

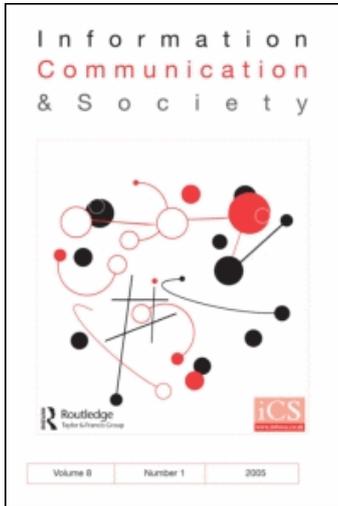
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SYMBOLIC PRODUCTION, REPRESENTATION, AND CONTESTED IDENTITIES

Jenny Pickerill ^a

^a Department of Geography, University of Leicester, Leicester, UK

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Jenny Pickerill

SYMBOLIC PRODUCTION, REPRESENTATION, AND CONTESTED IDENTITIES

Anti-war activism online

The increased flexibility facilitated by Information and Communication Technologies has enabled anti-war activists to garner great control over representations of their arguments. This paper explores the value of the symbolic dimension of collective action through three cumulative forms of analysis: understanding how the symbolic domain is used; explaining the strategic choices behind this use; and, finally, linking these representational choices to the subjective experience of the individual and their processes of political identity construction. Many groups lacked a coherent online strategy. The reasons for this are threefold. First, use reflects the organizational structure and ideological principles of the groups. Second, by emphasizing diversity and inclusion most groups wanted their online material to be as accessible as possible and as a result censored anything too opinionated or deemed too radical. Third, there was an enduring emphasis upon local place and face-to-face communication. This made groups' online interventions lack coherence because they were often aiming their representations at particular populations. In a study of Muslim anti-war activism the relationship between these representational choices and the processes of identity construction were explored. Muslim activists sought support by asserting a collective religious commonality and by aligning with sympathetic others to counter stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists. This re-ignited a historical tension as to the place of religion within anti-war activism. Consequently, Muslims struggled to articulate their claim to multiple identities, and online representations limited those who attempted to develop overt and complicated new religious political identities.

Keywords anti-war; activism; identity; representation; frame; social movements; religion

Introduction

On a cold March day in 2006, on the third anniversary of war in Iraq, thousands of protestors lined up near the Houses of Parliament in London to demonstrate once more against war. Though each of us knew why we had chosen to protest that day it quickly became apparent that our causes of concern and motivation were diverse. Even the lead banner contained three very different slogans; 'Troops home from Iraq; Don't attack Iran; Defend the Muslim Community' (Figure 1). Other placards included 'War is not the answer', 'Down with imperialism! Down with Islamic Regime in Iran!', 'Free Palestine', 'Blair out of Office', 'Peace Not Profit', 'No WMDs¹ = No Need For War', 'End Nuclear Hypocrisy', and 'Islamists! Stop Killing Iraqi Gays!'. As in many anti-war demonstrations since 2001 the variety of slogans and symbols signalled a vibrant, heterogeneous anti-war movement that sought to capitalize on the 'logic of numbers' this diversity brought to the anti-war cause. However, this diversity has also complicated analysis of the movements' strategies, composition, and achievements.

Added to this complexity are the very different ways anti-war groups and organizations have adopted and adapted Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Email, internet, and mobile technologies are now integral to current campaigning; yet their use in anti-war protests remains under analysed (Atton 2003; Pickerill 2003, 2006; Van Aelst & Walgrave 2002; Gillan 2009). This is despite growing recognition of the importance, perhaps even centrality, of the symbolic domain to the success and power of collective action (Melucci 1996; Scalmer 2002). This is particularly the case in an era of Information War where the mediation of war is no longer so easily controlled by state governments and, especially with ICTs, more open to contestation by activists, journalists, and the general public. Such contestation results in an amplification of 'symbolic struggles' over the implications and meaning of war (Pickerill & Webster 2006; Tumber & Webster 2006).



FIGURE 1 STWC banner (18 March 2006, London). Source: Author.

It is in this context that this paper explores the value of the symbolic dimension of collective action. Using a social movement perspective this is achieved through three cumulative forms of analysis particularly concerned with the role of ICTs: understanding how the symbolic domain is used (through analysis of representations by the movement); explaining the strategic choices behind this use (through interview data and observation); and, finally, linking these representational choices to the subjective experiences of the individual and their processes of political identity construction (using a case study of Muslim anti-war activists).

This paper is based on in-depth analysis of five case studies of British anti-war and peace organizations; Stop the War Coalition (StWC), Faslane 365, the Society of Friends (Quakers), Justice Not Vengeance, and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). In addition a number of explicitly Muslim anti-war organizations and networks were examined, including The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), The Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPACUK), and Cage Prisoner. The significant constituency of Muslim activists in recent anti-war protest has brought the inclusion of religious identities to the fore, and thus it was chosen as a particular case study within the research. In total 60 interviews were conducted with a range of activists, anti-war demonstrations and vigils were observed, and literature from the movement was analysed.

Online representations and challenging collective identities

The cultural perspective adopted by activists enables them to mobilize supporters into action, tap into resources, form alliances, and communicate clearly with others in society and those in power (Jasper & Poulson 1995). In fact if activists do not garner some symbolic power, much of their strength to mobilize and attract resources is neutralized. Thus resources are attracted by 'those whose actions are coherent with the ideological dynamic. It is not simply that ideology contributes to the resources of certain groups vis-à-vis others, but rather the resources themselves are constituted through discourse' (Moaddel 1992, p. 375).

