Mediated Resistance:

Alternative Media, Imagination and Political Action in Britain

Veronica Barassi

PhD Anthropology/Media Studies

Goldsmiths College, University of London

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Abstract

This research explores the connection between political imaginations, media technologies and social movements in Britain. The relationship between media and dominant ideologies is a central issue of academic debate, but the role of alternative media in the construction of oppositional political discourses is largely under-investigated. This research project explores this relationship by relying on the theories and methodologies of both anthropology and media studies and provides an original and cross-disciplinary reflection on alternative media and political identity; on internet technologies and new forms of political imaginations; and on the possibilities and challenges people encounter in the everyday construction of mediated political action.

Drawing from the ethnographic context of campaigning organisations and the Trade Union Movement - and looking in particular at the case of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign - this thesis argues that internet technologies have become the channels within which new political imaginations and possibilities are embedded and transmitted. Yet, to understand the way in which these new political imaginations are re-defining the terrain for political action, it is important to explore the complex dialectics between transformation and continuity - between the technical and the social – rather than emphasising disruption and novelty. It is only by looking at continuity that scholars can understand the complex and imaginative negotiations that enable activists to re-imagine social change in order to adapt to the techno-historical transformations of the last fifteen years.

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Acknowledgements

It was 1984 when Gary Larson designed his sarcastic vignette, which criticised anthropology for selecting out those important parts of social life where the media was involved. In an over-exoticised framework, Larson represented a group of 'natives' who, witnessing the arrival of two anthropologists, rushed to hide their media technologies. Although marked by a profound sarcasm, Larson's vignette was grounded in reality: by 1984 media technologies were becoming increasingly pervasive even in the most 'remote' places of the world, and anthropologists were overlooking the small or large implications that these technologies had for human life and culture.

THE FAR SIDE   By GARY LARSON

"Anthropologists! Anthropologists!"

Anthropological contributions to the understanding of media practices date back to the work of the Lynds' on community media in the United States (1924 in Peterson, 2003) or to Powdermaker's (1951) ethnography on Hollywood filmmakers. However, it was only recently that anthropologists have started to turn their attention to media technologies (Ginsburg *et al*, 2002; Ginsburg 2002, 1997; Peterson, 2003; Herzfeld, 2001; Askew and Wilk, 2002; Cohman and Rothenbulher, 2005; Appadurai, 1996; Marcus, 1999; McLaghan, 1999; Laughlin, 1999; Turner, 2002). Although anthropological studies on the media have, in fact, proliferated in the last decade, in many areas of the discipline the importance of media technologies as frameworks of anthropological analysis is still widely under-estimated (Peterson, 2003; Herzfeld, 2001).

This research was born out of a will to explore - from an anthropological perspective - the relationship between social movements and media technologies as tools of political action, and to understand the way in which this relationship has changed with the advent of internet technologies. The idea was to carry out ethnographic fieldwork within a political group in Britain and to analyse the values and imaginaries that activists attached to media technologies and practices, and the way in which these related to understandings of political action. The project

itself was problematic. In anthropology, the analysis of social movements – with the exclusion of some exceptions (Ginsburg *et al*, 2002; Ginsburg 2002, 1997; Nash, 2005; MacLagan, 1996; Edelman, 2005; Edwards, 2005) - has often refused to engage with an exploration of the centrality of media technologies in the construction of social and political action.

In media studies, alternative media are an area of academic interest that is still relatively new. Created by professional and non-professional journalists, by political activists or individuals committed to particular worldviews, *alternative media* are broadly understood as small scale media, which are linked to the realities of social movements (Downing, 2001), defined by horizontal communication, participatory practices (Atton, 2002) and content that is more or less in explicit opposition to the one of mainstream media[1] (Downing, 1998; Atton, 2002; Curran and Couldry, 2003; Couldry, 2003; Coyer *et al*, 2007; Waltz, 2005). Despite being extremely insightful, most of the work produced on the topic seems to encounter what Ortner (1995) identifies as the major problem of anthropological studies of resistance; namely the problem of ethnographic 'thinness'.

In a rich and engaging article Ortner explores different approaches to resistance within anthropology, in order to prove that the majority of studies in the field involve a refusal of ethnographic thickness, a failure of holism or density (1995:174). The problem of ethnographic thinness, according to her, leads to the sanitization of the internal politics of resistant groups, and thus to romanticism (1995:190). In a similar way, analyses of alternative media in media studies - and their relation to the lived experience of political movements - are marked by a certain degree of 'thinness'. They are thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of these groups, and on the intentions, desires, fears and projects of the people involved (Ortner, 1995:190).

Drawing from Ortner's quest for ethnographic thickness in studies of resistance, my aim was to highlight the frustrations, desires, projects and feelings of the people who engage in the everyday mediation of political action. Therefore, for this research project I have decided to draw from the theories and methodologies of both disciplines and demonstrate that - although disciplines are 'systems of meaning', with their own codes and signifiers (Peterson, 2003) – a careful destruction of academic boundaries and the cross-fertilisation amongst disciplines creates the basis for the emergence of new possibilities for social research.

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[1] This research project understands mainstream media as essentially business groups, concentrated and globally interconnected, highly diversified and geared primarily by profit-related concerns (Castells, 1997, 2009).

This thesis is the product of a cross-disciplinary reflection on the relationship between social movements, media technologies and political imagination in Britain. Its aim is to highlight the human experiences and beliefs that are embedded in the mediation of political action, and shed light on the social complexities involved in the techno-historical transformations of the last decade. In introducing this thesis, I first discuss the specifics of my field of analysis; I will describe my methodological choices, and the ethical considerations behind this research project. I will, then, look at the theoretical foundations on which this research is grounded, and argue for the contemporary importance of a research project that explores the relationship between resistance, imagination and media practices. To conclude this introduction, I present the outline of the thesis, and explore the content of each chapter, in order to provide the reader with a general understanding of how the argument has been organised.

Part I - Mediated Resistance: Objectives and Methods of a Cross-Disciplinary Research Project

Research Questions and Objectives

Media practices and technologies have been part of the personal histories of those involved in social and political struggles long before the advent of new information and communication technologies. As Castells (1996, 1997, 2009) has noticed, however, the advent of the internet and the re-structuring of capitalism have deeply transformed the mediation of political action in many important ways, and new information and communication technologies have become central tools of political opposition. But how are we to understand the extent of these transformations? In which way is the everyday engagement with new information technologies transforming activists' understanding of political action and media activism? How can we properly address the conflicts and discourses new technologies embed; the beliefs and fears that they trigger in the people involved? These are the central questions this thesis will address.

In 1994, as internet technologies started to pervade the different layers of everyday life, a small collective of artists and activists in Europe and the U.S. - known as the Critical Art Ensemble - argued for the importance of creating networks of 'electronic disturbance'. Drawing from the theories of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the collective of artists contended that power was liquid and that its networks extended through the means of communication. Therefore, according to them political and cultural resistance had to be fought in cyberspace (Critical Art Ensemble, 1994: 12, 23, 57-58). The same year as the Critical Art Ensemble called

for constructing electronic civil disobedience, in the far southeast of Mexico, a guerrilla army of indigenous Mayan peasants - the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) - rose up in rebellion against neo-liberal capitalism and in particular against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Since the very beginning the Zapatista struggle distinguished itself from other political movements for two main reasons. In the first place, the *guerrilleros* led by the Subcomandante Marcos, showed a disinterest in state power or hierarchical structures, and instead emphasised autonomy, direct democracy and relationships of affinity (Day, 2005; Graeber, 2002; Holloway, 2002; Khasnabish, 2008; Tarrow, 1998). These political ideologies have moved beyond the Mexican borders, and had a profound 'resonance'[2] on political activists across the world (Khasnabish, 2008). In fact, it was within the movement for the liberation of Chiapas that the People's Global Action Network[3] (PGA) was created, and this lead to the 1999 Seattle demonstrations and the rise of the networked movements for global justice (Klein 2000: Graeber, 2002).

In the second place, the Zapatistas were the first to use the internet to agitate, enact their autonomy, create a collective identity and construct worldwide support and networks (Castells, 1997; Ribeiro, 1998; Slater, 1998; Kowal, 2002; Atton, 2004, 2007). It is for this reason that Castells defines their struggle as the first form of 'informational guerrilla activism' (Castells, 1997:79). Khasnabish (2008) has argued that in understanding the pervasiveness of internet technologies within

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[2] Resonance is intended here as a non-linear and unpredictable dynamic by which meaning constructed in a particular context becomes significant in another with both predictable and unexpected effects. Rather than diffusion - which signifies migration - resonance signifies movement, mutation and active translation (Khasnabish, 2008:8).

[3] **People's Global Action (PGA)** is the name of a worldwide co-ordination of radical social movements, grassroots campaigns and direct actions in resistance to capitalism and for social and environmental justice, which was launched in Geneva in 1998. The initial inspiration for the formation of PGA came from a global meeting called in 1996 by the Zapatista Army. The Zapatistas sent out an email calling for a gathering of international grassroots movements to meet in specially constructed arenas in the Chiapas jungle to discuss common tactics, problems and solutions. Six thousand people attended, from over 40 countries, and declared that they would form 'a collective network against neoliberalism'. In August 1997, another gathering was organised in Spain by the European Zapatista Network. Delegates came from around the world, such as the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST) who occupies unused land to create farms, and the Karnataka State Farmers Union (KKRS) from India, renowned for their 'cremate Monsanto' campaign which involved burning fields of genetically modified crops. Here some of the primary objectives and organisational principles of the emerging network were drafted. In February 1998, movements from all continents met again, this time in Geneva, where People's Global Action was launched (People's Global Action website: http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/, accessed on the 03/03/07).

