Transforming the boundaries of collective identity:

From the 'local' anti-road campaign to 'global' resistance?

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Biographical notes

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with how people involved in 'local' protest might come to see themselves as part of wider social groupings and even global forces of resistance. An ethnographic study of the No M11 Link Road Campaign in London examines participants' definitions of their collective identity boundaries at different stages of involvement. Cross-sectional material from the beginning and later in the campaign shows that there was a transformation in collective identity boundaries towards a more inclusive definition of 'community'. Analysis of participants' accounts before and after involvement in the eviction of a tree suggests the role of conflict with the police in producing an oppositional definition of the collective identity, facilitating links to other groups in resistance to illegitimate authority. Finally, biographical material indicates the implications of transformed identity boundaries for co-action with wider social groups. It is argued that the same intra- and inter-group processes that determine how identity boundaries extend to include a broader community might account for how people come to see themselves as part of a global social movement.

Key words: anti-roads protests, collective identity change, crowd behaviour.

Introduction

UK roads protests emerged in the 1990s in response to the government's £23billion road-building programme (Rootes 2000: 30-31), and declined only after the programme was cut by three quarters. The protests have been identified as sites of both social and psychological transformation (Drury & Reicher 2000; Jordan 1998: 133; Welsh & McLeish 1996: 40). Through the way they resisted road-building, activists sought not only to affect society but also the ideas of other, less politicized, participants, who might thereby come to recognize the wider significance of the 'local' road-building scheme (Cathles 2000; Plows 1995; Seel 1997).

Most studies of anti-roads protesters have focused on the activists rather than the 'locals' who also sustained the campaigns but who may have had a more parochial view of the protest. It is such (self-defined) 'locals' who are the focus of the present study. The concern here is with how such participants came to re-define the issues motivating their involvement as more than 'local' ones, and thus how some of them came to see themselves as part of broader collectives and even 'global' struggles.

For both participants and theorists, there is a question over how we might conceptualize such potential transformations. In the recent past, social movement theory has analysed change in movement participation in terms of ideology (see Scott, 1990), political opportunity structures (e.g., McAdam 1982), or even eschewed the subjective side by focusing instead on the varying affordances of social and material resources (e.g., Gamson 1975: 136-141; McCarthy & Zald 1977; Oberschall 1973). More recently, however, the concept of 'identity' has been put forward as an essential

theoretical construct in research in this field (Gamson 1992; Stryker, Owens & White 2000). Of relevance for current concerns are examples of research examining different forms of identity change, including studies of movements as sites for the development of collective identities (e.g. Eyerman & Jamison 1991; Fantasia 1988: 109; Melucci 1989), and research on the long-term impact of movement participation on activists' identities (e.g., Fendrich 1974; McAdam 1999).

Some studies suggest that notions of identity are rejected by roads protesters themselves. Participants emphasize their diversity (Seel 1997: 111) and resist the suggestion that they should have a common political ideology (Barry 1999: 82-83). At the same time, however, by pointing to the way that different types of people with different issues and priorities came together over roads (Welsh & McLeish 1996: 37), road protesters stress their superordinate unity even within this diversity. Moreover, the common commitment among the different UK anti-roads protests to (non-violent) direct action – e.g. site invasions, occupations of diggers, squatted protest camps – has been understood as the defining characteristic of a common identity (Aufheben 1994, 1998; Barry 1999; Doherty 1996; Doherty, Paterson & Seel 2000; McKay 1996; Plows 1998; Wall 2000).

The issue therefore might be one of how identity is conceptualized. Some participants and theorists reject identity conceptualized as a fixed thing – i.e. as a reified form of *being* rather than *doing* – which reinforces our place within given (alienated) social relations (Holloway 2002: 63-64). However, identity might be conceptualized rather as the dynamic *process* through which individuals and groups construct understandings of self, world and others (e.g., Castells 1997; Melucci 1989, 1996:

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71). In this kind of account, identity is an understanding of one's position within a set of social relations, along with the possible and proper action flowing from that position (Reicher & Hopkins 2001).

Transformations in collective identity might be analysed along a number of dimensions (Drury & Reicher 2000; Kiecolt 2000). But one that would seem to be particularly relevant for the question of how participants in 'local' campaigns can come to identify with wider groups and struggles is that of identity *boundaries*. A greater inclusiveness in the definition of the collective self enhances its power to transform the world. Thus for example one account of revolutionary strategy is the 'expansion of the boundaries of what the "working class" comes to include' (Cleaver 1979: 189).

This takes us to the question of process: precisely how might participation in collective action transform the boundaries of collective identity? A number of accounts emphasize the importance of relations between the collective and forces external to it, such as the police (e.g., della Porta 1998, 1999). Thus Reicher and co-workers' Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM; Drury & Reicher 2000; Reicher 1996; Stott & Reicher 1998a) suggests that, since identity is an understanding of one's position within a set of social relations, identity will change in the course of an event to the extent that one's position changes through interaction with such external forces. Specifically, the ESIM posits two features of crowd-police interactions which are necessary in order for change to occur in collective action events.

First, there needs to be an asymmetry of categorical representations between participants and an outgroup such as the police. Thus, for instance, participants may see themselves as 'respectable citizens' who are expressing their democratic right to assemble and express their views. In such cases, they may feel no antagonism to the police, and may understand their own actions as legitimate and non-threatening. If there are confrontational groupings within the collective, participants will see them as atypical and 'other'. By contrast, the police may see the collective as a whole as 'oppositional' and perceive their actions as either actually or potentially illegitimate and threatening. Acts of confrontation which the majority in the collective sees as atypical are therefore seen as representative and as signs of (incipient) generalized conflict.

