein, the GJM appears to be a tailor-made example of a rising movement seeking to establish a new hegemony (from below), as understood in Gramscian-Marxist terms. It is such a reality that seems to have led Stephen Gill, writing in the aftermath of Seattle, to propose that the GJM was itself a solution to Gramsci's problem of the Modern Prince.³⁵ However, Gill's assertion is contested, and the relevance of this key conception of Gramsci's to the GJM needs to be closely examined.

The work of Antonio Gramsci represents, if only superficially, the closest thing to an academically acceptable version of Marxist theory formulated by a revolutionary socialist in the wake of the mass working-class struggles that followed the First World War. His *Prison Notebooks*³⁶ have been appropriated for a seemingly incommensurate range of projects and it seems that everyone from revolutionaries to Eurocommunists, and from radical pluralists to progressive educationalists, can locate a Gramsci that suits their particular needs. It should not be surprising then, as anti-systemic struggle returned to the world stage, that theorists would look to Gramsci.³⁷

Despite the varied interpretations of Gramsci, it is difficult to ignore the unifying concern in Gramsci's theorising: to develop a sophisticated, historically informed appreciation of how social struggles and social movements develop

32. Della Porta and Diani 1999; Hosseini 2010; Maddison and Scalmer 2006, p. 20.

33. Cox and Nilsen 2007; Smith 2001; Wieviorka 2005.

34. Wallerstein 2002, pp. 36–7.

35. Gill 2000.

36. Gramsci 1971.

37. Ford 2003; Rupert 2003.

inside advanced capitalist societies. Gramsci analyses the use, by the capitalist class, of complex and inter-related mechanisms of consent to support its coercive rule in 'the West'. In so doing, he contrasts this with the more naked use of state coercion against the Russian masses (in 'the East'), and terms this winning of consent 'hegemony' and the coercive aspect of rule 'domination'. Large sections of the *Notebooks* examine how these distinctions require the development of novel strategies for the working class to win over a broad coalition of all 'subaltern' groups to effect social transformation. Contrary to popular focus on Gramsci's conception of hegemony, he equally emphasised the question of resistance and possibilities of transformation.³⁸

It is because Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* represent such a rich, non-reductionist vein of social study that they have attracted theorists seeking to explain modern social movements and have been posed as an alternative to the perceived limitations of both radical pluralist and orthodox Marxist explanations.³⁹ This is, in particular, because Gramsci's ideas convey a deep understanding of the role of cultural processes without abandoning the issues of economic and political power. However, it has been argued that to successfully elevate Gramsci to the theorist *par excellence* of social movements characterised by cross-class alliances, the Marxist core of his politics must be removed. As perhaps the most celebrated post-class appropriators of Gramsci's ideas, Laclau and Mouffe state their 'principal conclusion is that behind the concept of "hegemony" lies something more than a type of political relation complementary to the categories of Marxist theory... [and that Gramsci] introduces a logic of the social which is incompatible with those theories'.⁴⁰ Effectively, they seek to privilege a cultural interpretation of hegemony over Gramsci's integration of the concept into a broader theory of social structure and agency.

It is difficult to square their argument with Gramsci's painstaking critique of reformist strategy, in which he emphasises the need for subaltern struggles for hegemony to understand capitalism as a totality where the divisions between economic and political aspects of society are 'merely methodological' and not organic.⁴¹

Gramsci's theory of social change, as set out in the *Notebooks*, represents a thoroughgoing and systematic attempt to link Marxist conceptions of historical development – and hence class struggle – with the nature of strategic questions raised by, and within, actually existing social movements in the advanced

38. Morton 2007b, p. 171.

39. Carroll and Ratner 1994.

40. Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 3.