Zapatismo, scholars have often romanticised the situation, and have not addressed the problem that in actual fact Zapatista communities lack electricity and running water, let alone internet technologies (2008:18-20). Without romanticising, however, the Zapatistas were the first to show activists and political movements across the world that internet technologies opened new possibilities for political action. Within days following the uprising in Chiapas, the movement managed to establish a global network of support groups who used fax machines, telephones, and the internet to share and update information (Cleaver in Juris, 2008:45). As the Subcomandante Marcos once mentioned, for them, the process of information and communication production via new technologies was of fundamental importance. This is because,

> 'Communication means help to keep the image of the movement alive. If a movement is made to appear dead or moribund, irrespective of the reality on the ground, this constitutes a greater threat than superior military strength' (Slater, 1998:394).

Following the Zapatista uprising, many social and political minorities have started to turn their attention to new information and communication technologies as important weapons of political opposition (Slater, 1998; Ribeiro, 1998), and the internet became a new 'repertoire' (Traugott, 1995a) of political action. At the end of the nineties, confronted with a social context in which social and political minorities extensively used internet technologies, many scholars believed that new information technologies were tools for collective empowerment (Rheingold, 1994; Negroponte, 1995; Rash, 1997; Toffler and Toffler, 1995). In anthropology, Appadurai (1996) viewed the extensive use of new information and communication technologies by social and political minorities as resources for the enrichment of human agency and liberation (1996:31). In recent years, these understandings have been challenged and the democratic potential of online terrains has been questioned through the development of critical understandings of the internet (Atton, 2004; Fuchs, 2008; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003; Meikle, 2002; Oates and Gibson, 2006; Ribeiro, 1998; Slater, 1998).

In investigating the relationship between political action and new technologies, my approach was inspired by the understanding that research on the social dimension of electronic technologies has often been constrained by assumptions of novelty, pervasiveness and agency (Woolgar, 2002:7). This is particularly true if one considers the study of social movements. Scholars interested in the relationship between new technologies and social movements have often turned

their attention towards the *new* movements for global justice, and their internet strategies (Castells, 1997; Ribeiro, 1998; Slater, 1998; Della Porta *et al*, 2006; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003; Tarrow, 2005). This research project distinguishes itself from such works, for one main reason: in addressing the relationship between internet technologies and political action I have chosen to work with a movement that had a long history of media activism and trans-national connection. Therefore, rather than concentrating on the *new* movements – that were made possible through the extension of internet technologies - I have decided to look at a group which was tied to the sensibilities and issues of an 'old' type of politics: the politics of the Labour movement in Britain. At the outset of this research, my understanding was that the Labour movement was a rich and fascinating site of research where the people involved had been forced to reflect and adapt to processes of globalisation and technological innovation. Therefore, I believed that it was a very important field of analysis, where I could properly investigate the values and beliefs that people attached to media action,[4] and explore the way in which these beliefs and understandings had changed following the advent of new technologies.

The Field and the Methods of this Research

As I approached fieldwork, I was confronted with a major complexity, and that is the fact that what is usually understood as the Labour movement in Britain is in actual fact an extremely complex and fragmented reality, which brings together different organisations, trade unions, parties and political affiliations (Pollard, 1999). Furthermore, focusing only on trade unions organisations as the field of research would be equally complex from an ethnographic point of view. This is because, as Larson and Nissen (1987) have noticed, not only are trade union organisations very different from one another, they also have different politics as well as strategies. It is perhaps for this reason that theorists have assigned so many opposing social roles to them. Some have seen trade unions as sites of revolutionary transformation, and others have seen them as business institutions for the economic protection of their members (Larson and Nissen, 1987:4). Aware of all these conceptual and ethnographic complexities, therefore, I decided to focus my research on the ethnographic context of a single organisation - embedded in the Labour movement - and analyse its history, its media practices and its networks of association and action.

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[4] The term 'media action' is understood here as an umbrella term, which brings together alternative media production (e.g. magazines, videos, websites etc.) with practices of counter information that take place within the spaces of dominant media (e.g. letters, articles, interviews etc.).

Amongst the various political groups that are linked to the British Trade Unions I have decided to centre my attention on international solidarity organisations. The scholars who analysed the relationship between internet technologies and political movements constantly emphasised the fact that new technologies had created the basis for new forms of political action, which were networked and transnational (Tarrow, 1998). My understanding was that practices of transnational action had always existed, especially if one considered the history of international trade unionism and workers' solidarity. However, I was interested in uncovering the way in which new technologies had facilitated or transformed these forms of transnational activism. Indeed, as some scholars have shown - whilst in the past international trade unionism was anchored to notions of working class unity and traditional Left discourses - in the last fifteen years the notion of international solidarity has been transformed by the advent of new technologies and the creation of global networked movements (Alvarez et al, 1998; Castells, 1996; Dagnino, 1997; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Waterman and Wills, 2001). Therefore, I believed that the context of international solidarity organisations in Britain was a very interesting field of research, where one can properly investigate the techno-historical transformations of the last fifteen years by looking at people's personal histories and testimonies.

As I approached fieldwork, I realised that (at present) almost all [5] the international solidarity campaigns in Britain – that were linked to the Trade Unions - were showing their 'solidarity' to Latin American Countries. This is not surprising. Indeed, as Tariq Ali (2006) suggested, many within left wing organisations in the UK believe that in the last decade – following the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela and the election of Evo Morales in Bolivia - Latin American countries have been swept along by important political transformations. These countries stand as examples of 'alternatives' to the global neo-liberal system, and give hope to people who fight for socialist ideals, workers' rights and participatory democracy (Tariq Ali, 2006). In this framework, showing solidarity to these countries, creating trade union networks, and defending their representations in the British national media are all considered important political acts by the people involved.

Although the different international solidarity campaigns are in fact interconnected and members and organisers often overlap, I have decided to focus my research merely on one organisation, which was the oldest: the *Cuba Solidarity*

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[5] It emerged during fieldwork that, of all the international solidarity campaigns organisations that are active in the Trade Union movement, only the *Palestine Solidarity Campaign* does not focus on Latin America.

Campaign (CSC). The organisation, previously known as British Cuba Resource Centre (BCRC), was born in the late Seventies out of a group of individuals (mostly from the Labour Party) who aimed at gathering and sharing information on Cuba's socialist achievements and on its economic blockade. At the time - in the middle of the Cold War in Britain - information on the Socialist country was scarce, and most of the time, biased; travelling to Cuba was quite rare, and personal relationships with Cubans were infrequent[6]. The information available in Britain was based mostly on first-hand individual experience or on the cuttings from *Granma Newspaper*[7]. Just before the Winter of Discontent[8] and at the very beginning of the Thatcher years, BCRC organisers gathered in a room of the Casa Latina in North London to discuss Cuba's achievements in terms of public health and education, and compare these with the political and economic situation in Britain. At the time, the group produced a newsletter of information on Cuba. This newsletter was the very heart of the organisation, and later became the *CubaSí* magazine.

The fall of the Soviet bloc in 1989/1990 had a profound impact on the BCRC; all the members of the executive committee almost disappeared, and the resources for producing the magazine were no longer available. Although some would suggest that people withdrew from the organisation because after the collapse of USSR, no one believed that socialism in Cuba was going to survive; other details seem to imply that the crisis was triggered by the fact that socialism and the socialist states were being questioned at the time by the people who saw themselves as socialists. Despite struggling, the organisation managed to survive, and in 1992 it was transformed from a resource centre to the *Cuba Solidarity Campaign*. By binding effective political and economic networks with the major Trade Unions in Britain - it largely increased its membership size and political influence. Consisting of 4000 individual members, 450 Trade Union branch affiliates, 28 local groups on national territory and two sister organisations in Northern Ireland and Scotland, CSC has become today the leading political organisation in Britain with a focus on Cuba and Latin America.

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[6] Information gathered during fieldwork, as I was talking with my informants.

[7] Granma Newspaper is the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, it was founded in 1965, and is available in weekly international editions in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, German and Italian.

[8] 'The Winter of Discontent' is usually known as the British Winter of 1978-1979, which was marked by a series of major strikes against the Labour Government. The inability of the Government to deal with the Trade Unions is often seen as one of the major causes for the victory of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative party in 1979 (Dorey, 1995: 155).

The headquarters of CSC are based in a small office in North London. However, since the very beginning of fieldwork it became evident that the reality of the organisation developed on a variety of different levels and was constructed by the juxtaposition of many networked spaces. Marcus (1998) suggests that there are a variety of ways in which one can do multisided ethnographic fieldwork, such as following the thing, the story, the people or the metaphor (1998:19). For my research I decided to follow the people, and the media they produced. During fieldwork I thus spent an entire year working at the CSC national office on a daily basis; I followed its organisers around Trade Union conferences, I spent days in Parliament, and evenings at social gatherings and events; I interviewed members of networked campaigning organisations and key figures in the Trade Union movement; I volunteered to work for CSC at the music festival of Glastonbury, and I also travelled to Cuba, to participate in their work brigade at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, 40kms from Havana.

Participant observation and informal conversations, therefore, were my principal methodologies, which enabled me to actively engage with the social world described in this thesis, and have a first hand experience of its internal conflicts, alliances, and beliefs. By tracking the political and media networks in which the Cuba Solidarity Campaign is embedded, I have collected a breadth and depth of observations and testimonies – across different organisations - on the meaning of their media practices and on how people responded and negotiated with the advent of internet technologies. Furthermore, in order to enrich my ethnographic analysis, I carried out a *textual analysis* of the media the organisations produced and undertook 37 one-hour long audio recorded interviews.