Second, it is necessary to have an (initial) asymmetry of power-relations: the police will have the power to impose their perspective upon the collective such that this comes to constitute the context within which participants (re-)define themselves. To continue with our example, the police do not only *see* all members of the collective as oppositional and dangerous, they *treat* them as such - either setting up cordons to limit their movements, using horses to force them in particular directions, or else dispersing them through a baton charge.

The key point, therefore, is that such power means that the police do not just perceive the social position of the collective differently to the way participants perceive it themselves, but they are also able to re-position participants in practice. Such police action will therefore impact on the self-definition and subsequent action of the participants.

Thus, where there is an asymmetry of categorizations and power between groups in a crowd event, then two further consequences follow. The first is that the police perception may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Groups that are perceived and treated as oppositional by the police then come to perceive themselves and act in oppositional ways. In particular, where police actions such as containment or dispersal are seen as illegitimate, then active opposition to the police becomes legitimized. The second consequence is that social relationships within the collective, as well as between participants and the police, will be transformed. Notably, where the police treat all crowd members as oppositional, then those within the crowd who advocate confrontation will no longer be seen as 'other', and prior divisions will be superseded by a single and more inclusive self-categorization.

The ESIM therefore suggests that particular forms of conflictual interaction with external forces such as the police are the basis for psychological transformation in the form of an emergent single large self-category – a change from narrow identity-boundaries (differentiating groupings within the collective) to broader, more inclusive ones. Research has indicated the importance of such intergroup dynamics in explaining collective conflict and identity change in a variety of events, including a student loans demonstration (Reicher 1996), anti-poll tax protests (Drury & Reicher 1999; Stott & Drury 1999) and incidents of football crowd 'disorder' (Stott, Hutchison & Drury 2001; Stott & Reicher 1998b).

What the ESIM implies, and yet what has not been explored, however, is the extent to which such psychological boundaries might stretch beyond the immediate collective.

Given the concern among activists that other participants move beyond parochial concerns (what has been called NIMBYism[1]), the question is whether the type of process described above might move participants beyond seeing themselves and the issues surrounding their road protest as purely local. In terms of outcome, the issues are, first, to what extent do 'local' participants in anti-roads protests come to see themselves as part of a broader 'community of struggle' with activists? And, second, to what extent could identity be extended to include nationwide or even global movements of resistance?

The present paper examines the experiences of participants in the No M11 Link Road Campaign, London, in 1993-4. After a brief summary of the No M11 campaign itself, the analysis is divided into three sections which focus on the following questions: (i) Did change in identity-boundaries (from 'local' to broader categories) actually occur? This section presents illustrative (cross-sectional) material to indicate definitions of identity boundaries and campaign issues at different stages in the campaign. (ii) What was the process involved? This section examines the role of public space as a location for discussion among participants and, in particular, the experience of a mass eviction by police of participants from around a tree on the route of the road. An issue for the Discussion is the extent to which such intra- and inter-group levels of interaction might condition each other. (iii) How might changes in identity-boundaries impact upon the lives of those who changed? Biographical material from two participants is presented to illustrate earlier points and to indicate the consequences of a transformation in identity boundaries both personally and in terms of co-action with wider social groups.

Methodological approach

The study was carried out within an ethnographic framework, allowing for a variety of data-gathering techniques, including soundtrack recordings, interviews and collection of printed material. Datasets for Analyses 1 and 2 are described in the Appendix; the data for Analysis 3 is described in the Analysis itself.

The material was subjected to a thematic analysis. Of particular interest was the use by participants of particular stories and images; examining participants' use of narratives and images in their accounts of themselves and their relations provides a way of studying how frames are expressed and made concrete (Fine 1995).

An independent rater coded a proportion (c. 15%) of the data used in the analysis. Seventy-five per cent of these codings agreed with our own, indicating that the coding scheme is reasonably reliable.[2]

An account of No M11 Link Road Campaign activity, 1993-1994

The following summary of events was constructed through triangulating materials from different data sources (Denzin 1989).

The building of the M11 extension - 3.5 miles through the London districts of Wanstead, Leytonstone and Leyton - was part of the UK national roads programme.[3] A number of people came to the area to take part in the campaign of direct action against the road. In the early weeks of construction work, in September 1993, there

were almost daily direct actions in Wanstead. Contractors were felling trees and digging up soil, and campaign participants attempted to stop them, mainly by climbing into the trees and on the diggers. The contractors were aided by security guards, who attempted to remove campaign participants from the sites. Occasionally, the police were involved and campaign participants were arrested for minor public order offences.

In early November 1993, the contractors erected eight feet high wooden fencing round a section of George Green, Wanstead. A few days later, a crowd, which outnumbered security guards and police, pushed down most of the fencing. Campaign participants then occupied the land, at the centre of which was a chestnut tree.

The chestnut tree was evicted on 7 December, in a day-long event at which more than 200 campaign participants were present at any one time. Around half of the crowd were people from Wanstead while the rest were people who had come to the area to support the campaign. There was a wide range of age groups involved, including both children and pensioners, with most perhaps aged in their twenties. The eviction began at 5.30 in the morning, when hundreds of police arrived with bailiffs. The police's first task was to move people physically from the base of the tree and then to keep them away from it by forming a cordon. A handful of campaign participants were actually in the tree and had to be removed by bailiffs using hydraulic platforms and cutting equipment. The struggle resulted in condemnations of the police action from campaign participants, many of whom had no previous experience of such conflict. There were 13 arrests and the tree was eventually pulled down by the authorities. The contractors then resumed work on the George Green site.