41. Gramsci 1971, p. 160.

capitalist world. At one level, he highlights the differing relative importance of the state and civil society in different countries:

In the East the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one State to the next, it goes without saying – but this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country.⁴²

With such an array of defences at its disposal, involving mechanisms of coercion and consent, the capitalist class will not be defeated through simple full-frontal attack. Using a military analogy, Gramsci argues that such a ‘war of manoeuvre’ is an exception to the normal pattern of struggle. Instead, the contending forces will be forced into a prolonged siege-like situation that he calls a ‘war of position’, which is concentrated and difficult, and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness. In politics, the siege is a reciprocal one, despite all appearances, and the mere fact that the ruler has to muster all his resources demonstrates how seriously he takes his enemy.⁴³

Gramsci’s strategy for dealing with this reality is the development of a Modern Prince, or a single party of the working class. Gramsci sees this party as both emerging from subaltern movements and playing a ‘directive’⁴⁴ role within them. Indeed, he foregrounds the necessary development of what he calls ‘the philosophy of praxis’ – a theoretical summing up of the lessons of the movement that can then serve as a guide to action. As Peter Thomas has pointed out, this terminology is consciously used: Gramsci is not merely talking about a historically frozen set of Marxist principles, but a theory that can only develop in living connection with the movement.⁴⁵ Gramsci effectively contrasts the ideas that come from close connection to the struggle with those abstractions applied from outside. The idea of the Modern Prince ties in directly with Gramsci’s view that to become hegemonic, the working class must make alliances with other groupings in whose interests it is to oppose the existing order.⁴⁶ The key

42. Gramsci 1971, p. 238.

43. Gramsci 1971, p. 239.

44. The Italian word Gramsci uses is ‘*dirigente*’, which can also be taken to mean ‘leading’.

45. Thomas 2008, pp. 101–2.

46. Showstack Sassoon 1980, p. 152.

question is how to forge a 'national popular collective will' to be rid of the ruling class, for only then can the struggle go over into a war of manoeuvre.⁴⁷

Again, the Modern Prince is not born whole, but is bound up with a living process of social contestation: 'it can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which the collective will, which has already been recognised and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form'.⁴⁸ Contrary to caricatures of rigid forms of party organisation, Gramsci sees the creation of the Modern Prince in terms of the coming together of partial struggles and sectional organisations: 'the theoretical truth that every class has a single party is demonstrated, at the decisive turning points, by the fact that various groupings, each of which had up till then presented itself as an "independent" party, come together to form a united bloc. The multiplicity that previously existed was purely "reformist" in character, that is to say it was concerned with partial questions'.⁴⁹

In parallel with these organisational developments, Gramsci sees mass consciousness needing to come to a 'global' or totalising view of the world: 'One may say that no real movement becomes aware of its global character all at once, but only gradually through experience...'⁵⁰

A '(post-)modern prince'

By arguing that the GJM was a 'postmodern prince', Gill was not adopting postmodern theoretical perspectives, instead arguing that this was an organisational form for the postmodern age – meaning the age ushered in after the dissipation of 'old' class-based struggles as well as the orthodox Marxist views of organisation that related to them. He notes that 'as such, the multiple and diverse forces that form the postmodern prince combine both defensive and forward-looking strategies. Rather than engaging in deconstruction, they seek to develop a global and universal politics of radical (re)construction'.⁵¹ He sees the movement as 'plural and differentiated, although linked to universalism', arising in the 'strategic context... of disciplinary neoliberalism and globalisation'.⁵²

Yet, as Matthew D. Stephen has argued, there are limitations to Gill's imposition of Gramsci's concepts on the GJM.⁵³ When the post-Seattle trajectory of the movement is considered, Gill's optimistic picture of a plural space for resolving debates and taking the struggle forward does not stand the test of reality. Even

47. Gramsci 1971, pp. 129–30.

48. Gramsci 1971, p. 129.

49. Gramsci 1971, p. 157.

50. Gramsci 1971, p. 158.

51. Gill 2000, p. 131.

52. Gill 2000, p. 137.

53. Stephen 2009.

before 9/11, there was 'growing evidence of ongoing ruptures and difficulties in negotiating differences in subjectivity'.⁵⁴ This was clearly argued by the activists involved in my research, and in particular the Bush Administration's plan to invade Iraq forced the movement to switch its master frame from one of socio-economic polarities to one of 'no war'.⁵⁵ As Luke reflected:

I think we made some mistakes, those of us who were involved in trying to get an anti-war movement going and did so successfully actually you know. Like in Melbourne where we basically adopted the line that we should say 'no war', basically our line was 'no war'. And we didn't, we quite deliberately [did that]... [T]he main focus of the protest movement against the war, we deliberately excluded any questions of global economic power, you know, and that was probably a mistake.

The rapid collapse of mass protest after the Iraq invasion speaks to the inability of the once-confident GJM to continue to channel its aspirations on a global scale.