In a recent article on the importance of para-ethnography - in other words of ethnography that takes into account the 'knowledge practices' (e.g. media, art, texts etc.) of the subjects that are studied - Holmes and Marcus (2006) contended that although para-ethnography is found in many fields of work in anthropology, its practice is often incidental (2006:36). For this research it was crucial. In the first months of fieldwork, I have carried out detailed research on the *CubaSí* Magazine and the BCRC newsletters, from the earlier copies available - which were dated 1981 - to the beginning of my fieldwork. In the analysis of texts I focused on the syntagmatic understanding of meaning, namely on the way in which meaning is constructed by a relation of signs into a narrative sequence (Peterson, 2003; Burgelin, 1972). Although I do not agree with the atomistic and quantitative approach of the content analysis school, my methodological approach also included qualitative content analysis methodologies (Berelson, 1971), which focused upon the presence-absence of a particular content. To enrich my textual analysis, I also

considered inter-textuality (Peterson, 2003), namely the interconnected way in which the same message was transmitted by different media, across different organisations.

The magazine was for me a central tool of research. This is because it was through the analysis of the magazine that I have acquired a sound knowledge of the organisation's history, reached an understanding of the key figures that were central to the past, and could map the development and transformations in the campaigning practices and beliefs. Much of this research project is the result of many days spent in the dusty offices of CSC reading and analysing their media productions. This is because, by looking at the changing names of editors and contributors, I was able to create a plan of interviews and to reach people who were no longer directly involved with the organisation. The creation of a plan of interviews was of crucial importance for the development of this project. At the outset of this research my intention was to hold 35 semi-structured interviews. This methodological choice was triggered by the belief that - as Dewalt (2002) has argued - with participant observation alone it is unlikely that the anthropologist will understand issues of transformation and change. Instead, within people's life accounts, the researcher can grasp issues of social change and historical transformation, and these were vital for addressing the questions of this project.

Following the *CubaSí* as a guide and combining my findings with the insights gathered through participant observation, I held 37 one hour long semi-structured interviews with people involved in the campaign. These included organisers, local groups' leaders, volunteers or simple members. As could be expected within a networked world, many of the people whom I interviewed were also key figures or members of other campaign organisations and trade unions. It will be explained in the next chapter of this thesis that the social world of CSC is a profoundly white, middle-class, middle-aged reality, characterised by a prevalence of men. In this framework, therefore, it is not surprising that the sample of interviews that I had was constituted of 23 male and 14 female informants. Of all these only 10 were under 30 years old. The sample also included all the 5 CSC workers, with whom I shared my everyday routine and conversations.

During the interviews I concentrated mostly on people's *life histories*. My intention was to understand their path to political involvement, to explore the way in which they experienced technological change, and to uncover the individual tensions and motivations that brought people to become active in the social world of CSC. The choice of focusing on people's life narratives was motivated by the belief that memory is always shaped by omissions and moral choices, and that

these omissions and choices are usually shaped by both collective and individual understandings (Tilly, 1994; Davis, 1992). In this respect, memory is political, social, and collective as well as personal, emotional and individual. Following this understanding of memory, the life histories approach can provide the researcher not only with an historical dimension, but also with insights concerning the way in which *collective repertoires* of the past (Tilly, 1994:244) are internalised by people. This latter point is fundamental for the understanding of contemporary social movements. Social struggles depend highly on repertoires of contestation (Alleyene, 2001; Tilly, 1994:244). These repertoires of the past are often shaped by the life histories of the people involved in the struggles, being leading figures (e.g. Che Guevara, Malcom X, Martín Luther King) or simple participants. It is perhaps for this reason that Holland and Lave (2001) suggest that "social struggles become personified, so that their forces assimilate the 'character' of the people from whom they are reproduced. Thus history is made in persons and by persons" (2001:30). In conclusion, it was through the combination of participant observation, textual analysis and life narratives that this research project aimed at highlighting the human experiences, beliefs, and understandings involved in the socio-technical transformations of the last two decades.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout its development this research project respected the ASA Ethical Guidelines, and relied on informed consent during its entire process. My fieldwork and interviews were based on my commitment to always protect the confidentiality and privacy of my informants, and to develop a straightforward and transparent relationship with them. Many organisers and activists agreed for their name and experiences to be published. When activists chose anonymity, I relied on the use of pseudonyms and on the changing of identifying details. Furthermore, when using recording devices, such as the digital voice recorder, I always made sure that my informant felt free to turn it off at any time.

During my research a series of ethical considerations emerged. One was related to participation. As mentioned, I worked on a voluntary basis for the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. My voluntary work was often appreciated and the director of the campaign saw my work as a possible solution to resolve issues of reciprocity. At times, however, I found it particularly difficult to negotiate the time to dedicate to my research (e.g. the analysis of the magazine, interviews etc.). These processes of negotiation were often a cause of tensions between those who believed that I had worked a lot and those who thought that my work was not enough. The tensions that emerged were often resolved without repercussions. Working for CSC, furthermore, placed me in a situation for which I had access to all

the documents within the campaign's intranet system. These included access to a variety of files of great interest for my research, as well as a list of contact details that could be used for interviews. I did not rely on these sources at any point, without asking permission.

A further important ethical consideration that emerged during my research was the issue of representation. My direct involvement with the production of articles and texts within the campaign made me particularly sensitive to the fact that, by participating in the process of cultural objectification, I was placed in a position of potentially transforming rather than observing the research context (Ginsburg *et al*, 2002:22). Furthermore, throughout my fieldwork I had to engage with the already made and diffused self-representations of my informants. My ethnographic analysis, therefore, tried to create a dialogue between activists' own representations and beliefs, and my own interpretation (Strathern, 1987:26). Throughout my research I discussed my interpretations with the people involved, making them aware of the possible outcomes of my project. My anthropological training has taught me that it is only through reflexive practices and negotiation that social researchers can avoid generalised assumptions and understandings. In this framework, I always tried to build on the criticisms and insights of my informants.

Part II - Alternative Media, Imagination, and Resistance: The Theoretical Foundations of the Research

Globalisation, Techno-capitalism and the Spectacle

In the previous part of this introduction I have discussed my research aims, methods and ethical considerations. Here I wish to explore the historical context in which this research project emerged, and highlight its theoretical foundations. In the last two decades, social scientists have been confronted with a variety of historical, cultural, political, economic and technological transformations, which have altogether been identified as pertaining to the process of 'globalisation'. At the beginning of the nineties, David Harvey (1989) suggested that new satellite technologies were shrinking the world, so that space and time could no longer be considered as direct constraints for the organisation of human experience (1989: 327-356). Far from relying on a techno-deterministic understanding, however, Harvey argued that in order to understand these transformations scholars had to look at the economy, and notice how the saturation of national markets, and subsequently the increased over-taxation from governments, lead to the emergence of a more flexible, trans-national, and networked economy (1989:141-172). Similarly to Wallerstein (1980), therefore, Harvey applied a Marxist

perspective to the understanding of globalisation. However, whereas the first relied on an economic model of 'core' and 'periphery' that did not uncover the complexities of globalisation as a cultural process, Harvey connected globalisation to wider historical transformations, and analysed the social, cultural and political 'condition of postmodernity'.

Although departing from a different assumption on modernity [9], Anthony Giddens (1990) shared a similar view to Harvey as far as globalisation was concerned. Despite not being a Marxist, Giddens believed that the globalisation of capitalism could not be understood without referring to Marx's analysis of capitalist production (Tucker, 1998:108-109). Furthermore, Giddens contended that the new world order was affecting the way in which time and space were experienced and organised. Globalisation, for him, was a process that enabled people and institutions to develop and maintain social relationships at a distance. In the global world, according to Giddens, larger numbers of people lived in contexts where dis-embedded institutions organised major aspects of day-to-day life, by linking local practices to global social relations (1990:79).

By the mid nineties, with the extension of the World Wide Web, the processes described by Harvey (1989) and Giddens (1990) accelerated, and capitalism consolidated its new global character. In this framework, the work of Manuel Castells (1996) is particularly important. Drawing from a Marxist background, Castells (1996), in a similar manner to Harvey and Giddens, understood globalisation as an economic and technological process that started to emerge at the end of the seventies. However, in contrast to the other two scholars, he placed a particular emphasis on the 'information technology revolution' and suggested that the global re-structuring of capitalism was greatly facilitated by new information and communication technologies. In this framework, he argued that the technological revolution did not originate and diffuse by accident or as a consequence of the re-structuring of capitalism. On the contrary, according to his perspective, new technologies made the re-structuring possible, since they provided the indispensable material basis for such a new economy to develop (Castells, 1996:66).

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[9] Harvey - similarly to scholars such as Baudrillard or Lash - established some grounds for periodising the modern and the postmodern as two different periods by looking at the different phases of capitalism. Whilst Giddens, along the lines of Bauman, believed that postmodernity is a phase of modernity (Dunn, 1998:83). Although fascinating the debates on modernity and posmodernity are not a focus of this research.

Throughout the nineties, the techno-historical transformations described by scholars such as Harvey, Giddens and Castells affected a great majority of social contexts across the world. Following the fall of the Soviet bloc, different countries embraced the neo-liberal model, which stressed free trade, privatisation and the deterritorialisation of corporate power. In this context discussions started to arise as to whether scholars could understand global transformations in terms of a Wallerstanian (1980) model of 'core vs. periphery', and if the local was being replaced by the global homogeneity. Within both anthropology and media studies, research demonstrated that in fact globalisation was defined by a dual process of homogenisation and heterogenisation, and that the 'local' existed in a dialectical interaction with the global (Appadurai, 1996; Anderson, 2002; Friedman, 1996; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Kearney, 1995; Peters, 1997; Tomlinson, 2002). In this framework the globalisation of markets, media and information technologies, etc. was seen as a dynamic process of 'disjuncture' and 'difference' (Appadurai, 1996) rather than as a process of imposition from 'above', or from a global centre.