Examination of collective action as cognitive praxis, then, is crucial to understanding the operations and achievements of social movements; 'an important precondition for the success of movements lies in the ability of their exponents to reformulate their own values and motivations, in order to adapt them in the most efficient manner to the specific orientations of the sectors of public opinion which they wish to mobilize' (Della Porta & Diani 1999, p. 68). This cognitive praxis is best understood as continuous cycles of symbolic production (or in the language of Melucci, reproduction of 'cultural codes'), which can be analysed through Goffman's (1974) notion of the schema of interpretation, or frame.

A frame is thus 'a general, standardized, predefined structure (in the sense that it already belongs to the receiver's knowledge of the world) which allows

recognition of the world, and guides perception . . . allowing him/her to build defined expectations about what is to happen, that is to make sense of his/her reality' (Donati 1992, pp. 141–142). Activists seek to frame their cause as relevant to broader society, claiming their role as the 'problem owners' who are able to reduce the social complexity of the issue and put forward solutions (Gusfield 1963). Movement groups typically attempt to align their claims with values and beliefs held widely across the population, a form of frame alignment, creating a dynamic relationship between existing cultural heritage and the development of a social movement (Snow *et al.* 1986). Much work has been carried out to identify a range of alignment processes between the frames activists present and the more generally available cultural understandings that these might tap in to (for reviews see Benford 1997; Johnston & Noakes 2005). Such an approach explores how activists construct 'sense-making' representations that seek to communicate sometimes rather abstract ideas to their target audience.

The framing approach does have conceptual and methodological limitations (Steinberg 1998; Gillan 2008); it can be hard to apply to social movements whose boundaries are porous and influx. In-depth framing analysis would require clear definitional boundaries that would present significant difficulties with regards to the anti-war movements (illustrated by the diversity in the opening paragraph of this paper). Moreover, the media through which groups portray themselves and their agendas are multifarious. The opportunities offered by ICTs are on the one hand a continuation of the old formats (from flyers to graffiti daubed on walls) simply distributed differently, and on the other a challenge to the formats and the assumptions of them.

This significantly complicates any frame analysis. Activists' frames (and identities) have always been contested by opponents through counter-representations or assimilation but ICTs make these symbolic struggles more likely (Heaney & Rojas 2006). The case of Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) is a good example of this. ICTs were crucial to creating a political space for this group in a period of repression and marginalization. They were able to use the technologies to counter hegemonic understandings of their position (as, e.g. victims in need of a saviour), build solidarity ties with others which helped 'relieve feelings of extreme isolation and hopelessness in refugee camps' (Fluri 2006, p. 98), and utilize the world-wide media for their cause. However, despite the voice gained by RAWA through its website, it ultimately lacked control over its representation, as the international media reinterpreted their images and ignored some of their words. US discourses about the need to 'liberate' the people of Afghanistan overrode the RAWA agenda. Neither did ICTs enable the group to overcome all the obstacles of being politically, spatially and financially marginalized within their own country, and they remain a clandestine organization.

Nevertheless, frame analysis provides a useful starting point from which to examine the relationships between the forms of representation chosen by activists and movement claims, and relationships between representations and

deeper structures of values attached to identities. In an era of multifarious and ubiquitous representations, closer analysis of activists' representational strategy is necessary and pertinent. Understanding these representations and identities in the context of symbolic production does enable a more nuanced analysis, even if this analysis must be hedged by acknowledgements of its partiality, incompleteness, and fluidity.

Social movements have been shaped by a series of struggles to create, defend, and promote particular self-identifications shared among significant groups (Melucci 1996). Identity is a social process of construction and in terms of social movements it is 'the process by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groups' (Della Porta & Diani 1999, p. 85). Identities are neither fixed nor constant, but rather constantly emerging in continuous negotiation within and between groups (Hirsch 1990; Checker 2004). The process of negotiating collective identities and the ways in which primary identifiers are represented to assert certain commonalities and exclusions ultimately shapes the political direction of particular social movements.

There is some debate as to whether identities are created or re-discovered (as 'natural' processes), but can certainly be multiple, are often defined in relation to the 'other', and respond to the historical and political conditions of nations. Crucially, the construction of identities is reliant upon their (mutual) recognition by others and thus upon the ability of social movement actors to outwardly project, and impose, particular images of themselves, hence the importance of analysis of representations (Touraine 1981).

Symbolic production by social movements is likely to have a direct impact upon individuals' experience of their processes of identity construction for two reasons. First, frames are explicitly used to mobilize links between the activists' cause and an individuals' ability to make sense of their world. In addition symbolic elaboration must enable an individual to perceive the costs of taking action as surmountable and worthwhile. This is done in part by producing understandings of collective solidarity and collective experiences, which in turn change an individual's sense of self.

Second, the choices of frames and representations by a movement can limit an individual's ability to comprehend their own position or complexity. Thus a choice of inclusive frames in order to appeal to a broad range of others in society may limit individuals in developing identities around, for example, particular religious principles, which could in turn dilute the potential of developing a strong collective identity (Friedman & McAdam 1992). Attempts at frame alignment often involve the re-elaboration of existing symbols and an adherence to tradition in order to appeal to a broad base of society (see such an approach by Martin Luther King in McAdam 1988). This is both a positively powerful approach which avoids asking supporters to break with tradition (which can lead to political and personal isolation), but can limit those supporters who are themselves seeking to use the social movement to move away from some

aspects of tradition. Alternatively, a restricted frame excludes the complexity of multiple identities and can create a disjuncture between an organization with its 'official' image and its participants' experiences of their everyday.

Thus there remains a need to examine more closely the link between symbolic production and identity construction. As we explain in the following, the development of collective identities among British Muslim participants in anti-war activism is highly pertinent to the dynamics of representation within the movement as a whole. Although any frame analysis of such a diverse and heterogeneous movement will necessarily remain partial and incomplete, and there are factors in addition to representation which obviously shape an individual's sense of identity, this paper begins the necessary process of empirically exploring the links between the symbolic and identity components of social movements.