Conversely, the World Social Forum (WSF) project is often seen as expressing the potential for raising political consciousness and collective organisation transnationally, working as it did on an 'open-space' model. Yet in the post-Iraq period, the WSF seemed to drift, its constitutionally enshrined refusal to take political positions leading to significant doubts about its effectiveness, perhaps best exemplified by infighting over 2005 attempts by prominent activists to forge a Porto Alegre Manifesto.⁵⁶ In shoehorning a partial account of Gramsci's theoretical system into his descriptions of the GJM, Gill misses that, for Gramsci, the purpose of the Modern Prince is to forge not just 'unity', but a 'collective will'. Furthermore, the absence of any integrated consideration of the role of organic intellectuals in building unity and sustaining a collective will is a significant gap in Gill's vision. Rather than simply celebrating unity in diversity – or 'one no, many yeses'⁵⁷ – Stephen argues that this state of affairs represents only the first moment in the progress towards a new hegemonic force. This initial step is about the subaltern group coming to awareness of its own existence in relation to the existing dominant group. As Stephen puts it, 'a counter-hegemonic challenge depends not only on this moment of mutual exchange and expression of diversity, but also on a positive programme of contestation'.⁵⁸ The point is not to counterpose some idealised 'party' form with the movement, but to recognise

54. Stephen 2009, p. 487.

55. Stephen 2009, p. 488.

56. Stephen 2009, pp. 489–91.

57. Kingsnorth 2003.

58. Stephen 2009, p. 493.

that movement unevenness demands a conscious strategy by at least a minority to overcome the problems associated with this.

Intellectuals: traditional and organic

It is not so much in Gramsci's notion of the Modern Prince that the movement in Australia found an echo, but rather in the related conception of 'organic intellectuals'. Gramsci's analysis of how a collective will can develop rejects the notion that collaboration between sectional subaltern groupings automatically leads to the development of a united movement as a challenge to élite hegemony and as represented by a single party. A trenchant critic of teleological and fatalist conceptions, who described the philosophy of praxis as 'absolute historicism', he introduces the conscious development of a layer of 'organic intellectuals' as essential to a rising class winning hegemony.⁵⁹ He argues for the construction of certain types of organisation, and notes 'a human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in its widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is, without organisers and leaders'.⁶⁰

Gramsci's analysis of intellectuals shows that, despite their apparent location as a separate social group, their formation and function cannot be separated from the class structure of society and their role is not just in the arena of culture, but at all levels.⁶¹ For Gramsci, everyone is a philosopher; that is, everyone thinks about ideas, but only some play a specific role in working with and disseminating them. Put another way, 'all men are intellectuals... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals'.⁶² The layer of 'traditional intellectuals' includes persons of letters, philosophers, clerics or abstract thinkers, who appear, at first glance, to transcend the conflicts of any historical period and thus stand above society. These layers indirectly represent the interests of the ruling élites because they propose a transhistorical view of human activity that does not permit serious disruption of existing social relations – instead assigning eternal characteristics to what are transient arrangements.

In contrast, organic intellectuals form a very different type of social layer. Their practice consists in 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, as organiser, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical spirit)'.⁶³ Rather than only having

59. Gramsci 1971, pp. 342–3.

60. Gramsci 1971, p. 334.

61. Showstack Sassoon 1980, pp. 134–6.

62. Gramsci 1971, p. 9.

63. Gramsci 1971, p. 10.

specialised knowledge, organic intellectuals become directive – they have both particular comprehension and actively engage in politics. When Gramsci applies this category to his analysis of the struggle for hegemony, he argues: ‘One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer “ideologically” the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals’.⁶⁴

While this appears to be portrayed as a spontaneous elaboration, the entire purpose of Gramsci’s analysis is to make the process conscious or, indeed, self-conscious. He argues that any movement that aims to be hegemonic – to replace common sense and old conceptions of the world in general – must complete two tasks:

1. Never to tire of repeating its own arguments (though offering literary variation of form): repetition is the best didactic means for working on the popular mentality.
2. To work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever-growing strata of the populace, in other words, to give a personality to the amorphous mass element. This means working to produce elites of intellectuals of the new type which arise directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them to become, as it were, the whalebone in the corset.⁶⁵