Even if scholars were able to demonstrate that local cultures did not disappear in a vortex of global homogeneity, and that in contrast to assumptions of cultural imperialism, peripheries did talk back, it appeared evident from the very beginning that processes of globalisation were embedded within structural inequalities (Stiglitz, 2000; Chomsky, 1996). Most importantly, as it emerged in the work of Castells (1996, 1997) global processes and inequalities had to be contextualised in the framework of information and communication technologies. If the Nineties were marked by the global-restructuring of capitalism dependent on technologies, by 2001, with the beginning of the 'War on Terror', the synthesis of capital, technology, and information and entertainment industries consolidated new power relations in the global arena and created the basis for the emergence of new social inequalities. In a global context in which mass communication has moved beyond traditional media to include the internet and mobile technologies, Castells (2009) contends, it is of fundamental importance to highlight the networks of power that are constructed by global multimedia business, and understand how these relate to national and international politics (2009:71-99). For him, today, global and local power relations are primarily constructed through communication strategies. Power for Castells is 'communication power'.

In understanding the meaning behind such techno-historical transformations, and the pervasive role of what he identifies as techno-capitalism, Kellner applies Debord's theory on the rise of the *Society of Spectacle* ([1967], 1983), and suggests that the last decades have seen the triumph of the logic of the 'spectacle'.

Debord – who was part of the Marxist avant-garde group known as the Situationists – analysed the relationship between mass mediated spectacles and capitalism. He thus argued that consumer societies, which were organised around the production and consumption of images, commodities and staged events were based on the spectacle. The spectacle, for Debord, was not a visual deception, but a worldview that had materialised and become a model (1983: Section 5-6); it was not a collection of images, but a social relationship between people that is constantly mediated and legitimised by images (1983: Section 4). In this framework, he saw the spectacle as a tool of de-politicisation, as a permanent 'opium war' (1983: Section 44), and understood the lifeless consumption of the spectacle as an alienation from human potentiality, creativity and imagination (1983:12).

Drawing from Debord, Kellner (2003) argues that - following the techno-historical developments of the last decades – the logic of the spectacle has entered every area of life. If one was to apply his understanding to contemporary Britain - despite anthropologists' usual scepticism about interpretations based on popular culture - the pervasiveness of the logic of the spectacle can be easily grasped. As Kellner (2003) suggests, the way in which people cook, dress, exercise, work, eat or live their life is constantly spectacularised by the latest TV show, news article, film or book etc., which reinforce particular models and relationships. Furthermore, within global international relations, the spectacle has also entered areas of life such as politics and war, and in this regard examples are numerous from the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In using Debord's insights, however, Kellner is critical about the fact that his concept of the 'society of spectacle' tended to present a picture of a quasi-totalitarian nexus of domination and he argues that it is preferable to perceive a plurality and heterogeneity of contending spectacles in the contemporary moment (Kellner, 2003:11). This is a very important point in the theoretical development of this research project. Indeed, throughout my research, I understand power or capitalism, not as an order, but as a system of different social relations of inequality, which are constantly reproduced through the appeal of specific values, ideas, beliefs or spectacles. In applying Debord's notion of the spectacle to the contemporary socio-historical situation, Kellner (2003) is interested in exploring the rise of an 'infotainment' culture and highlighting the mechanisms and power discourses embedded within the construction of different media spectacles. In referring to Debord, the standpoint of this research is very different from the one of Kellner. This is because, instead of being concerned with broader assumptions

on culture and society, I rely on Debord to uncover the complex relationship between spectacle, alienation and resistance.

Indeed, as mentioned above, Debord saw the spectacle as a tool that distanced people from political participation. By reducing social creativity the spectacle was for him a source of alienation. Debord was not simply a theorist, but a political activist, who in the years preceding the '68 uprising in France – together with the other Situationists such as Vaneigem - sought a way to resist the logic of the 'spectacle'. The Situationists called people to resist the 'passive consumption of the spectacle', and actively produce art as a way of overcoming alienation (Shukaitis and Graeber, 2003:23). In this framework, they developed one of the most interesting theories on the alienation of capitalist life. This is because, for them, 'alienation' was not merely understood in strictly Marxist terms as lack of control in one's workplace, but rather a sense of 'distance' from society, as a feeling of impotency in changing the dominant relationships that are constantly mediated by the spectacle (Plant, 1992:1-38).

Following the '68 uprising, the concept of alienation was challenged (Shukaitis and Graeber, 2003). As postmodern theories started to emerge, and scholars like Foucault (1980) or Baudrillard ([1981] 1994) began to question their Marxist origins, alienation was seen as a category that served only to legitimise Marx's idea of base and superstructure; it was seen as a totalising concept which needed to be interrogated and deconstructed. For postmodern critics alienation did not exist, because there was no given totality from which people could be alienated (Graeber and Shukaitis, 2003). Furthermore, within cultural and media studies, the link between the spectacle and alienation – which was one of the pillars of Debord's theory - has often been challenged by research that looked at the creative element embedded in subcultures, or at the active role of the audiences (Eco, 1994).

Without disregarding the work of postmodern scholars, or cultural studies scholars, this research project was born out of the belief that alienation is still an important conceptual tool, which is of central importance in the analysis of social movements and their media practices. Drawing from the work of Shukaitis and Graeber (2003), my understanding is that alienation does exist especially in a society of images, which as Baudrilliard ([1981] 1994) would say are spectres of reality. In understanding, the relationship between alienation and spectacle, however, I do not wish to suggest – as in Debord – that the spectacle creates passive consumption; neither would I want to ground this thesis in classical Marxism and see alienation as an issue of class, or merely as a lack of control over one's own work. On the contrary I believe strongly that social scientists owe much to the legacy of postmodernism, and must constantly refer to the importance of

deconstructing totalities and highlighting the issues of identity, subjectivity, cultural specificities, and reflexivity.

Therefore, my understanding of alienation has more to do with 'feeling' and 'identity' rather then with a material condition or class division. For me alienation must be understood as a feeling of distance from the images produced by dominant institutions and organisations, a feeling of not belonging, of not sharing the interests and values that are re-produced by a society of the spectacle. Here it is important to notice that such an understanding shares many similarities with the work of postmodern alienation scholars who perceived alienation as being defined by a feeling of exclusion from dominant identities (Geyer, 1996; Geyer and Heinz, 1992). In this framework, therefore, my understanding is that the images of togetherness that are brought into being by social institutions and media organisations - we just have to think about concepts such as 'public', 'population' or 'audience' - can be profoundly alienating for individuals and groups (Shukaitis and Graeber, 2003:11-33).

The standpoint of this research therefore is that alienation can be understood as a feeling of 'distance' or a sense of disconnection and non-identification with the images presented by society. It is by looking at this feeling of distance that we can better conceptualise the way in which groups and individuals are constantly engaged in the construction of their own 'images' and meanings of the world, and organise their actions on the basis of these images. As the social movements' literature shows (Alvarez, 1997; Day, 2005; Della Porta, 2005; Holloway, 2002; Kasnabish, 2008; Nash, 2005), at an historical time in which neo-liberal values and private interests seemed to have triumphed – especially in Europe and the U.S. - people often dissociated from these values, and engage their everyday lives in the imagination of other possibilities. At the outset of this research therefore my hypothesis was that oppositional space had to be found in the *imagination*, in the multiplicity of ways in which groups and cultures react to the techno-historical transformations of the last two decades.

Imagination, Social Creativity and Resistance: The Social Significance of Alternative Media

Imagination as a term has been used by scholars in a variety of different ways. This research embraces the concept of imagination, by looking at its bound relation to everyday practices of resistance. In considering imagination as related to resistance, this research draws heavily upon the Marxist tradition. Marx believed that the human capacity for creativity and human critical faculties are rooted in the same source: *imagination*. Imagination is for Marx what differentiates the man

from the animal. Indeed, as he explains, the architect raises his/her building in the imagination; the bee does not (Marx, 1967:178). Marx's understanding of imagination is, however, ambiguous. This is because, although he contended that the revolution was derived by human critical faculties, he believed that the revolutionary should not rely on the same faculties as the architect (Graeber, 2007a:114-115). This is because, for him, it is not the task of the revolutionary to come up with an image of society, and then try to bring it into being. This would be utopian.

In *The Imaginary Institution of Society* Cornelius Castoriadis tried to overcome the ambiguity embedded in Marx's work, by developing a theory on radical imagination. According to Castoriadis, imagination is a defining element of humanity. Grounding his understanding in Aristotle's claim that 'The soul never thinks without phantasms (images)' he recognised the fact that imagination, intentionality and action were inseparable (1998:194). As a critical Marxist Castoriadis brought together Marx and Freud and argued that dream, desire, wish, pleasure and fantasy are all at the core of our social processes, and they are also at the core of political institutions. In this regard, for him, institutions cannot be understood merely for their function, but as embedding norms, values, languages, tools, procedures, and therefore as having a strong symbolic power (Castoriadis, 1998:130). According to him the task of radical movements is to transform the 'instituted society' by putting instituted representations into question. This process, for him, is made possible not by doubt or scepticism but by radical *imagination*, by the creation of figures or of models of the thinkable (1998:369-374). Imagination is for him not a solitary project but a collective one.

Castoriadis is of central importance for this research project because he establishes a link between imagination and resistance, and by doing so – as Elliot suggested (2003) - his theory moves beyond a focus on the human subject, and opens possibilities of research that enable us to understand imagination as a social process (Elliott, 2003:85). Drawing from Castoriadis, this research project understands imagination as detached from an idea of fantasy, which carries with it a connotation of unrealistic thought divorced from projects and actions (Appadurai, 1996:7; Graeber, 2007a). On the contrary, in Castoriadis' terms, I see imagination as a social *activity*, something that *we do* (Ingold, 2000: 416), which carries forward internationality, project and action of a kind. As Ingold suggested, metaphorically imagination can be understood as something a chess player does when, sitting apparently immobile and without touching the pieces of the board s/he proceeds to work out a strategy (Ingold, 2000: 416). In this framework

imagination becomes a practice that has a political meaning, as well as a social one. This thesis will argue that, in the understanding of political action and activism, therefore, imagination is of central importance. This is because it is by referring to the concept of imagination that we can shed some light on the processes that bring people together in the construction of alternative possibilities, and make them act in collective ways.