Unpacking representations

In the first of the empirical sections of this paper, the ways in which the symbolic domain are used are examined by a close analysis of different representations by movement organizations. This explores how groups chose to represent themselves. The reasons behind these choices are considered in the following section. There are multifarious forms of representation, but three common themes in the ways in which anti-war groups have used ICTs and other materials²; their multiple online interventions, the use of iconic and confirmatory material, and the use of representation as projection.

Multiple online interventions

Although on the whole very similar material was posted online as used in flyers and in street action imagery, the multiple representational arenas used by groups complicated representations. For some a website was simply not a priority, 'it is about prioritizing the campaigning rather than telling people that we exist' (Zina, peace campaigner, Leicester, interview). As such, local groups have tended to prioritize locally distributed media, such as pamphlets, which are not replicated online. Others sought to use a mixture of avenues; 'we want our audience to be mixed and the way that we advertise is we have quite a big email list audience and just traditional taking flyers and posters around to places and then getting other organisations to email it on ... and the vast majority of people who come to our events are not Jewish' (Helen Pearson, Just Peace Leicester (Jewish Peace Group), member, Leicester, interview).

Groups use ICTs to increase their capacity to collect, collate, and distribute information from disparate locations. Anti-war websites stored an enormous amount of information in support of their case, gathered from many sources (from personal testimony to newspaper reports), which vastly increased the symbolic resources of protesters. For networks such as Faslane 365 activists

were able to upload their own testimony of events and photographs of their participation in actions, contributing to an array of information about the campaign and its history. But this was more than simply archiving; it was about broadening the material, remit, and deepening and amplifying the frame for the audience.

Some organizations and activists have sought to make online interventions beyond their particular websites and email distribution lists. Anna Liddle (Yorkshire CND, Bradford, interview) used MySpace as additional publicity avenue, 'loads of young people use MySpace, it's an accessible point for them to start thinking about Hiroshima, for example, . . . the internet is a non-scary way of exploring things, you don't have to go up and talk to some stranger on a stall . . . you can just browse and have a look'. Others, such as Lindsey German (StWC) and Anas Altkriti (British Muslim Initiative (BMI)) wrote on the Guardian's *comment is free* . . . site in addition to their own websites (Figure 2), and had sites on wiki websites such as Wikipedia. As such, this variety of representations, both online and off, complicated the ways in which groups framed their campaigns. Arguments are clearly realigned to suit particular audiences, be they youth targeted or a very public intervention which is likely to attract comment via the Guardian website.

Iconic and confirmatory material

Second, opposition to war has been articulated using a number of different arguments strongly related to a group's historical remit and intended audience. Thus,

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/anas_alkriti/2007/03/victims_of_war.html. The page header features the 'comment is free...' logo and a search bar containing 'Comment is free'. Navigation links include Home, This week, Contributors, Subjects A-Z, Editors' blog, Dan Chung, Steve Bell, About us, Audio, Webfeeds, and Other blogs. The breadcrumb trail reads 'guardian.co.uk/commentisfree > Anas Altkriti'. The main content area displays a profile picture of Anas Altkriti, his name, and a list of articles with 'Latest' and 'Show all' options. Below this is a 'Profile' section with a 'BLOG FEED' icon and a link to 'All Anas Altkriti articles'. The article title is 'Victims of war', dated 'March 18, 2007 9:00 AM', with a 'Printable version' link. The article text begins: 'Four years after the decision to launch a massive military assault on Iraq, the country lies in ruins. Will history hold those responsible to account?' and continues with a discussion of US Senate actions and military presence in Iraq. The article concludes with the sentence: 'Millions of Iraqis, indeed the vast majority of the population (myself

FIGURE 2 Anas Altkriti writing on comment is free . . . Guardian online (18 March 2007).

the Socialist Worker Party framed their opposition around Blair’s culpability in the death of others and inadequacy as a Prime Minister (see Figure 3), using an inclusion frame whereby political structures remain intact but Socialists gain power. The Islamic Human Rights Commission critiques the argument that war is a justified response to terrorism by using a picture of a dead child to argue ‘If this child was a terrorist, then we all are’, directly linking readers to the plight of the child (Figure 3), using a frame transformation to critique concepts of terrorism. The Green Party tied the war in Iraq to debates about capitalism and imperialist control over oil reserves, encapsulated in a placard slogan ‘Peace Not Profit’. Peace groups often sought to make broader links between war, militarism, and violence.

This need to concisely express the framing argument is illustrated by StWC who adopted a number of short slogans that summed up their case against war. StWC’s key aim was very specific and was to stop the war declared by the USA and its allies against ‘terrorism’, and thus establish an interpretative anti-US frame. The explicit linking between the war on terrorism and attacks on Muslim communities has been one of StWC’s defining features and has enabled them to secure much Muslim support. In turn Muslim groups, such as MAB have linked their ongoing campaign for ‘Justice for Palestine’ with calls to ‘Don’t Attack Iraq’. This linking has enabled them to support links with StWC, be part of large-scale protests, and still retain their focus on Palestine; a clear use of frame bridging between otherwise quite disparate causes.



FIGURE 3 Socialist Worker newspaper, and Islamic Human Rights Commission paper, (front page, vol. 7, September 2006).

Key to the communication of such arguments has been the use of imagery, visual iconic symbols to both capture attention and convey a strong message. Naazish Azaim (University of Leicester Islamic Society (UoLISoc), Leicester) used iconic photographs of the orange jump suits of detainees in publicity material against Guantanamo Bay (see Figure 4); ‘images convey more than words and I wanted to use something shocking – something that shocked every human to the core’ (interview). CND structured its website around the use of photographs, using them to link together war, NATO, Menwith Hill, the plutonium trade, and the issue of nuclear submarines (Figure 5).