In the subsequent months, the No M11 Link Road Campaign prepared for an even larger eviction: in February 1994, over 300 campaign participants occupying a block of houses (dubbed 'Wanstonia') faced dozens of bailiffs and 800 police officers. Unlike the eviction of the tree on George Green, on this occasion most participants interviewed saw the show-down with the authorities as an end in itself, as part of the campaign to discredit the forces behind the road.

The campaign remained highly active in Wanstead and Leytonstone until the final eviction of the last row of houses, in Claremont Road, in December 1994. Houses were squatted and barricaded; land, trees and roads were occupied; and construction sites were invaded on a regular basis. (For more details, see Aufheben 1994, 1998; McKay 1996: 148-150; Wall 1999: 74-79).

Analysis 1: Change over time

From the beginning, those No M11 campaign participants who were *not* self-defined 'local residents' typically tended to see themselves as part of a wider movement resisting road-building nationally and indeed ecological destruction world-wide. However, most people from Wanstead involved in the campaign stressed instead their 'local' concerns - at least initially. The analysis therefore focuses on the possibility of change in the boundaries of collective identity for Wanstead people. The relation between different definitions of 'the issue', and hence between the groups of people espousing these different definitions, is of particular interest.

In the data collected in and referring to the period prior to the struggle for George Green, a number of common themes were apparent in people's accounts of their involvement in the campaign. First, the definition of the local area as '*green*' and '*village-like*' was particularly important to those against the road:

> CP1: I've lived in Wanstead now for 21 and a half years, I came here because I thought it was a green and pleasant place in which to end my days.
> [Female Wanstead interviewee: 11 December 1993] [4]

Second, a theme common to both anti- and pro-road Wanstead people's accounts of themselves in the early period of the campaign was that of social *exclusivity*. For example, according to this participant, living in Wanstead was a sign of social success:

> CP2: the elderly middle class who in this part of London feel that to live in Wanstead is something of an achievement, because there was a time when it was seen that if you lived in Wanstead it was [ ] a mark of if not your success at least of your earning power
> [Male Wanstead interviewee: 28 April 1994]

Being a Wanstead resident was said by a number of those interviewed to be affirmed and identified through a respectable, middle class physical appearance. Hence, some of the participants who came to Wanstead because of the campaign were seen as 'other' and were rejected because their appearance offended these middle class values and this sense of pride in the respectability of the area:

CP2: Occasionally, I've got to be honest, in the early days I really did wonder just what we were getting into. This was September, October. [ ] The appearance of some of these people is in a town like Wanstead, it's a very strange sight. [ ] I don't actually feel surprised or ashamed at my early reaction. I think it's the reaction of a great many people in this town now [ ] They do take against people straggling round the town in dreadlocks and very very tatty boots and very very tatty anoraks and all the other bits and pieces of the lifestyle which to most of these people is a total anathema.

[Male Wanstead interviewee: 28 April 1994]

At the time, the No M11 Campaign was the major roads protest in the country; it was in effect a national protest. But, while a relatively large number of self-defined activists from around the country got involved, the participation of Wanstead residents was still seen as crucial (Welsh & McLeish 1996: 32). Activists therefore attempted to encourage participation among Wanstead people. Campaign leaflets, distributed to Wanstead residents, characteristically referred to an inclusive 'us' or 'we', implicitly conveying the argument that 'locals' and 'protesters' were the same side because they shared the same interests in the valued 'green' and 'village-like' qualities of the area:

Norwest Holst [ ] have now turned their attention to our conservation green in Wanstead which they are presently boarding up (behind which they intend to cut down six trees which have preservation orders on them - including our much loved old sweet chestnut).

[Campaign leaflet: 1993]

Such leaflets might be considered an attempt not so much to posit wholly new superordinate identity boundaries but to appropriate the Wanstead identity to campaign activity (cf. Snow & McAdam 2000: 56): if the road threatened Wanstead

(as a 'green' and 'village-like' area), then being a 'local' should mean fighting the road - i.e., being like 'the protesters'.

By November and December 1993, the struggle for George Green had indeed served to involve more Wanstead residents in direct action. While the 'green' and 'village' arguments continued to be evident, some Wanstead opponents of the road now also argued that, in relation to the nature of Wanstead, what mattered was what people actually *did* rather than what they looked like:

> They may look different, but they believe in the things which, deep down, all thinking people should believe in - like justice, decency and better future for the generations to come. [ ] The only difference between them and us is that they have the courage of their convictions. They have quoted Oscar Wilde's Sonnet to Liberty on one of their posters. Let's show them that we believe in some other words from that poem:
>
> > *"and yet, and yet,*
> >
> > *These Christs that die upon the barricades,*
> >
> > *God knows it I am with them, in some things."*
>
> [*Redbridge Guardian,* 25 November 1993: letter from CP3, male Wanstead participant]

If this change in identity criteria had obvious implications for who became included ('activists' as now grouped with self) it also had consequences for who was now excluded, namely those Wanstead residents against the road but who did nothing:

> CP4: the residents that won't come over here to stand up to be voiced, to be known to that we want a green and pleasant land, as far as I'm concerned they are zombies, the living dead.
>
> [Male Wanstead interviewee: 5 December 1993]

Since some of the comments above preserve a distinction between 'us' (the 'locals') and 'them' (the 'protesters'), it might be argued that the evidence so far shows only that Wanstead residents felt more positive about 'non-local' protesters but that they continued to categorize them as a 'different' social group. Yet other comments suggest that the boundaries of identity did indeed become more inclusive. People who were once defined as 'different' were now part of a shared 'community' defined in terms of a 'common cause':