The concept of imagination is of central importance to the understanding of political action for a further reason: the creation of collective feelings of belonging. This is particularly evident if we look at the work of Anderson ([1983] 1991). Anderson suggested that communities, such as the nation state, were not those 'social wholes' that anthropologists claimed to study, but were in fact *imagined* constructs (1991: 5-6). The emphasis on community as a social construct was a turning point for anthropology and in the social sciences in general. In anthropology, following Anderson, Cohen's work (1985) has shown that, in their true light, communities were neither organisms nor machines, but symbolic constructs and 'worlds of meaning', which owed their existence to their continuing use and re-creation 'in the minds of their members' (Cohen,1985: 82).

The understanding that communities are constructed in the minds of the people and are made possible through practices of imagination does not challenge their truthfulness or the fact that they are effective actors within contemporary societies. Anderson himself made an effort to emphasise this point. In fact, in discussing Gellner's contribution to the study of nationalism, Anderson suggests that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication', and 'falsity' rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation'. And a few lines below, he adds: "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1991:6).

Combining Castoriadis' understanding of radical imagination as a collective project of resistance with Anderson's perspective that belonging is constructed by imaginative practices is an appropriate theoretical approach for the analysis of social movements and political action. This is because such an approach enables us to understand that in contrast to 'revolution' - which as a term calls for radical transformation and disruption (Fox and Starn, 1997) - 'resistance' can be perceived as an everyday process which involves the construction of symbols, identities and meanings. By understanding resistance as an everyday process this thesis draws from the work of those scholars, who highlighted that protest necessarily involves struggle over ideas, identities, symbols, and strategies, and thus that

representation and the imaginary are inextricable from collective mobilisation (Alvarez et al, 1998; Comaroff, 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Diani and Della Porta, 1999; Escobar, 2004; Fox and Starn, 1997; Gledhill, 1994; Melucci, 1996, 1989; Nash, 2005; Pratt, 2003; Scott, 1985; Swartz, 2002; Tarrow, 1998, Traugott, 1995a, 1995b).

This understanding of resistance as an everyday process finds its origins in the theories of the new social movements' scholars, who, inspired by the civil rights movements, believed that class struggles had been replaced by conflicts of identity (Touraine, 1985; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Melucci, 1996; Castells, 1983). Although drawing from their insight, as will be explained in future chapters, this thesis rejects the classical academic distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements, arguing rather that movements are in constant transformation and constant negotiation with a range of political possibilities, repertoires and imaginations brought about by a given epoch. Furthermore, by considering resistance as an everyday social process that involves the construction of symbols and meanings, this research project detaches itself from those scholars who according to Maddox's (1997:286) criticism 'see resistance everywhere'. On the contrary, this research recognises that political activism does require actual work to make an object political and to create the kind of sites in which political action can happen (Barry, 2001:194).

The understanding that social and political movements are based on imaginative practices, and that the imagination of alternatives as well as the construction of collective identities are in fact acts of resistance, is one of the theoretical foundations upon which this research project is built. It was by recognising the bound relation between imaginative practices and resistance that I became interested in the media produced by social movements. In *Imagined Communities* (1991) Anderson contended that the rise of print-capitalism was a mayor contributor in the construction of the nation-state as an imagined community. This is because newspapers and modern novels were able to confer a sense of *simultaneity*, which permitted that different people could imagine themselves as a community (1991:33-46). Furthermore, according to Anderson, the way in which *language*[10] was used within printed practices was a fundamental source of imagination. In fact, it was through the choice of a particular language and the reference to terms of private property (my, yours, etc.) (Anderson: 1991:

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[10] My interpretation is that for Anderson, language is "what serves to convert into discourse the work of cognition of specific socialities" (Gell in Ingold,1994:194)

68) and to terms which expressed kinship binds and home (Heimat, Vaterland, Motherland, Patria etc.) (Anderson, 1991: 143) that the nation could be imagined as a united community.

Tarrow (1998) applied Anderson's insights to the analysis of social movements and suggested that the rise of the popular press in Britain and France at the end of the 18th century triggered the creation of new associations that developed around the production and exchange of printed materials. According to him, therefore, print and association were complementary channels in the development of social movements (1998:45-50). A similar understanding was shared also by Downing (1995) – who, by looking at the history of movements in the United States, has shown that media activism has been a central form of political action from the ninetieth-century women's press and the suffragette movement to the civil rights movements of the 1960s (1995:180-191). Analysing the French revolution Anderson himself had noticed the strong link between collective mobilisation and printed media, when he argued that: "the experience [of the revolution] was shaped by billions of printed words into a 'concept' on the printed page, and in due course into a model" (1991:80).

Therefore, as this thesis will show, in the analysis of social movements and political action in general, media become important levels of ethnographic enquiry, which cannot be overlooked. In this framework however, this thesis detaches itself from an understanding of media as text that is produced and consumed. It instead analyses media as practice (Couldry, 2004), in the sense that it studies the practices and meanings that evolve around media technologies and texts and how they relate to people's understanding of political action. Only by doing so - as some media anthropologists have shown - can we theorise media by looking at the type of social relations and processes that they trigger, and thus appreciate them for their intrinsic human significance (Ginsburg, 1990; Ginsburg et al, 2002, Ginsburg 2002, 1997; Peterson, 2003, Herzfeld, 2001; Askew and Wilk, 2002; Coman and Rothenbulher, 2005; Laughlin, 1999; Marcus, 1999; McLaghan, 1999; Postill, 2005; Turner, 2002). As this thesis will show, media technologies can become, in the ethnography of a political group, important 'spaces of imagination', where imagination meets lived experience through the discursive construction of meaning.

Part III - Mediated Resistance, Imagination and Political Action in Britain: An Overview of Chapters

This thesis represents my personal effort in trying to create a ground of collaboration between anthropology and media studies. As mentioned, the experience of interdisciplinary research taught me that, as Peterson (2003) suggested, disciplines are 'systems of meaning', with their own codes and signifiers, which must be respected and understood. One of the greatest challenges that I had to face in the making of this thesis was finding a balance between ethnography and theory, in such a way that met the criteria of both disciplines. My intention was not to write a classical ethnography of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, but to find a way in which ethnography and theory interacted without obscuring one another. This thesis is the result of such a challenge.

CHAPTER ONE provides an ethnographic exploration of the social world described in this thesis. Departing from the 'office' of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and proceeding to a description of an event at the Trade Union Congress House, the chapter shows how the social world of CSC is constructed through the political and economic networking between Trade Unions, the *Morning Star*, the Labour Party and other campaigning organisations in Britain. By tracing the networks of inclusion and exclusion of this social world, this chapter will argue that although insightful in the analysis of social movements, the concept of network has methodological as well as metaphoric limitations (Knox et al., 2006). As will be explained, the focus on the political and economic networks between the different organisations excludes an analysis of the 'disconnections' that bring people together in collective forms of political action. By relying on the concept of *ethnographic cartography,* therefore, this chapter tries to address this problematic, and explores the biographical narratives and imagined spaces that constitute the fabric of the networked social world described in this thesis.

Extending the concept of *ethnographic cartography*, **CHAPTER TWO** will argue that when mapping the social reality of political organisations such as the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, scholars must take into account a further level of ethnographic enquiry: the level created by information and communication technologies. I argue that with the technological developments of the last fifteen years, these techno-social spaces have multiplied and media-related practices have come to dominate the everyday reality of the people involved with CSC. Instead of asking questions about the socio-political impacts of the advent of the World Wide Web – that will be addressed in a future chapter - this chapter instead considers

alternative media practices in an historical and ethnographic framework, by looking at the issue of collective memory. By doing so, my aim is to shed light on the social significance of alternative media for the people involved in political action, and also to highlight the very personal and emotional dimension embedded in these mediated *spaces* of imagination.

Concentrating on ethnography the first two chapters of this thesis show that alternative media connect biographical experiences, imagined understandings, and the multiple concrete spaces of networked political action. They do so by constructing a socio-technical dimension where collective imaginations can be constructed and legitimised, and where feelings of emotional attachment to the group can be experienced. However, the demonstration that alternative media are the spaces within which a political group, such as CSC, constructs its own collective imagination and consolidates a feeling of membership leaves many questions unaddressed. This is because we must inevitably ask ourselves: How does this work? How are these social processes of imagination and belonging guaranteed by media practices? Can a careful look at media processes enrich our understanding of both ideology and identity construction? If all media can be seen as 'spaces of imagination' what is the difference between alternative and mainstream media practices?

Titled *Ideology, Imagination and Media Rituals: Concepts and Theories for the Anthropology of Mediated Resistance*, **CHAPTER THREE** addresses these questions, through a theoretical and cross-disciplinary exploration of the relationship between ideology, hegemony and signifying practices. This chapter will argue that it is in the cross-fertilisation amongst disciplines, and by looking specifically at the concept of *media rituals* (Couldry, 2003) that we can develop important theoretical tools for the understanding of the complex social processes embedded within media practices. Furthermore, the chapter will show that it is by looking at *imagination*, at the projectual dimension that is embedded within ideology and ritual that we can shed some light on the way in which social protest and critique bring about social change. Such a theoretical discussion on the relationship between media, ideology and identity is of central importance in order to move on to the following chapter of this thesis, which explores the changing relationship between political activists and media technologies, following the advent of the internet.