Despite compressing their campaign arguments to short slogans, or framing them through iconic imagery, however, groups were aware that they were deliberately employing confirmatory material for an audience that was already sympathetic to their cause. Groups did not appear to be using material to persuade readers through analysis or argument. Rather it was assumed that the audience was already persuaded of the import of anti-war campaigning, and thus confirmatory material dominated websites. Many interviewees acknowledged that their online material was aimed less at mobilizing new supporters, but rather at maintaining support and momentum for their campaigns by framing their anti-war stance into the broad frame of their particular organization, such as for non-violence, support for Palestine, for socialist government, or an end to US detention of terrorism suspects. As such, few groups opened space for debate about any merits of war or sought to explore any complexities that might hinder their arguments.



FIGURE 4 London anti-war rally 18 March 2006. Omar Deghayes is a Libyan born British refugee detained at Guantánamo Bay. Source: Author.



FIGURE 5 CND website (13 August 2007).

Representation as projection

Finally, activists have used ICTs to project their size, power, and support from other groups through their websites. Groups need few people to establish an online presence and the audience of such sites often has little way to determine a group's size or broader significance (Boyd 2003). More importantly, many groups employed symbols that identified them as part of broad alliances, explicitly seeking to link their cause to others within a broader framework of anti-war. For example, the Respect Party used imagery of anti-war protests in their website banner, clearly aligning with and by implication claiming some credit for, anti-war protests (Figure 6).

Activists have acknowledged that their strength lies in the diversity of the participants in the movement, that to draw boundaries around what is deemed valid in terms of aims, tactics and ideology would reduce that power, reduce the number of participants and eventually curtail the vibrancy of the movements. Thus rather than view difference as a divisive threat they have sought to celebrate it as a form of strength and link across multiple and different



FIGURE 6 Banner from the Respect Party website (13 August 2007).

organizations, groups, and networks. This can amplify groups' perceived power, but also deliberately 'smooth over' difference. For example, in Leicester there are fascinating power dynamics between the anti-war groups, but ultimately a clear division between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, online and to the media they present a unified front to oppose war. Moreover, although historically there has always been debate over who groups are speaking on behalf of (whether it is their membership or a broader moral argument), there were particular tensions and conflict over representations of Muslim voices in the movement which resulted in complex claims by groups such as MAB, which claimed to not represent all Muslims but also sought to speak on behalf of Muslims against war;

the last thing we wanted to do was to actually enter a competition as to exactly who represents whom . . . We have had just about enough of the likes of Abu Hanza and the extreme elements of the Muslim community, who were in their minute minorities speaking on behalf of Muslims . . . as a Muslim organisation – that is the overt Muslim platform within the antiwar movement – we did represent Muslims there . . . but at the same time we never ever professed to represent all Muslims . . . We needed to introduce to the public, to the media, a new generation of Muslims, who could speak on behalf of the Muslim community, who could represent Islam and Muslims

(Anas Altikriti, BMI (and formerly MAB), London, interview)

In summary, the complexity of the ways in which groups made interventions online reflects a lack of a cohesive online strategy by many groups. Many groups had not clearly considered what they intended to achieve through their online representations. All groups had clear aims and goals, but these were not necessarily coherently expressed in the online arena. Without a clear strategy of what their online representations were to achieve it is impossible to determine the effectiveness of online interventions (Downing 2003).

Explaining representational strategies

This second empirical section explains the reasons behind these representational strategies. There are three factors that help explain these choices: the organizational principles and ideological frameworks of the anti-war groups; the diverse and heterogeneous composition of the movement; and the role of ICTs and the enduring importance of face-to-face communication.

Organizational principles and ideological frameworks

A basic, and rather banal, reason that anti-war organizations lack an integrated online strategy is a lack of time due to limited resources. There is a more significant

organizational issue, however, that underpins many representational choices – the ideological approach of an organization (Kavada 2005). Bennett (2003) has suggested that ICTs make social movements harder to control: that this increased information flow complicates decision-making and reduces the networks' ability to retain a collective identity. Some of the anti-war organizations were fearful of this and that the speed at which information can be uploaded online to an international audience might encourage rash decisions in material used or argument posed.

For StWC the ability to post online was limited to a few core officer holders, however the organization also made significant use of links to articles hosted on a variety of external websites including the Guardian's open commenting section *Comment is Free* However, the choice of which groups are linked to from the site remains informal; 'it's completely pragmatic . . . either somebody says, will you put a link, which is a good enough reason as long as you agree with them, but it's not very systematic because then if people don't ask you, you don't put it up' (Lindsey German, StWC, Convenor, StWC, interview). Yet who groups have linked to is important in their representations, for example Friends of Al Aqsa have linked to and supported Interpal through their website, an organization that has often been accused of links with terrorist activity (though each accusation has proved false).

Activists also controlled their representation by being careful in controlling the source of their material and thus the content of their websites and emails; 'if the source is from a certain place you know, you get to know whether it's something you could rely on' (David Webb, Yorkshire CND, Convenor, Leeds, interview). There were also accusations, mainly against StWC, that they sought to silence certain voices and carefully manage their representation. Asad (interview) argued that 'In the Stop the War Coalition . . . there were no big Muslim organizations represented there. That was all parallel – it was all outside. . . . If you actually look at the big national demonstrations, the big platforms – they rarely include any of the big Muslim speakers'. In October 2007 there was a controversy when Andrew Murray (StWC) rejected the application of affiliation from the groups *Hands Off The People Of Iran* who in turn accused StWC of 'crude political censorship' (HOPI 2007).