> [CP5]: it's really made a difference to me; I really feel a sense of community in Wanstead. I've lived here for years, I've never felt this sense of community. I've found people I've known for years who don't give tuppence about it but also I've found new friendships with people who are all sorts of different kinds of people, people of different age ranges [ ] because we share a cause and all believe in the same thing, that's what's made a difference
> [Notes on conversation with female Wanstead participant: 9 May 1994]

Other comments make the significance of this sense of 'community' more concrete – as in the following, which evokes idealized images of community in which people could leave their front doors open:

> CP10: Yeah they're really great, I mean before they [the activists] arrived I didn't feel safe walking about at night, (where) I come over here on my own at night and I feel perfectly safe and you can walk across the Green any time of day or night and you know that they're here, and they're better than the police force.
> [Interview with female Wanstead participant: 22 November 1993]

As Jasper (1997: 82-83) observes, all movements can become communities. But what of the reverse relation? The question is whether coming to feel part of a community of

resistance might also mean seeing oneself as a *movement* participant. Specifically, what is the evidence that the new-found unity among participants was defined such that previous parochial concerns were transcended by understandings offering the potential to link with other, broader, struggles?

At least some 'local' participants did come to link themselves with other groups of people elsewhere engaged in struggle. Thus, one participant commented on the equivalence of the situation of No M11 campaign to that of the brutal repression of Ogoni tribe in Nigeria trying to resist the environmental devastation of their land by the Shell oil company and the government:

> CP4: it was just like us, what Shell is doing to Nigeria; protesters there are being cut up.
>
> [Field notes, male Wanstead participant, campaign meeting: 23 May 1994]

The choice of the Ogoni as a comparison group is significant given both the salience of the Ogoni struggle amongst UK environmental protesters at the time and the subsequent evolution of the No M11 campaign itself. Both participants and commentators have traced a continuity from the roads protests at the M11, through the anti-car and anti-capitalist Reclaim the Streets (RTS) parties to the international anti-globalization demonstrations at Seattle, Prague and Genoa (e.g. Aufheben 1998; Chesters 1999; Klein 2000: 311-324). The theme of opposition to the environmentally and socially damaging multinational motor and oil industries, through the specific form of direct action (rather than representational politics), is the thread that connects local anti-road campaigns to what has since been seen as a world-wide movement.

Analysis 2: The struggle for George Green

In the case of the No M11 campaign, what divides the earlier 'exclusive' accounts from later statements in which definitions of identity are more inclusive is the speakers' involvement in the struggle for George Green. Two features of the month-long struggle for George Green stand out as important in participants' accounts of changes in their understandings of relations with others and their reasons for involvement: first, the occupied chestnut tree as a space for discussion, and second, the traumatic eviction of participants from the tree by police. Each of these is examined in turn.

The land immediately around the chestnut tree was occupied as a camp site, and become the location for hours of discussions for participants and those on the fringes of the campaign. Every day and evening, 'activists' and 'locals' came together – to show solidarity, offer practical help (in particular food for those camping) and chat about the issues. Some participants explicitly stressed the role of these open meetings under the tree in changing perspectives on what the campaign was about. In particular, arguments by activists to promote particular definitions of the campaign issues (environmental, national, global) and the role of direct action came to be more widely accepted, and a sense of shared struggle began to develop:

> CP19: The tree was a major sort of boon in that area because fire tends to be something that attracts lots large numbers of people, you see a bonfire, naturally people congregate around it, and that formed a massive focal point where initially people would just come over and say 'oh so how are you?', you know, 'What are you getting up to? How's it going?' and then build up conversation from there. [ ] This dialogue would start, we'd start talking about why we were

there, the issues involved and people would sort of, you know, could relate from their own personal experiences about what we were doing. They could see that basically they wanted the same as us, but we were just going about it in a very different way,

[Male interviewee: 7 February 1994]

[CP20:] People from different backgrounds began to get to know one another; professional people, retired people and Twyford Down new-age travellers spent long evenings together, talking, forming new friendships, exchanging ideas about roads, the environment, consumerism, life, the universe and everything.... Something new and beautiful had been created in the community. Barriers of class and background melted away - together we had created a model of how society could be. Many local people talk of their lives being completely changed by the experience.

[*The Verge,* February 1994, p. 8]

As these comments indicate, the physical location of the exchanges seems to have been at least as important as the strength of activists' arguments. The role of public space as a forum for communicating ideas has been identified in historical and cultural research (e.g. Fozooni 2003: 26). Contemporary political discourse is sometimes characterized as monological or one-way – one reason being that the kind of public spaces for political debate and participation that existed in the past (e.g., mass public meetings, rallies) have been replaced by passively-consumed media statements and images. Both political action and collective identity construction require physical space (Butler 1996; Welsh & McLeish 1996: 32); as one commentator on the UK direct action movement of the 1990s puts it, 'space is a prerequisite for community' (McKay 1998: 28).

No M11 participants therefore came to stress the value of the land around the tree not just as a green space, but as a social space. Here was a place, distinct from both 'public' areas (such as the high street) and private spaces (such as private houses) which was 'owned' by nobody and hence by 'everybody'. The reclamation of 'free space' was a theme in participants' accounts of the aims and achievements of the campaign.

However, while the discussions under the tree appear to have led to more widespread acceptance of 'environmental' definitions of the struggle, it was the eviction of the tree that led to the 'environment' and hence the campaign itself being seen as 'political'. Moreover, while 'activists' stressed the importance of the free space as a catalyst for change among 'locals', 'locals' themselves more often pointed to the eviction as the turning point in their own self-transformation. In order to explore the possible inter-group processes behind participants' redefinitions of their identity boundaries, we turn now to their experiences during the George Green eviction.