The Modern Prince represents the organisational product of this effort, in effect a ‘collective intellectual’ drawn from the movement but also taking on a directive/leading function. Gramsci asks ‘what is the character of the political party in relation to the problem of the intellectuals?’. In response to his own question, he states that the ‘political party for some social groups is nothing other than their specific way of elaborating their own category of organic intellectuals directly in the political and philosophical field’.⁶⁶

Australian GJM participants caught in moments of transition

My research on the acute crisis of the Australian movement post-9/11 not only posed questions about why it had collapsed so quickly, but also provided a snapshot of the transformation and differentiation that was taking place at the ‘micro’-level. The ability to define two poles of activist type (campaigners and networkers) suggested that the process of united struggle was not just a passive

64. Ibid.

65. Gramsci 1971, p. 340.

66. Gramsci 1971, p. 15.

process of acceptance of diversity, but also one of the formation of networkers, who were already looking beyond such a situation.

Rather than the Australian GJM being in some way an updating of Gramsci's Modern Prince, it was a rather more amorphous beast, in which there were the early manifestations of a process of crystallisation of a layer of activists analogous to the organic intellectuals of the *Prison Notebooks*. Such a process lies at the heart of Gramsci's theoretical project, in which there are moments of transition that can be captured and appreciated, but which are part of a ceaselessly moving course of contestation – the so-called war of position. That struggle is not to be conceptualised as the simple clash of two unchanging social forces, but a much more complex route whereby subaltern groupings develop strata who can express an embryonic collective will and consciously try to overcome the 'partial' character of the various sections of the movement.

The failure of the Australian GJM to survive the War on Terror, despite an identifiable layer of activists who could be considered organic intellectuals, does, however, beg the question of the missing Modern Prince and returns us to Gill's proposal. Despite the networkers' individual efforts to hold the movement together and their relative clarity about the problems faced when sudden developments in wider society left the movement as a whole unable to respond effectively, they had not arrived at a point where they could (or wanted to) propose a political party (or minority current), with whatever relevant form that might take. As Claudia suggested, the movement in Australia was unable to both collectively think through 9/11 and retain its broader anti-systemic critique:

I think that...that we should've had the courage...should've stopped and reflected for a little bit longer than we did. I think that the Left in Australia has a pretty amazing problem of not valuing some kind of deeper discussion and that clearly, these events had actually just changed the world as we knew it and we're going to continue to shape the world for a long time

Many other activists, including Giulietta, echoed this:

I think sections the anti-globalisation movement [thought] this is all too hard, and it morphed into the anti-war movement. A lot of the arguments and ideas around the impact of global capital on poverty and everything else was lost to a large degree. It got subsumed in quite a moralistic argument, so I think what happened was the conservatising effect turned into this kind of outraged moralism and lost a lot of the kind of finesse of the analysis around the movement of money and the relationship of that to war.

The movement networkers certainly did continue to have an appreciation of where the various sections of the movement had 'gone' (into electoral politics,

the anti-war movement and the campaign against the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, in particular), but they did not have a clear agenda for overcoming increasing atomisation. In one sense, they did recognise that the fragile and provisional state of the movement in Australia before 9/11 meant that centrifugal forces threatened the break-up of tenuous alliances, but the process of crystallisation had not progressed far enough for a minority within the movement to come together to develop a collective intellectual. This parallels Gramsci's own description of the limitations of the most basic moment of movement formation: for want of a party to carry out the 'active and constructive' phase of the political struggle, there is the danger that collective will is left in a 'primitive and elementary phase' that can be 'scattered into an infinity of individual wills' when faced with a 'sudden confrontation'.⁶⁷

The inability of a dynamic anti-systemic movement to surmount these difficulties highlights the issue of how movements strategise on a collective basis. Gramsci's conception of organic intellectuals – emerging from subaltern groupings but playing a directive (leadership) role within them, having both knowledge and political skills, working among fragments but seeking to transcend the partial to develop the collective will – is a powerful theoretical solution to this problem. This is especially so when it draws on the imagery of a Modern Prince, able to bring together those organic intellectuals who want to lead a wider movement towards a collective understanding and struggle for hegemony. In the struggles against neoliberal globalisation conducted by the GJM, however, the form and character of the Modern Prince failed to emerge clearly. That is a task for another day.

67. Gramsci 1971, pp. 128–9.