Those groups more supportive of non-hierarchical organizing tended to take a more open and fluid approach to deciding what material was posted up. For example, although the rules of participation in Faslane 365 were decided by a core group of activists who retained control of the site overall, the website was relatively open to groups posting up their own testimony. Other groups have sought to create space for debate online, such as MPACUK;

most Muslim groups are really, really controlled about what's said in their websites. What we say is nobody owns the Muslim community. The Muslim community are their own people and, as their own people, they've got the right to say what they want, . . . let them speak, and that way the

causes and the issues that are dear to the Muslims at least have an avenue within MPAC to progress onwards and then affect the greater community
(Zulfi Bukhari, CEO, London, interview)

However, in terms of content on the website they have a number of control mechanisms for what gets posted up, 'so it's hierarchy but we push that decision-making downwards up [*sic*] until something outside of the guidelines or a procedural vagueness and that's when we then say, no, we've got that discipline, you have to forego some of those luxuries of independence' (Zulfi Bukhari, interview). In this way groups tended to have a complex approach to controlling online representations and although many sought to control material, in order to present a coherent and consistent message, this control was rarely absolute.

Diversity and frame bridging

There was a clear emphasis upon alliances, inclusion, and diversity within the anti-war movement. This was most obviously expressed through the variety of groups involved, but this approach also influenced how groups sought, or were able to, represent their claims. Through diversity the frame of the movement was extended to link together a variety of causes (such as Iran, Palestine, human rights, peace, and anti-imperialism). This might serve to confuse rather than clarify the frame activists were using, or add to 'frame clouding' and at times made articulating anything other than being 'against war' difficult;

because it's a coalition, . . . we struggled to come up with consensus political statements . . . we tried to write leaflets with statements about the war, but there were continuously people that objected to things, and so the list of core statements that we could make was often quite minimal – for example 'Stop the War' . . . someone might want to say 'victory to the Iraqis' but obviously we wouldn't put that on a leaflet even if someone believed it . . . we retained plurality of opinion while operating together . . . but this was the campaign website, so in the end what we could have was details of the next meetings, demos coming up etc, which of course is valuable, but then it's not going to create a very in-depth website.

(Chris Talbot, Respect, Leicester, interview)

Conscious of the heterogeneity of the movement and keen to appeal to as broad a range of society as possible, the majority of groups were careful in their use of language and imagery online. Activists such as Zulfi Bukhari (MPACUK) acknowledged that although the audience of the 'website will be 80 per cent Muslim, 10 per cent Zionist, . . . 10 per cent would be just the wider community. Because we get a lot of non-Muslims coming on to our website who are just general people who want to know stuff'. Faslane 365 deliberately sought to widen their target

audience, 'we have deliberately said we cannot just do this within the peace movement, there are not enough people . . . we've got to go way outside of our normal circle' (Jane Tallents, Faslane 365, member, Faslane, interview).

Moreover, many Muslim activists were careful in their use of Arabic terms; 'You have to connect with the audience, there's no point in my speaking for an hour to a group of non Muslims using Arabic terms if they don't understand what these Arabic terms are . . . in my articles or in my works, wherever, where I do use an Arabic word I will immediately . . . translate it straight afterwards' (Asim Qureshi, Cage Prisoner, volunteer, London, interview). Finally, Zina believed that although it was very important to shape leaflets in simple and accessible ways and know precisely your target audience, the website enabled greater flexibility in communicating more complex rationales for action;

For something like *Women in Black*, we do have a leaflet and whenever I write leaflets, if leaflets are for the general public, then I am seriously simplifying both concepts and language to an extent that I'm not happy with it but I think that it is more accessible . . . If what I'm trying to do is to get people to a direct action like Faslane 365, then I assume that we're not going to get people who aren't already sympathetic to this issue, so I'm not trying to educate people who aren't sympathetic to this issue . . . if you were doing a website, you would feel more able to use different language in different sections of the website, and when we have done that, if you have a section of legal advice, then you don't have to worry about it, and similarly if you have a section of press releases, you phrase it very differently.

(Interview)

ICTs and the enduring importance of face-to-face communication

Finally, the role of the technology itself (as Bennett suggests) cannot be ignored. ICTs enabled groups to have multifarious online interventions and the effort to control and shape each of these was considerable. By seeking maximum intervention and impact, groups forgo some element of control over the results. At the same time, however, there was a particular and enduring emphasis on the importance of particular places and face-to-face communication. There was ever-present emphasis upon local place despite an understanding of the international linkages of importance to the anti-war movement and the functionality of ICTs as a media with a potentially global audience (Tarrow 2005). Thus groups sought to frame their campaigns via particular places, despite evidence that this is often not a successful strategy as 'places have multivalent meanings because multiple audiences of the social movement understand a place's significance differently' (Heaney & Rojas 2006, p. 486) and crucially opponents are able 'to co-opt the meaning of place for their own ends' (ibid, 485). Moreover this, perhaps perversely, made groups' online interventions lack coherence because they were often aiming their representations at particular populations.

Place is an important part of individuals' identity. Attempts to mobilize were often limited spatially to a local scale by the belief that newcomers could best be reached and encouraged to take action through face-to-face contact, thus negating the need for ICTs. Thus 'for our local protests when we're going to protest down town . . . we do it by phone, and just turn up in town and that's it – or by personal contact. I do email but it's not very effective' (Chris Goodwin, LCSTW, co-ordinator, Leicester, interview).