During or with reference to the period prior to the police intervention, all 13 Wanstead participants interviewed stressed their 'local' identity in their explanation for their presence under the tree: they as 'locals' had a 'right' to be on George Green. Moreover, most of the 'locals' spoken to accepted a division of labour, explicitly or otherwise. In these accounts, there was a 'local' role in contrast to that of the 'protesters':

CP6: I mean my instinct is just to stay as near the tree as possible with as many locals as possible on the outside with perhaps the... the main protesters sort of in the middle, so they've got to get through us first,

[Female Wanstead interviewee, under chestnut tree: c. 3a.m., 7 December 1993]

Given the accusation by many pro-road Wanstead residents that the protesters were illegitimate 'outsiders', explicit definitions of the self as 'local' had a rhetorical function of self-justification. Yet the practice – of joining in with and yet remaining apart from 'other' participants – suggests an experiential division within the crowd which went beyond arguments with pro-road residents.

Participants almost universally described the nature of the police intervention at the tree as an illegitimate and 'heavy-handed' attack on themselves as 'legitimate protesters'. All 57 legal statements made by campaign participants complained about police violence, and all 56 interviewed mentioned it without prompting. Participants felt that they had a 'democratic right' to be on George Green and to protest to the extent that they were 'non-violent'; and most expected simply to be led away without 'excessive force'. Yet all, whether 'protesters' or 'respectable local residents', experienced the same treatment; they were all treated as members of an 'illegitimate' social category:

CP7: They treated us like criminals, and we had a right to be there, and we weren't doing any harm, we were just there

[Female Wanstead interviewee: 26 February 1994]

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The reference to vulnerable categories of people (children, the elderly) in the following comment emphasizes the inclusivity and hence brutality of the police action:

> CP9: it really was disgraceful to know that they could bring in these amount of police to do this and also use violent tactics to get to the tree regardless of who was there, whether it was children there or… there was a lot of old people there
>
> [Female Wanstead interviewee: 11 December 1993]

If 'everyone' was in danger, then the crowd as a whole – not only 'protesters' but also 'locals' – shared a common relationship to the police. Simultaneous with the perceived indiscriminate attack by the police, feelings of solidarity became enhanced within the crowd: that is, there was psychologically a greater coming together:

> CP11: …the bonding you have when there's a big pile of you packed together and the police are pulling you out, that's, you know, complete strangers and you're grabbing them and you're holding them and everything, not the kind of thing people would normally never dream of doing to somebody you don't know. And there was a real kind of good feeling amongst protesters towards each other
>
> [Male interviewee, under chestnut tree: c. 9a.m., 7 December 1993]

According to at least some campaign participants, in the face of the police action, the feeling of enhanced solidarity within the crowd translated into a breakdown of the previous division of labour. Although only a handful of interviewees provided (spontaneous) comments like the following on relations of solidarity within the collective, no one offered contradictory accounts (for example by saying that existing divisions increased):

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CP13: When the police came everyone like sat down around the tree and like linked arms and everything, and you could see local middle-aged women thinking 'Shall I? Shan't I?' You know, 'Ooh it's a bit muddy', and they just sat down anyway and like joined in and you know got muddy with the rest of us. It was really empowering.

[Female interviewee: 15 January 1994]

Thus, in summary, in response to the conflictual relation with the police, Wanstead residents felt closer to and even co-acted with 'protesters' who were previously defined as 'other'.

Evidence of enhanced solidarity within a crowd event might represent just a transitory context-dependent variation in self-perception rather than a transformation of self-definition. However, in the weeks following the eviction, interviewees explicitly mentioned greater feelings of 'togetherness' among all those involved in the campaign. The basis of the new unity was said to be the common opposition to the authorities (police and road contractors):

Interviewer: How do you feel about everybody involved now?

CP2: This is stupid but I was born I was literally a baby during the war. But I heard these stories of the Blitz bringing us together, and I have found this to be true. In the streets of Wanstead, people that you've never ever noticed before suddenly find they have a common cause, they know you, they know what you stand for, they come up and we are we're on an entirely new community feeling here, as if we've suddenly discovered our sense of community, because obviously there is a common enemy, there is a common cause, much as there was in the war.

[Male Wanstead interviewee: 11 December 1993]

Seven participants made such comments, and, again, no one contradicted them.

Moreover, corresponding to the rejection of passive Wanstead residents discussed earlier was the widespread re-categorization of the police - from 'protector of my rights' to an antagonistic 'outgroup' (Drury & Reicher 2000: 591-593). Twenty three of the participants who were interviewed during or after the eviction explicitly mentioned that their views of the police had changed in this way, whereas only seven interviewees said the events of George Green only confirmed their prior perspectives. In contrast to the former group, all of the latter described having experienced previous collective conflict with the police.

Such an exclusion from the ingroup is clear in the following example, in which the inclusive category of 'the people' is employed to refer to those whose interests are not, after all, served by the police:

> CP14: You know, I mean that was an experience in itself, wasn't it? I always thought that they [the police] were for the people. But in fact they're not for the people in a sense. [ ] They keep saying they were doing a job for us, but they weren't, they weren't with us, were they? Definitely weren't with us. [ ] in a sense, it was like a revolution it, you know what I mean, because you knew then what you were fighting against.
> [Female Wanstead interviewee: 12 December 1993]

Conceivably, the changes documented so far may only have applied to the specific group of individuals that Wanstead residents had got to know through contact in the crowd event. However, there is also evidence that, through the broadening of the

definition of 'the issue', participants' transformed social categorizations extended even to groups of people with whom they had no personal contact.