CHAPTER FOUR argues that – within CSC - the belief in the opportunities and possibilities brought about by the World Wide Web has profoundly altered the everyday experience of political action, and changed political priorities and strategies. At the same time, however, the frustrations and anxieties attached to

internet technologies have transformed people's relationship with printed media, as well as affected people's understanding of alternative media practices. In considering these transformations, the chapter will draw upon Latour's actor network theory (2005) and uncover the role of technologies as agents within society. However, this chapter will show that if we are to perceive technologies as agents, we must bear in mind that they have become such due to human agency. This is because technologies are embedded within human discourses and imaginations, which - by being naturalised in the technology itself - profoundly affect the everyday layers of social experience. It is by looking at this dialectical relationship between the technical and the social, that this chapter contends that we can better appreciate the techno-historical transformations of the last two decades.

CHAPTER FIVE explores further the relationship between the social and the technical by looking at the impact of internet technologies on political imagination. In particular I uncover the bound relation between imagination, internet networks and new forms of political belonging. As will be shown, within CSC and other networked organisations, notions of political identity and belonging are becoming the very basis of a conflict between generations. Whilst older generations believe in party-based political identity, younger generations distance themselves from the membership politics of the Labour movement, and show a more flexible and networked understanding of political participation. To understand the social dynamics and implicit discourses embedded within this conflict of generation, I argue, it is of extreme importance to turn our attention to the role played by internet technologies, to look at the concept of 'network' and to consider the political imaginations embedded in the networked movements for global justice. By focusing on the conflict of generations, and exploring the ways in which CSC organisers are responding to the generation gap the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that social movements are neither 'old' nor 'new', but are often worlds in transformation that keep renewing themselves to adapt to the new political imaginations of their given epoch.

CHAPTER SIX is very different from the preceding ones. Instead of focusing on the socio-technical dimension of political action and exploring media related practices and beliefs, it explores the ways in which *mediation* can be detached from our understandings of 'the media' (Silverstone, 1999, 2005). By describing the life during CSC's work brigade to Cuba, this chapter demonstrates that the brigade, which is organised for members to experience the real Cuba, is a mediated experience. In reflecting upon this process of mediation, this chapter relies on a symbolic reading of Marx's theory of value (Graeber, 2001; Turner, 2006), and

argues that relationships are often mediated in such a way that brings forward specific political discourses. For this reason, I will contend, we need to understand that relationships have a deep intrinsic representational value; a value that is constantly sought through practices of mediation. Although *mediation* affects every layer of social reality, the ways in which people react to mediated images and meanings depend upon their own identities and political imaginations, and create the basis for association and opposition. The understanding of mediation as a social process affecting everyday life, I conclude, is of central importance to re-direct scholars' attention on to the human dimension and processes that defines people's interaction with media technologies.

Chapter I - Mapping a Social World: Exploring the Multiple Levels of an Ethnographic Cartography

Introduction

Departing from the small office in North London - where the headquarters of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign are located - this chapter will explore the social world in which CSC is embedded. It will be shown that the social world of CSC is constructed through networking processes, and thus networks become central methodological and analytical tools for ethnographic enquiry. However, as will be explained, during fieldwork I encountered two main problems in using the concept of network as an analytical and methodological approach. In the first place, I noticed that although networks and connections were central in the making of the social world of CSC, equally important for ethnographic enquiry was the absence of networks, or in other words, the disconnections between CSC and 'other' organisations. Therefore, drawing on Green (2002) I was concerned about the fact that an emphasis on networks and connections would overshadow the social significance of *disconnections*.

The second problem I encountered during fieldwork was that people related in dissimilar ways to different types of network. Whilst some networks had a profound meaning for the people involved; others were considered has having little importance. In the light of this experience, I decided to draw on the work of those anthropologists (Green, 2002; Green *et al.* 2005, Knox, *et al.* 2006; Riles, 2001; Strathern, 1996; White 1992), who have argued that networks should be understood as cultural constructs, and therefore I decided to analyse networks as being socially produced. This methodological and theoretical choice made me realise that one important implication of understanding networks 'in their making' is that it prompts a reflection on the cognitive maps through which social actors make sense of, and categorize their social environment (Diani, 2003:5). In other words, if we want to understand the meaning of networks and how these are made possible, we must analyse the shared values, beliefs and experiences that bring people together in networked forms of political action.

Indeed, as this chapter will show, the social world of CSC is not only constituted by the interconnection of the political and economic ties between different organisations, but it is also constituted by the interaction of shared beliefs and identity narratives that bring people together in collective forms of political action. As it will be explained, within the social world of CSC, the image of Latin America, as well as specific understandings of class, are the imagined spaces of political opposition. It is by looking at the intersecting between concrete spaces of political

action and imagined ones, and the way in which these spaces are constantly created through everyday practices and shared narratives - this chapter will argue - that we can better understand the ethnographic reality of a political movement.

In order to analyse and describe this multileveled ethnographic reality I will introduce the concept of *ethnographic cartography*. By relying on the metaphor of cartography, my intention is to propose an approach that traces the political and economic networks between organisations, but also considers how these networks are incorporated into practices and narratives of place-making (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b; Green *et al*, 2005). By relying on the idea of 'map', my goal is to argue that in the analysis of networks, scholars should look at the larger picture, and consider the boundaries and disconnections, as well as the shared experiences and ideological constructions that make networked social worlds possible. The reference to the concept of *cartography*, furthermore, also has an ethical implication. This is because the image enables us to understand that there are parallels to be traced between the ethnographer and the cartographer; because with their subjective perspective they both contribute to practices of making the social world they try to represent (Harley, 1989: 3-6). Cartographies, like ethnographies, are not objective representations that can be understood as separated from the observer/researcher's social discourse and subjective understandings (Clifford, 1986). The following – therefore - is my own understanding of the social world of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign.

Concrete Spaces of Political Action: The Cuba Solidarity Campaign and the Office on Seven Sisters Road

I entered CSC on a misty autumn day in early November. That was my first contact with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign's office, and with the people who worked or volunteered there. I had chosen CSC as context of research because my intention was to gather data on the global/local relationship, by looking at the way in which media technologies enabled the creation of a middle ground for transnational interconnections and political actions. Furthermore, being fascinated by Latin American politics, I believed that there was much to be discovered in a context where people came from different cultural, social and national backgrounds. Since the very beginning of fieldwork, however, CSC's dusty office - on the top floor of a local comedy pub - with its narrow corridors, carton boxes, and ever-boiling kettle, pervaded me with a deep sense of *locality*. This is the locality of Seven Sisters Road - a road like many others in North London - with its rough style, massive council estates, kebab shops, and off licence on the corner.

A steep black staircase with a small sign 'Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign' led to the office main door. Once entered, I was confronted with the sight of a small kitchen, a notice board, and unwashed tea stains next to the sink. Just after the kitchen, on the left hand side, there was the office of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. Divided in two different rooms, the office had six individual desks: five for the full-time office workers and one to be shared amongst the volunteers. A smell of burning coming from the electric heaters saturated that November afternoon, while the director's voice talking on the phone echoed loudly between the rooms, and down the narrow corridor.

The corridor was dark and full of shelves, with two doors facing each other in the middle, and another one at the very end. The door on the left hand side opened onto a large communal area. Wooden tables were crammed in a corner of the room, whilst an old window – next to the photocopier machine - gave a post-industrial view of chimney pipes and huge council estates. Facing the communal area were the offices of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, and at the end of the corridor there were the offices of CODA International, a charity which supports civil society organisations in developing countries, especially Latin America. Whilst CODA arrived later in Seven Sisters Road, the Nicaragua and the Cuba Solidarity Campaign have been sharing the space on top of the Red Rose Club since the end of the Nineties. At the time, NSC had a clear advantage on the distribution of space. However, with the rapid expansion of CSC, and the demise of interest from the British public in Nicaragua, NSC's headquarters have been confined to a smaller office, whilst CSC occupied most of the space.

Life in CSC's office was hectic, the time schedule tight, and the workload heavy. Office workers engaged in a variety of multiple tasks, from general administration work and the organisation of different events (such as concerts, political gatherings, conferences, festivals, exhibitions etc.), to the various forms of media action. Media action as a term is used here to define those practices of political action that are largely centred upon the production or consumption of media texts. These included the quarterly production of the *CubaSí* magazine and the *CubaUpdate* online newsletter, as well as the everyday production of articles, press releases, and letters aimed at counter-acting the too often negative representations of Cuba which dominated the mainstream media.

Work was of central importance to the life of the office. It built relationships, created social roles amongst people, and represented a form of social participation within the group. The way in which work was experienced and organised, however, differed largely from other organisations and institutions I have come across in the

past. Volunteers came to the office to offer their unpaid labour to the campaign, because they believe in its cause. Amongst the five full-time office workers, I have been confronted more than once by people who asked me to understand that for them working for CSC was not 'just a job'. It was more something they believed in, something that satisfied the need to be politically and socially active, and a way to professionalise their political activism.

Illustrative in this regard are the life histories of the office workers themselves. Rob – the director - became the first full-time paid employee of the campaign in 1996/1997, after being involved with CSC on a volunteer basis. A similar history is the one of Trish - the office manager - who has been volunteering for the campaign since 1989 whilst she was still working as a housing solicitor. In contrast to Rob and Trish, the other three office workers Dean, Natasha and Stephen were employed through a formal interview, and amongst them only Stephen was a member of the campaign before his employment. Despite being employed formally, their personal histories are nonetheless also very emblematic in terms of political commitment to the cause of the organisation. For Dean, CSC was his first full-time employment after having moved to London from Bristol, and always 'meant a lot to him' to have found a job that strengthened his political and social commitment.