In addition, locally-based groups emphasized the importance of local places for interaction. This included holding meetings in particular parts of the city to attract certain audiences; 'It's one of the few occasions when there is a really good mix of ethnic groups – when they hold the meetings in Highfields. When we hold them in Clarendon Park, then it's more of a white audience' (Claire Jackson, Just Peace Leicester, member, Leicester, interview). The role of certain religious spaces reduced the reliance upon online communication for that audience; 'email is less integral to the Islamic Society because that's more socially interactive . . . people always know that if they go to the prayer room they'll meet someone . . . out of the extended family unit, the mosque is the next place that people go to. . . it is supposed to serve as a social hub for the community' (Arif Sayeed, UoLISo and Respect, Treasurer of UoLISoc, Leicester, interview). However, this reliance on Mosques as a socialization hub was problematic for some. It suggests a fairly insular form of social movement activity that deals with its own community in a face-to-face way. They were used by some as a retreat space that reflected 'some sort of siege mentality, building walls around the Muslim community' (Anas Altikriti, interview).

This localization was reflected in certain identity formations that were expressed in particular spatial and temporal moments (Long 2007). In other words, activists from small local groups shaped their representations to appeal to this local audience and in turn helped shape a sense of a locally rooted identity. Yet despite this localism in social networks and in the mobilization of activists, some groups sought to situate themselves within global debates and with global audiences; 'we're a virtual organization, so without internet and email we wouldn't exist, or we'd exist in a much limited capacity. I think the internet has been by far our most invaluable resource, . . . the majority of our readers are from the US, not from the UK . . . which is very interesting . . . being a UK based NGO that we have our biggest support in the US' (Asim Qureshi, interview). Thus despite the rootedness to specific places that many, small groups especially, exhibited it was also evident that some activists valued the international reach of ICTs and at times struggled to articulate the links between the local and global;

one of the areas which we felt were extremely problematic . . . is the argument that Muslims only care about foreign issues, they only talk about Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq . . . how is it that they can claim to be British when all they speak about are issues that are in far flung corners

of the world. Obviously our counterargument is that *we live in a world today where nothing is foreign*

(Anas Altikriti, interview, emphasis added)

Changing the politics of identity: the case of Muslim anti-war activists

In this final empirical section a case study of Muslim anti-war activists is used to understand the relationship between representational choices, the subjective experience of the individual, and their processes of political identity construction. The myriad of representations outlined in this paper are an expression of, and impact upon, individual activists' sense of their identity and position within anti-war movements. Consideration of religion as a motivating factor in collective action or the study of religious movements has been understudied by social movement theorists (Bayat 2005), though Muslim use of ICTs has received recent attention (Siapera 2005). Religion is focused upon here as an identity category because of its particular prominence in recent anti-war campaigns. Although there are strong historical links between the peace movement and Christianity (expressed through the Quakers, Christian Peacemaker Teams, the roots of CND, and many other groups), Muslim activists have become prominent contributors in recent years.

Muslim anti-war activism

By 2001, self-identified Muslims constituted 2.7 per cent (1.6 million people) of the British population, second only to Christianity in size as a faith group (ONS 2003). Muslim communities are heterogeneous and divided by religious differences, ethnicity, heritage, and language (Radcliffe 2004). Moreover, 'the making of a British Islam is an ongoing, unfinished process of experimentation, diversity and debate' (Lewis 1994, p. 8). This is further reflected in the array of Muslim national political organizations in Britain; for example the Muslim Council of Britain, and MAB, and those who advocate a separatist agenda, such as al-Muharijoun and Hisbut Tahir.

Early involvement of Muslim communities in peace efforts can be traced to the early 1990s when the first Gulf War triggered Muslim objections in Britain, and continued with the conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Palestine. The US response to the events of September 2001 was met with worldwide Muslim condemnation triggering participation in the broader anti-war movements re-emerging at that time (AbuKhalil 2002).

A variety of explicitly Muslim groups have taken an anti-war stance. MAB had a significant early presence as a key coalition member of the StWC. Its name was repeatedly associated with StWC and CND on anti-war flyers,

banners, and literature. In addition other smaller and more grassroots groups emerged such as MPACUK, a civil liberties group, Cage Prisoner which campaigns for the release of detainees from Guantánamo Bay and JustPeace 'an anti-Iraq war group that promotes Muslim participation in movements that campaign for freedom from oppression and injustice' (Saleem 2005, p. 25).

Contested Muslim activist' identities

The heterogeneity of Muslim involvement in anti-war activism and its representation highlights the contested nature of British Muslim identities. Ismail (2004) contends 'the intersection of religion and identity is complex and raises important questions both in public spheres presumed to be secular and in contexts where religion is thought to play a significant role in defining the public sphere' (p. 614). Many British Muslims find themselves between such contexts, contending with what it is to be British while simultaneously being influenced by their parents' homeland, their local community, and their faith.

Representation forms an important part of this negotiation of individual and collective identities and has been a strong marker in the debate about Muslim activism in the anti-war movement. This is in part due to the need for social movement actors to outwardly impose their image and identity in a quest for mutual recognition and legitimacy. For many Muslim activists it has concerned a search for a collective, but flexible, identity in the face of increased hostility and police repression.

This search has four key components. First, in the early days of post 9/11 many Muslim activists sought support (in the face of increased hostility) by asserting a collective religious commonality and by aligning with sympathetic others (often within the anti-war movement) to counter stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists. This involved utilizing a broad bridging frame that linked war, poverty, marginalization, anti-terror legislation, and the radicalization of British Muslims. At the time there was a strong national politics in Britain of suspicion, critique (for example in how Muslims chose to dress) and outright repression of Muslim communities. StWC chose to include 'Stop the racist backlash' as a core and early slogan as part of a broader symbolic struggle by anti-war activists to show solidarity with Muslims.