Following the George Green eviction, some Wanstead participants argued that those who fought to save the tree were on the side not just of 'Wanstead' but also of 'the environment' against the national roads programme as a whole. Thus they were part of a broader social grouping according to which the 'local'-'outsider' distinction was meaningless:

> You may live in Wanstead. If not, by your logic, should you have the right to use the front page of the Recorder to criticise the protestors? What are the geographical limits of your concerns? [ ] I'm proud to be part of that 'rag bag army' fighting a battle that affects us all.
> [*Ilford Recorder*, 30 December 1993, p. 10: letter from CP16, male Wanstead participant]

Moreover, at least some perceived themselves to be now cast into a certain social location that bracketed them with types of people who were in opposition to the authorities for other reasons. For example, five participants compared their situation to that of the miners during the 1984-5 strike, a reference which was entirely absent in the data prior to the George Green eviction:

> CP18: (This was done with) the miners of Nottingham.
> [Soundtrack recording: c. 7.30a.m., 7 December 1993]

Of course, such references could be read as indicating that participants saw themselves less as part of a developing new (nationwide or international) movement and more as part of a particular embattled 'community' whose power-base was

shrinking; the 1984-5 miners' strike was a milestone in the decline of the UK labour movement and working class struggles more broadly. The construction by participants of the loss of the tree and green as the destruction of the local community is consistent with grasping what happened as community-focused rather than indicative of a shift towards seeing self as part of wider global forces.

On the other hand, while themes of community were undoubtedly important, other parallels drawn by participants – Tiananmen Square, the 1990 poll tax riot, Wapping (the News International dispute) and Yellow Wednesday (the Twyford Down mass eviction) – suggest that such examples were being used to clarify intergroup boundaries at a more abstract level. Thus, in referring to the miners' strike, participants used an historically prominent political struggle – in which accusations of police bias and brutality were central (Green 1990) – to characterize their own relationship as 'citizens' with the police. In other words, the suggestion is that campaign participants now came to see themselves as 'the same' as others due to their common relationship to 'unjust' or 'oppressive' police action. Just as the police are said to be the 'same' social category in each case, so there is a meaningful continuity between the No M11 campaign participants and the miners as well as others in resistance. Each are part of a much wider struggle against illegitimate authority.

Analysis 3: Biographical material

This final section of the analysis uses biographical material (see della Porta 1992; Roth 2000) to indicate how transformations in the boundaries of collective identity can have consequences for co-action. The two participants whose experiences are

discussed here were selected for analysis because of the quantity of interview and other material they provided across the duration of the campaign.

CP6 was a woman in her forties, married with children, whose family had lived in Wanstead for several generations. She opposed the road but only became involved in the campaign during the struggle for George Green. She had never experienced any conflict with the police before her involvement. She was interviewed four times over the course of the campaign, from November 1993 to Spring 1994.

CP14 was a woman in her fifties, married with a family, who worked and lived in Wanstead. She, too, had never been involved in collective action or come into conflict with the police before the campaign. She was interviewed six times over the course of the campaign, beginning in early November. Copies of her statements published in the press were also collected.

The first point is to show how these two participants defined themselves and their relationships prior to the struggle for George Green. A frequently-made argument by critics of the campaign was that the Link Road was essentially a 'local' issue. The implication of this was therefore that only 'local' people could legitimately protest (or express any views) about the road. As long as those opposed to the road accepted that it was essentially a 'local' issue then they operated within the same logic, and necessarily saw the presence in Wanstead of people from 'outside' as strange if not illegitimate. This was the case for CP6, who described herself as a 'middle class' Wanstead resident:

CP6: I remember reading in the paper (before November) [ ] about [CP13 - non-local] being

arrested [during a protest in Wanstead] and I remember thinking [ ] what a strange thing to do,

come up here and be arrested for someone else's road

[Interview: 5 March 1994]

However, both CP6 and CP14 came to the conclusion that acting to save Wanstead

was more important than a respectable appearance, a change which led them to reject

those Wanstead people who continued to emphasise the importance of appearance:

CP14: They [Wanstead residents] have got a different sort of an outlook. You know what I

mean? What can I say, because the Wanstead people are so cliquey and they don't really want

to participate, if you like, in these things because they think 'ooh they're dirty'

[Interview: 5 December 1993]

Both CP6 and CP14 were also amongst those who, through the experience of the

eviction of the tree, became both more critical of the police and more oppositional in

their self-definition (Drury & Reicher 2000: 591-593). Moreover, both spontaneously

linked their relationship with the police to the miners in the 1984-5 strike; and both

subsequently redefined the scope of the campaign from the M11 Link Road to the

roads programme and indeed to environmental struggles more broadly:

CP6: The emphasis has grown more on the whole roads programme rather than just

specifically this particular road here.

[Interview: 5 March 1994]

Crucially, this redefinition of the issue and of their own place in relation to the

relevant social categories also had consequences for co-action. After the tree was

evicted, CP6 was involved in occupying the 'Wanstonia' houses and CP14 participated in some of the campaign's trespasses of construction sites. More broadly, however, to the extent that the battle was the same across the country and that they were on the same side as environmental campaigners in other campaigns, it made sense to join with them:

> CP6: I've progressed in that now I would, given time permitting and everything else, I would actually go and help in another campaign somewhere else even if it's only for a day if there's a rally or something, which is what I said to this policeman, actually I said 'I would actually go and help in a campaign like the north-circular or elsewhere for the day and that would make me an outsider there wouldn't it', and he said 'yes well I suppose it would' [ ] that's what I'm saying when I said become more radical; I would actually take time out to help somebody else rather than just sort of being at the end of my road and then once that's gone forget it, that - actually determined to keep on with the whole roads programme, fighting it wherever.
> [Interview: 5 March 1994]

> [CP14:] There's a lot from elsewhere but they're not aliens. They're fighting for what we in Wanstead are fighting for, a better place to live, a bit of common sense. We know this is happening all over the country. I'd go anywhere to defend other people in the same situation.
> [*Guardian* (2), 17 February 1994: 3]

In the years immediately following the end of the No M11 campaign, CP14 was one of a number of 'Wanstead residents' who participated in the RTS street parties, including the overtly anti-capitalist J18 in the City of London, where, as we have seen, the theme of direct action in defence of the environment was elevated from the 'local' to the 'global' stage.