Tasha was employed as a campaigns manager in 2003, but after four years commuting from London to Brighton, and sleeping at friends and relatives, she decided to accept a job in Brighton for an academic institution. During the time she was not working for CSC, she helped out at events and kept saying how much she missed working there. Only five months later she returned to work for the campaign as communication officer. Similarly to Tasha, Stephen also had a history of dislocation in order to work for the campaign. Stephen - a 28-year-old newly-wed reporter from Coventry - left his former job behind and his wife alone for most of the week, just because he believed that working for CSC would grant him the space to express his own political commitment. Although we had a day to day relationship in which we would exchange life histories and impressions, Stephen told me his story during a semi-structured interview, within which he also explained the reasons why he decided to leave a job as local reporter in order to work for CSC:

> **V:** how come did you decide to work in local journalism?
>
> **S:** Well. If you want to change people's mind then one way to do it is through the media. Local media is a better place to do this than the national media, because there is very little room in the national media to actually put forward your own point of view. When I

enrolled in the journalism training programme, the first thing that we were told was that if our intention was to spread our messages then it was better if we left the course. Because that's not what journalism was about; journalism was about facts. Personally I found that it was not true. There is a lot of room especially in local journalism to get through your point of view. You know, if there is an industrial strike you can always give prominence to the Trade Union's versions etc. etc. etc.

Also I found that when I was working as a reporter I had much of the trust of local refugee centres or NGOs and they would come to me with their stories. And I am quite proud I did that! There is also another facet of local journalism which made me feel quite proud about my work. Occasionally you get people from very, very poor backgrounds who live in housing association tenancies and their house might be awful, and through the newspaper you can go to the local council and say 'well either you fix this or we'll give you bad publicity'. So through local journalism I was doing many things that made me proud.

But then I went to Latin America, travelled to Chiapas or Cuba - areas where social change was taking place. And then I came back. It was three and a half years that I had been working for the *Coventry Telegraph*, and I realised that I was restricted by local journalism. I wasn't able to do what I wanted to do, I wanted to give more room to my political opinion. So I was on the lookout for 9 or 10 months for a job in a campaigning or development organisation. Here I am. Now I am proud of writing for the *CubaSí*, I know it's very different from the other newspaper, which had a circulation of 60,000 people. I know the *CubaSí* in comparison is very small, but I am proud to be writing for it.

V: what makes you proud?
S: Well CSC, the organisation. I believe in what we do; that is why I became a member of CSC a long time ago. And I adore Cuba. I don't adore trying to enrich shareholders. That is not a rewarding job. Coming from there where the working conditions were terrible, to an organisation – that admittedly doesn't pay very well – but where you are respected, and people want you to do better has been great. There has been a fundamental shift there.

Stephen's account highlights the political commitment that a position at CSC can signify for the people involved, and provides some insight into the difficulties of combining political activity with other professions. Stephen also draws attention to the fact that the working environment within CSC is different, and is defined by respect and human relationships. This is another element to be considered in the understanding of everyday life in the dusty office on top of the Red Rose Club. In the office of CSC working relationships are unusually informal, respectful and friendly. In fact – despite the fact that everyone has a defined hierarchical role within the organisation - as far as personal relationships are concerned hierarchies are constantly challenged. Rob often prepared coffees for co-workers and volunteers. Sitting in a circle with tea and biscuits, group meetings had often the feeling of informal conversations. The importance of personal relationships was evident in the way in which working life was un-usually organised. All employees worked only 3-4 days a week; personal issues were respected and often placed ahead of working commitments, and lunch breaks at times lasted up to 2 hours (especially when old volunteers were working during the day). Lunches were real social events; they were moments of fun, exchange and discussion. As we were sitting in the Moroccan Restaurant, the 'salad bar' or the British 'greasy spoon' on Seven Sisters Road, conversations would touch a variety of different issues, also very personal ones, and we would gradually come to know each other a bit better.

The small office on top of the Red Rose Club and its surroundings was the central space of fieldwork. It was within 'the office' that political action was imagined and organised in a way that reached a variety of different social spaces, and encompassed different social contexts by extending through both national and transnational territories. On a daily basis, CSC workers interacted and exchanged information and opinions with the members and organisers of other campaigning organisations, and the Trade Unions. Furthermore, people within CSC would communicate with Cuban institutions or media, in order to construct shared plans of action. These institutions included the Cuban Embassy, the Granma International Newspaper, or Institute of Friendship with the People (ICAP) [11]. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to understand CSC as a defined site of fieldwork (e.g. the office), in which the researcher can enter and exit, according to a classical anthropological understanding of ethnographic research (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997c). As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, in order to engage with this intriguing yet challenging site of research I adopted Marcus' (1998) idea of

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[11] The Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People is an organisation, linked to the Cuban Government that organises the global solidarity movement with Cuba. Its headquarters are in Havana, and as we shall see in chapter six, the institute organises solidarity brigades to Cuba.

ethnographic 'multi-sited imaginary', and acted as participant observer in a variety of different contexts, from the Trade Union conferences, to the work brigade in Cuba. It was by researching the multisided realities within which CSC built its political action that the cartography of a social world started to reveal itself in front of my eyes.

Trade Unions and International Solidarity Campaigns: Connections and Overlaps of a Networked World

Crossing Oxford Street on a Saturday I felt surprised to find it completely deserted. The early morning and its emptiness imposed a surreal atmosphere upon one of London's busiest streets. It was early June and, before I realised it, I found myself once again in front of TUC[12] Congress House. With its 1960s architecture and the sculpture by Jacob Epstein dedicated to the dead trade unionists of the two World Wars in the courtyard, Congress House has been one of the overlapping 'concrete' spaces of my multi-sited ethnographic research (Marcus, 1998). It has been the space where the Latin America Conferences took place, and also the venue for different meetings, wine receptions, and social gatherings. As often occurs in familiar spaces, that morning I knew where to go. I walked down the metal staircase, looked at the TV screens - which were announcing the SERTUC (Southern and Eastern TUC) Conference on Global Solidarity - and found my way to the plenary hall.

The conference hall was semi-full; most of the delegates had already made their ways into the workshop sessions. The chairs in the middle of the room overlooked the main stage, with the SERTUC logo flashing on a screen. On the right hand side of the main hall, I could see the stalls of the international solidarity campaign organisations - amongst which was the one of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. At a first glance, one interesting aspect that could not pass unnoticed was the fact that the different stalls of CSC, the Venezuelan Information Centre (VIC), Justice for Colombia (JFC), Banana Link (BL) or Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) all looked quite similar. They all had fairly plain table covers, similarly designed leaflets, books and T-shirts for sale, the flag of the country they showed solidarity to, and the latest copies of the magazine they produced.

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[12] The Trade Union Congress is the national federation of Trade Unions in Britain. It is comprised of 58 National Unions affiliated with a total of about 6.5 million members. The TUC was founded in 1860, and in 1889 created the Labour Representation Committee, which later became the Labour Party (Cole, 2001:182). The TUC Congress House is located on Great Russell Street in Central London. It was constructed in 1958 as a memorial to the sacrifices made by trade unionists in the two World Wars, and since then has been the headquarters of the TUC Congress.

As I sat down behind the stall of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, with Stephen and Gordon, a 28 year old activist who sits on the Executive Committee, I started noticing that I had seen many of the people present within the plenary room on previous occasions and in different contexts. Suddenly I could picture myself drinking coffee, during the last Latin American Conference at Congress House, talking with Matt from VIC about the difficult times Trade Unions were facing, and the need to constantly merge smaller Trade Unions into bigger ones. I could also see myself discussing with Mark Donne – previous CSC employee who works as a researcher in Parliament - about the importance of a movement in favour of Venezuela. More vividly then ever before, I also re-called the 'peace dinner' - organised just before Christmas by Ken Livingstone in the London Living Room on top of City Hall - where Stuart of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) asked me questions about my work. As I gazed around the plenary room that day, and watched people talking, discussing and interacting I realised that there were strong connections to be traced amongst the different campaigning organisations and the various Trade Unions. These connections started to become clearer when, on the following day, I met the same people and the same organisations at the GMB[13] conference in Brighton.

As the month went by, and I was sent with Dean to Glastonbury to work on the CSC stall in the Leftfield[14], the interconnected reality of CSC, other campaigning organisations and the Trade Unions became more evident then ever before. The night we arrived, it was raining but the mud was still below the ankles. Dean and I left our belongings in the Workers' Beer[15] camp, and as soon as we set up our tent

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[13] GMB is today a British General Union, which has more than 600,000 members working in different fields of the economy. The Union was born at the end of the 19th Century as a Gas Workers and General Union. It won the first battle in 1889, after reducing Gas workers daily hours from 12 hours to 8 (http://www.gmb.org.uk/, date accessed 03/03/08). Many members and organisers of CSC are involved with the union.

[14] The Leftfield is a travelling space for political discussion at music festivals in the UK, with its own stage and the stalls of different political organisations from Trade Unions to campaign organisations. The event is organised by Geoff Martín, organiser of the Battersea and Wandsworth TUC, and sponsored by Cooperative Insurance, the GMB union, the Amicus union (today Unite), Clause IV, Ethical Threads and the Workers' Beer Company. The Left Field was first designed to tackle apathy and promote left-wing politics and trade unionism in young festival goers at the Glastonbury Festival in 2000, and has since trebled in size and is now a regular fixture at Guilfest, Homelands and Glastonbury festivals, and in 2005 at the Edinburgh Fringe.

[15] The Workers' Beer Company raises funds for trades union and campaigning organisations. The Company runs beer tents at large outdoor events, and promotes music festivals and other events to raise money for the labour movement. It also owns different pubs where people can organise political events and gatherings. CSC South London Local Group gathers regularly in the Bread and Roses Pub, in Clapham, which is owned by the Workers' Beer Company.

we met Stuart. Stuart was a Scottish fire-fighter active in the Fire Brigade Union[16] (FBU). Yet he was also a member of the Scottish Cuba Solidarity Campaign and was there at Glastonbury to help with the Justice for Colombia (JFC) stall. In the following days as we shared the stall with JFC in the Leftfield, I noticed how the constructed boundaries amongst organisations were always challenged by the reality of things, and how people belonged to various campaigns or unions at the same time. In the following months of fieldwork, the boundaries between the campaigns and the Trade Unions became, in my own understanding, increasingly thinner. I actually discovered that the overlap between the different organisations defined the everyday realities of these political groups, and was embodied in key figures such as the one of Bernard Regan, who is at the same time a representative of the National Union of Teachers (NUT)[17], the Secretary of CSC and VIC, and a leading figure in PSC.