Movements have historically sought to overturn stereotypes (for example feminist and sexuality movements, Taylor & Whittier 1995). Many Muslim groups sought to rearticulate a particular version of Muslim identity, both to counter existing simplified stereotypes within the British media and as a way in which to mobilize Muslims to take peaceful action against war, rather than resort to terrorism. Thus, for example, MPACUK's aim was to 'empower Muslims to focus on non-violent Jihad and political activism' (website). This was partly achieved by representing a politically active form of Islam that condoned terrorism and was very much about being British. Thus one page of

their website contained an article ‘Islam a Blessing to Britain’ (Figure 7) and another article entitled ‘The Rational Centre: MPACUK’s Vision for British Muslim Identity’ called for Muslim participation in all aspects of British society and politics.

Moreover, Anas Altikriti argued that asserting a strong religious identity facilitated Muslim groups in encouraging Muslims away from paths to terrorism;

British Muslims, coming from all sorts of nationalistic backgrounds; Asian, African, Arab, Latin American, have constantly failed to promote national identities. . . . One thing that we noticed after 9/11 was that many Muslims who before 9/11 never really saw themselves in a religious guise, in fact many of them had never been to a Mosque in their lives, . . . actually deciding to change their ways very, very naturally. . . . Muslim organisations come into it, that they welcome this kind of return to religion and this association of the religious identity but at the same time they try to control things so that these people do not become even more despondent and are driven to the extreme – that’s the role of the . . . organisations.

(Interview)

Second, this linking re-ignited a historical tension as to the place of religion and identity politics within anti-war activism. While there is a historical importance of Christianity to peace activism, certainly within CND, there has also been a political suppression of using Christianity as an overt religious identifier within anti-war activism. Bruce Kent (CND, Vice President, London) talked of a



FIGURE 7 MPACUK website (5 August 2007).

strong secular current within such activism that sought to sideline those with Christian affiliations;

There is a prejudice against faith people speaking. They're not looked on as quite as serious as getting your Trade Union leader. There is, in some quarters, that kind of prejudice about having church people . . . actually the faith people, especially the Quakers, have been the most persistent and consistent of any group, any group at all . . . Much more important to have the chair, the blooming President of the TUC or somebody, or half a dozen Labour MPs, than someone from the church

(interview)

Consequently, the focus on Islam as a religious identity within the movement re-ignited debates as to the value of secular activism, treating Islam as a unique religious 'other' and causing Muslim activists to have to respond to overt criticism of their religious choices even within anti-war campaigns.

Third, as a consequence of this historical tension and the fixed ways in which other anti-war groups categorized Muslim activists, Muslims have struggled to articulate their claim to multiple identities. This led to a precarious position for those activists who wished to maintain their religion and yet move beyond religion as a defining identity. Bagguley and Hussain (2005) argue, through their empirical work in Bradford, that people construct multiple identities such as being British/Pakistani/Muslim. Thus Muslim activists sought to embrace the collective identity of religion at the same time as projecting the complexity of its implications and practices, and argued that multiple identities were possible. This should have been relatively easy given that the anti-war movement had sought to celebrate its diversity (especially the StWC), and that there is an established social movement literature on the reality of multiple identities. Moreover, many in the movement accepted that an individual can have many affiliations, but that this does not necessarily diminish the agency they may bring with them to an action. However, at times certain collective identities can appear to be incompatible with core principles of a movement. In particular religious identities appear to have specific dilemmas of integration with other (often hidden but assumed) principles of the anti-war movement. The gender politics of Islam has been a particular sticking point in this regard.

Thus many activists sought to open up space for these multiple identities; 'in the past on the left you would have had to stay quiet if you believed in God . . . We are forcing open a space not only within the Marxist left but also in contrast to the right-wing Islamists as well. *We have multiple identities and need multiple spaces.* Those who want to engage with us have to recognize our rights to these identities and spaces' (Asad Rehman, quoted in Bouteldja & Rehman 2004, emphasis added). In particular ICTs enabled the complexity of such debates to be represented and expressed without having to simplify to three word slogans. As such, technologies have helped overcome some of the perceived barriers of communication;

there really is no communication problem, because communication has changed. We use the internet, we use phones, we use text messaging to communicate, so I really don't see it as a hindrance. At the end of the day if a woman wants to wear the veil she can wear the veil like somebody wants to have tattoos all over them or piercings – it's just an identity isn't it?
(Farida Tejabwala, interview)

However, this process, of weaving together very different political (and personal) spaces through anti-war activism is difficult and for Asad potentially damaging;

Identity politics . . . is an inward looking politics, which actually is devastating because it does separate you from everyone; it's why we're having this multiculturalism debate, faith schools debate, because it actually is about identity politics. And I think this is where the anti-war movement's biggest failures are – not on the war, but creating space which affected us in the social and the private sphere. Its effect wasn't about the war because in the war we were able to fight and always be there – it's in the other spaces.

(Interview)

Finally, as Asad suggests, this precariousness has particularly limited those who attempted to develop overt and complicated new religious political identities, especially those who wished to break or remake understandings of Islamic tradition in relation to activism. Social movements can be particularly useful vehicles for those who wish to articulate radical (or utopian) ideas; in fact 'it is possible to conceive of movements as media through which concepts and perspectives which might otherwise have remained marginal, are disseminated in society' (Della Porta & Diani 1999, p. 72).