The comments of these two participants therefore take us full circle from the starting point of the analysis. They are now potential 'outsiders' themselves; but as participants in nationwide and indeed international movements, the whole 'local-outsider' distinction dissolves.

<u>Discussion</u>

As a qualitative study of an 'object' which is not easily fixed down and interrogated, the data-set for this analysis of the M11 Link Road protest is inevitably fragmented in places. Collective protest is difficult to study systematically, because of the fast-moving and unpredictable nature of the event and the difficulty of contacting participants afterwards. Ethnographic research is argued to be particularly suited to data-gathering in this type of setting (Drury & Stott 2001), but in itself cannot resolve all the problems that arise in the subsequent analysis. Thus, while a reliability test might show that the analyst is consistent, it is in the nature of qualitative analysis that the meanings (consistently) assigned by the analyst may not necessarily be those of the various participants themselves – particularly perhaps in a situation which is conflictual and hence where meanings (e.g., of legitimate action) are contested between participants and police. The present analysis has not sought systematically to quantify the different types of response, but has selected and presented those pieces of evidence considered consistent with the patterns apparent in the data-set as a whole. It is argued, therefore, that the presentation here of a large number of quotes provides the reader with at least some basis for judging for herself the validity of the analytic claims being made.

Given these caveats, and therefore treating the evidence as suggestive rather than definitive, we can nevertheless draw some conclusions about what happened among participants at the No M11 Campaign. Thus we can suggest that at least some participants changed from distinguishing themselves from 'outsiders' towards feeling solidarity with them, and categorizing them with self on their basis of their action against the road (and it certainly isn't being claimed that everyone or even every 'local' changed in this direction). Many participants also came to exclude both the police and those Wanstead people who continued to reject the 'outsiders'.

There is clear evidence in the present study that the shared sense of collective identity that emerged – the new sense of 'we-ness' – constituted a new and broader community of struggle. Parochial definitions of the issue, if not fully superseded, were at least subsumed by more inclusive concerns – in particular, the illegitimacy of the national roads programme. What is less clearly evident, however, is the extent to which participants changed to seeing themselves as part of an international movement. The shift from the plight of Wanstead to the fate of 'the environment', the greater willingness to embrace direct action, and the radicalization of participants (their rejection of the police, their comparison of themselves with others resisting illegitimate authority) – all these form the thematic threads that link the 'local' anti-roads campaign with the later world-wide anti-capitalist or anti-globalization movement. It has to be acknowledged, nevertheless, that clear cut examples of participants involving themselves in anti-capitalist struggles as a direct consequence of their involvement in the No M11 campaign are few and far between. Partly this is suggested to be a methodological artefact; since the ethnographic research ended with

the end of the No M11 campaign (1994) – i.e. before the recent anti-capitalist movement emerged (1998-1999), any such examples of involvement are likely to be ad hoc and anecdotal. In the absence of a relevant international movement at the time of the No M11 campaign, the best evidence for the 'globalization' of participants' identities is perhaps their abstract comparisons of self with others in struggle against the forces of illegitimate state power (the Ogoni, the UK miners' strike, Tianenmen Square etc.).

Moreover, whether or not many No M11 participants did subsequently get involved in international movement activities, the key argument being made here is about process. Specifically, it is suggested that the same processes that served to create a more inclusive sense of community amongst participants can determine how participants come to see themselves as part of wider social forces. The analysis looked at the process of change at two levels, intra- and inter-group. First, the analysis pointed to the initial attempts by activists to position the anti-road campaign as coterminous with the category of Wanstead residents, and indicated the role of discussions among participants (under the tree) in serving to broaden the issues motivating their involvement. A number of researchers point to the role of communication within the collective in identity construction and change (e.g. Delgado 1986: 88; Klandermans 1992: 86, 99). As part of a boundary-framing process, discussions within a collective enable people to clarify their relations both with each other and with those with whom they may be in conflict. In relation to the current study, a general point about process might therefore be that arguments from activists, about the broader (national and global) significance of a struggle, are more likely to be taken up by other participants

as part of constructions of the self where there is a public space within which such arguments can be freely expressed and heard (cf. Melucci 1989).

Second, the analysis of the eviction, along with the biographical material, suggested the importance of intergroup relations in transforming conceptions of who 'we' are and therefore who is included (and excluded) from our self-definition. Although Wanstead residents saw their action as legitimate protest and initially distinguished themselves from the 'activists', the police perceived the crowd as a whole as a homogenous threat to public order (Drury & Reicher 2000). Moreover, the police were able to act upon their definition – by treating 'activists' and 'locals' alike. In this context, all participants came to see themselves as sharing a common relationship with one another – based upon the shared (illegitimate) threat they experienced from the police. The experience of unexpectedly being a common target of the action of the police therefore served to transform the definition of the protest issue from simply saving Wanstead to the struggle against illegitimate authority. Within this changed definition of the issue, other social groups not actually present in Wanstead became seen as self-relevant. These groups included all those involved in anti-roads and environmental struggle, and indeed others in conflict with the forces of 'injustice'. The consequence of this was that at least some Wanstead residents came to see themselves as part of a broader, nationwide movement, which in turn meant *acting with* them rather than separately from them.