Some Muslim activists had sought to use anti-war activism as an avenue to challenge not just notions of what it meant to be an anti-war activist, but also what it meant to be a British Muslim. This was particularly advanced by young women who chose not to wear the hijab or take a less literal interpretation of the Qur'ān. Some Muslim activists wanted to represent an alternative version of Islam to the world, be politically engaged, and be British. Thus, 'in the post-colonial world, we need to consider the "both/and" way of thinking – that it is possible to belong to both, to be part of the umma, the global Islamic community, and be British . . . We refuse to make a choice' (Saleem 2005, p. 24). This transformation is what Ramadan (2005) refers to as the 'silent revolution' – the politicization of second and third generation Muslims (including many women) in Britain. Ramadan identifies Muslim involvement in the British anti-war movement and their involvement in other social justice campaigns 'working in the name of common values' as 'evidence of new trends, a new movement that is coming out of our presence' (quoted in Reyes 2005, p. 23). In his work Ramadan advocates the need for a new form of Muslim politics that deals with the complexity of British Muslims'

position. He calls for an 'ethical reform' of Islam, a contextualized re-interpretation of the key texts that is relevant to the everyday lives of ordinary Muslims. Part of this 'silent revolution' is Muslims being selective and critical in what they subscribe to – from both British culture and Islamic values.

This potential re-interpretation of Islam is radical and challenging. For all that the anti-war movement might have lacked an online strategy, it maintained quite stable ideological divisions that were unsettled by the complexity of such Muslim activism. As social movements use a mixture of adherence to tradition with the re-elaboration of existing symbols it lacked the space to support such potential breaks with tradition. By seeking to frame opposition to war as broadly as possible, many organizations sought to avoid alienating any of the larger Muslim organizations and to suppress any rigorous debate about the role of religion within activism. As a result any potential to re-evaluate Islam and novel interpretations of Muslim anti-war activism were sidelined.

In summary, a strategic choice was made by several Muslim organizations to politically align with other anti-war groups in order not to be isolated and to seek legitimatization in a difficult and unfavourable (inter)national political context. At the time Muslims had few options and sought solidarity where they could. However, although the anti-war movement began as a diverse and inclusive coalition, it did not remain so and struggled to incorporate complex notions of religious identity, which has led to difficulties for many Muslim activists, several years later, in rearticulating new activist identities. ICTs have helped in some respect to create space for those smaller, often more marginal, Muslim groups to articulate their vision of anti-war activism and to build networks of support. However, the vagueness of the broader anti-war movements' online strategy coupled with the strong control asserted by certain groups constrained the arena in which these important issues could be debated.

Conclusions

ICT use has shaped and been shaped by anti-war activists and other social justice movements for over a decade (Warf & Grimes 1997). Yet there remains a need to explore in detail the ways in which ICTs are used by groups in their representational strategies and to examine more closely the link between symbolic production and identity construction. This paper has explored the symbolic dimension of collective action through three forms of analysis: understanding how the symbolic domain is used; explaining the strategic choices behind this use; and, finally, linking these representational choices to the subjective experience of the individual and their processes of political identity construction (using a case study of Muslim anti-war activists).

There are three common ways in which groups have used ICTs and other materials: in multifarious formats and interventions, in often confirmatory

ways, rather than seeking to convert new audiences, and finally, to symbolize their power and alliances with others. However, despite (or perhaps because of) this variety of uses many groups lacked a coherent online strategy and these representations are neither as controlled nor part of a careful strategy as might at first appear. Many groups have a complex and at times messy approach to considerations of their audience, relations to place, and the importance of using durable frames. The reasons for this are threefold. First, use reflects the organizational structure and ideological principles of the groups. Most groups sought to maintain hierarchical control of their online content, but this control was rarely absolute and limited by a lack of time and resources. Others were more open about their content and thus had little control over what was posted online. Second, with the emphasis in the movement on diversity and inclusion most groups wanted their online material to be as accessible as possible and as a result censored anything too opinionated or deemed too radical. Third, there was an enduring emphasis upon local place and face-to-face communication. This made groups' online interventions lack coherence because they were often aiming their representations at particular populations (while also retaining their 'accessibility').

In a specific case study of Muslim anti-war activism the relationships between these representational choices and the processes of identity construction were explored. Such representations were a core tension in the construction of a religious identity as being a primary identifier of Muslim anti-war activists. Representational forms heavily influenced the negotiation of collective identities especially as social movement actors seek mutual recognition and legitimacy by outwardly imposing their image. First, in the early days of post 9/11 many Muslim activists sought support by asserting a collective religious commonality and by aligning with sympathetic others to counter stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists. Second, this linking re-ignited a historical tension as to the place of religion and identity politics within anti-war activism. Third, Muslims had struggled to articulate their claim to multiple identities. Finally, this precariousness has particularly limited those who attempted to develop overt and complicated new religious political identities, especially those who wished to break or remake understandings of Islamic tradition in relation to activism.

This research has begun the necessary process of empirically exploring the links between the symbolic and identity components of social movements. It has identified the usefulness, but also the failings, of employing frame analysis to a movement as heterogeneous as anti-war activism. It has illustrated the need for detailed analysis of ICT use by activists and for a more thorough consideration (only begun here) of the reasons *why* activists choose to use ICTs in certain ways. The implications of these choices, here considered using a case study of Muslim anti-war activists, remain contested and in need of further investigation. Such work should also extend to more intergenerational or temporal analysis of the role of representations online within activist campaigns.

Notes

- 1 Weapons of mass destruction (WMD).
- 2 Although this paper is focusing on the use of ICTs we need to understand the broad picture of representation, thus a range of material produced by groups is included in the analysis because while hardcopy productions continue, their use has been reshaped by ICTs.

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Jenny Pickerill is a Senior lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Leicester, UK. She is interested in how collective action, participation, spaces for dialogue, autonomy and anarchism can create pathways towards environmental and social justice. She has written a book (*Cyberprotest*), co-written a second (*Anti-War Activism*), a number of articles, and several book chapters, about environmental activism, the use of internet technologies for campaigning, and the anti-war movement in Britain. Address: Department of Geography, University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester, LE1 7RH, UK. [email: j.pickerill@le.ac.uk]