The analysis would therefore suggest that the extent to which participants involved in collective conflict come to define themselves as part of wider social forces rather than simply part of a more limited 'community' depends upon the inclusiveness of police

action in relation to the social categories perceived to be involved. Where illegitimate police action is seen as treating alike not only all those legitimately protesting against the M11 Link Road in Wanstead but all those opposing the government's roads programme – and where the police are seen as acting in the interests of the roads programme to suppress legitimate protest – then the boundaries of collective self will extend to include all those involved in the nationwide struggle against road-building. By the same token, where illegitimate police action is perceived as treating legitimate anti-roads protesters the same as those 'illegitimate' international groups opposing global environmental destruction – and where the police are seen as acting in the interests of global power structures such as the G8, WTO etc. to suppress legitimate protest – then the boundaries of the collective self will correspondingly extend to include these international forces of resistance. In such cases, one becomes not just an anti-roads protester but an anti-globalization protester.

Previous research, such as McAdam's (1989) longitudinal study of the biographical consequences of activism, has shown that identity change can be enduring and have implications for society as whole. However, while such studies suggest that such change happens only gradually, the present analysis of the role of intergroup conflict indicates that, on some occasions, it can happen very quickly. The analysis presented here is consistent with the ESIM account of intergroup dynamics outlined earlier (e.g., Reicher 1996). It also fits with other research on the policing of protests which suggests that police repression can serve to shift protesters' focus from a particular issue to the 'meta-issue' of the right to protest itself (della Porta & Reiter 1998). Indeed, the ESIM is one of a number of models highlighting the importance of asymmetry between police and protesters' stereotypes and conceptions of proper

practice in accounting for the escalation of physical conflict between the groups (della Porta 1998, 1999; Stott & Reicher 1998a; Waddington 1992). Moreover, each of these models indicates that such conflict shapes how protesters and police come to approach each other in the future.

The present analysis goes beyond previous work, however, in allowing us to suggest how the role of interaction among different protesters might be put together with that of interaction between protesters and police. Thus we might suggest that particular 'within-group' arguments and speakers become particularly influential in certain intergroup contexts. In the case of the No M11, the aim to stop the road from 'destroying Wanstead' was common to 'activists' and many 'locals' from the beginning of the campaign. But, to the extent that the 'activists' were defined as different from self, their arguments for the national and even global significance of the campaign were less easily accepted. The perceived violent eviction served to redefine all of those involved as sharing a common collective relationship to the police. Within this changed context, according to which the Link Road was clearly 'political', the 'political' links made by protesters (to the national roads programme and to state- and business-sponsored environmental destruction more widely) came to make more sense and the parochial construction of the issue was transcended.

Therefore, while strategic factors, such as activists' attempts to define the protest as being broader than the 'local' (Shemtov 1999), were evident in the No M11 campaign, the present analysis suggests that we need to go beyond actors' stated intentions if we are to understand change and radicalization. Participants act on the basis of their identity but that action is still subject to the interpretations of others who

may be operating with different interpretative frames. The (subjective and objective) outcomes of their actions therefore may not be what the actors intended or expected (Drury & Reicher 2000).

This point about the possible disjunction between intention and outcome of collective action leads us finally to a broader issue. Concepts such as frames have been useful for grasping the subjective in conflict and change in social movements; but what has yet to be fully elaborated is quite how the macro of social change articulates with the micro of change for individual participants. We would like to suggest that identity – self as a project of action entailing definitions of who counts as 'one of us' and conceptions of proper and possible action – represents the pivot between the sociological and the psychological. Examining the dynamics of social identity processes can therefore help explicate how social structurally-based ideologies, frames, discourses and collective representations translate into the subjective understandings that operate in (and may be transformed through) collective action.

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Notes

Acknowledgements

Appendix: Data-sources for Analysis 1 and 2

Analysis 1

- *Taped interviews* with 25 campaign participants covering the following issues: (1) the aims of the campaign and of campaign actions; (2) the identity of participants (e.g., 'What sort of people are involved?', 'How would you describe yourself?'); (3) relations with other people involved, including how the participant felt about them.
- *Written personal accounts* from three people.
- *Field notes and recordings* of conversations, rallies and commentary.
- *Campaign productions:* five newsletters, 20 leaflets and posters, five press releases, six letters, two articles.
- *Witness statements* (six)
- *Newspapers:* 22 local, six national, one magazine article.
- *Other material* includes contractors' record sheets, transcripts of videos of campaign actions, and witness statements from construction workers and police.

Analysis 2

- *Taped interviews* with 56 campaign participants before, during and after the eviction. In addition to the standard question, participants were asked: (beforehand) what they expected to happen; and (afterwards) what was their experience, whether they had ever experienced anything similar, and whether their experience had affected their views.
- *Written personal accounts* including seven unpublished letters, four further written accounts.
- *Field notes and recordings* including soundtrack recordings for most of the event and notes taken shortly before and afterwards concerning incidents and conversations.
- *Campaign productions:* six articles, four leaflets, two posters, one circular and four press releases.
- *Witness statements* from 57 people plus the campaign office log.
- *Newspapers:* 11 local, six national.
- *Video and photographic material* includes three videos and nine photographs.
- *Other material* includes a tape recording of a formal meeting between participants and police officers, and a tape-recorded interview with a Chief Inspector involved in the event.