As emerges from the above description, it was through participant observation within the multisided 'concrete spaces' where CSC builds its political action that the map of a social world started to appear in front of my eyes.   By stressing commonality and overlap between international solidarity campaigns and the Trade Unions, however, I do not wish to claim that the single organisations (and the single Trade Unions) do not have their own history, politics and internal dynamics. However, I want to argue that the history of the different organisations as well as their political culture is constantly interconnected. This point becomes evident if we consider the history of the international campaigning organisations that had their stalls at the SERTUC Conference on Global Solidarity.

The Venezuela Information Centre (VIC) was launched in May, 2005 at an event sponsored by major Trade Unions. Today the organisation has approximately a thousand members, and campaigns in defence of Hugo Chàvez's Government and the Bolivarian Revolution. Its representatives and organisers - such as Bernard Regan or Francisco Dominguez - are also members of the Executive Committee of

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[16] The Fire Brigade Union (FBU) was established at the end of the First World War, in 1918 in London. Although being a relatively small union, with only 48,000 members, its voice within the Trade Union Congress (TUC) is influential. The FBU disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 2004, as a protest against he way in which the Labour Government had handled the firefighters' strike in the winter of 2002-2003, (http://www.fbu.org.uk/, date accessed: 05/09/2008). There are many different interconnections between CSC and the FBU, in terms of people and common actions. Furthermore, *The Firefighter*, which is FBU's internal magazine, regularly publishes articles on Cuba written by CSC.

[17] The National Union of Teachers (NUT) was born in 1870, its headquarters are located since 1915 in Mabledon Place in Central London, WC1. Today, NUT has almost 300,000 members, (http://www.teachers.org.uk/ date accessed: 05/09/2008).

the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. Its first paid worker, Matt Willgress, used to work for CSC. Also, Justice for Colombia (JFC) was established by a group of trade unionists, who were interested in creating an organisation that campaigned for social justice and workers' rights in Colombia. JFC was funded in 2002 out of an alliance between the TUC international department and some of the organisers of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, an already existing grassroots organisation.

After a year, the organisers of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign withdrew their commitment and support and abandoned the project of Justice for Columbia. This choice was motivated by the fact that the Colombia Solidarity Campaign maintained an anti-imperialist stance and also criticised the wrongdoings of British companies abroad. This stance clashed with the policy of the Trade Union Congress, which is first and foremost interested in supporting British workers. Today, therefore, JFC is organised and managed by people who are primarily linked to the TUC international department. JFC and CSC are often involved in the organisation of joint trade union fringes or events, and together with VIC, create networks of solidarity and action between Latin American trade unionists and British workers.

The creation of solidarity networks between Latin American and British trade unions is also the primary concern of Banana Link, the other organisation which had mounted its stall at the SERTUC Conference for Global Solidarity. Banana Link is a small non-profit organisation which was funded in 1996 and campaigns for a fair and sustainable trade of bananas in Latin America and the Caribbean Region. Banana Link works on a Union to Union project which builds solidarity links between Latin American Banana Trade Unions and the British Trade Unions. The other organisation that was present at the SERTUC Conference for Global Solidarity was the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. PSC was founded in 1982, and is the largest international solidarity organisation, which does not focus on Latin America. However, many of the people involved with PSC are also active members in campaigns such as CSC or VIC. Furthermore, similar to these international organisations PSC also engages in the construction of workers' solidarity networks, and works closely with the major unions in the UK.

The different international solidarity organisations share similar strategies, activities and understandings of political action. These activities include: participation in Trade Union events and organisation of fringe meetings; lobbying of Members of Parliament and organisation of public meetings in the House of Commons; media action; and participation in festivals and events with the specific aim of promoting their cause. Furthermore, it must be noted that these organisations all have a similar structure, in the sense that they all rely on the

decision of an executive committee which is democratically elected at annual general meetings. As the next part of this chapter will show, it is when one traces the overlap of spaces, people and practices that the *cartography* of this social world starts to emerge. It is a cartography that is constantly constructed not only through the making of political networks, but also through an effective politics of exclusion, and the construction of imagined spaces of political opposition.

Networks, Connections and Disconnections: The Making of a Social World and the Problem of Networks

As emerges in the previous part, it was by observing the organisation of space at TUC Congress house that I started to realise that the Cuba Solidarity Campaign was embedded in a networked social world. In the social sciences, in recent years, the notion of space has become central to contemporary social, economic, and political understandings generating a breadth of different perspectives from Giddens, to Baudrillard, to Virilio (Hubbard *et al*, 2004). Influenced by key works in philosophy and geography, that have shown how space is socially produced through everyday practice (Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991), the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences was partly triggered by debates on globalisation and the network society. In anthropology 'space' is a fundamental concept. This is not only because participant observation as methodology constantly requires that the anthropologist engages with the lived space of his/her informants, but also because, as the anthropology of embodiment (e.g. Bourdieu) or the ethnography of organisations (Dale and Burrell, 2008:4) have shown, from the observation of how space is divided, organised and embodied, social researchers can reach fundamental insights on the hierarchical structures and power relations of a social group.

The organisation of space of Congress House that day enabled me to shed some light on the complex dynamics of the social world of CSC. This was especially relevant when I took into account the *presences* as well as the *absences*. The very presence of the campaign stalls on the right hand side of the main hall provided me with a visible representation of the bound relation between solidarity campaign organisations and the Trade Unions, and highlighted the political and economic networks that were established between them. The creation of political networks with the Trade Unions is of central importance for campaigning organisations. This is because, Trade Unions are for these organisations a platform though which their 'voice can be heard'[18] and thus through which they can gain political influence. In this regard, the below extract from and interview with Rob is insightful:

    V: Why does CSC need the Trade Unions?

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[18] Rob Miller's words addressing CSC's Annual General Meeting in June, 2007.

R: Well, because they have seven million members, and we would like people to know about Cuba. You know Cuba is a socialist country and it's got Trade Unions, and there is obviously a direct link between the Trade Unions of Cuba and the Trade Unions of Britain. So it's a very good area for us to work in. You know if we only worked in the Labour Party we wouldn't go very far at the moment!

V: why?

R: Because the Labour Party is in favour of the Iraq war! Not in favour of socialist Cuba! Whereas Trade Unions are open to discussion and debate; they are collective organisations with events, money, resources. If we can put an article on a journal of a Trade Union, I mean we just agreed in making a Trade Union leaflet about Cuba that reaches 50.000 people and that's great. To arrive to that number of people directly is not a bad game. And if you put an article in a Trade Union journal you might reach half a million people, and there is no other media of the Left where we can do that.

V: so that's why CSC needs the Trade Unions I completely understand.

R: we don't need them, but it's a good relationship. We existed before we had a good relationship with Trade Unions.

V: yes, but – at the time - the BCRC's main goal was to bind effective ties with the unions.

R: you are right, but Trade Unions were not receptive at the time.

V: why?

R: well, because of a different leadership. Now they are more Left, receptive, more internationalist. Trade Unions at the moment are better than they were 20 years ago. Leaders come and go. At the moment, you have a really good Trade Union movement. It's good for us.

V: But if you are to think in terms of political activism do you think the Trade Unions are 'institutionalising' politics in some way?

R: You've got to institutionalise politics. You have to have institutions of the Left. If you don't have institutions of the Left you don't go anywhere...you need to organise. Not getting over-board and getting too bureaucratic about it, but without Trade Unions how are you going to collectively negotiate without having an

institution to help you, and facilitate it. They are institutions, and they are good institutions of the Left and we need more institutions of the Left.

V: Ok I do understand why Trade Unions are good for CSC, but the question is: what do the Unions get out of this relationship?

R: that's a good point. I mean some do it for political reasons, but you don't know really what the reasons are. At the moment the main reason why we have got relations with Trade Unions is that you have got progressive left wing leaders, and a lot of those people are supportive of Cuba - as they are supportive of Palestine or Venezuela or whatever so - they are progressive people, and they want to be internationalists. Yeah I guess internationalism is their reason.

As Rob points out the relationship with the Trade Unions is largely beneficial for international campaign organisations, in terms of funds, resources, and political influence. Yet, the relationship also entails a series of obligations. One of which is that campaigning organisations have to incorporate Union representatives in their executive committees. In the executive committee of CSC, for instance, of twenty seven members, seven are official Trade Unions representatives and one represents the *Morning Star*[19]. This entails that when these representatives are contradictory figures, the organisations themselves cannot (or should not, for obvious political interests) decide to replace them unless they decide it with the Trade Union involved.

Noticing that the relationship between Trade Unions and campaigning organisations involves a series of obligations does not imply – however - that international campaigns are totally subservient to the Trade Unions. On the contrary, within organisations such as CSC there seems to be a tension between a need to associate with the Trade Unions and a desire for independence from them. Individual membership is, for campaigning organisations, an important measure of their degree of independence from the influence of Trade Unions or political parties. In this context, therefore, CSC has much more of an independent activity in

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[19] The *Morning Star* daily was launched in 1930s as the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and was known as the *Daily Worker*. In 1966 it was re-launched as *Morning Star*, and since then it has been produced by a co-operative of people from the Labour party. Today the newspaper is an integral coordinator of the Trade Union movement, (http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/index.php, date accessed 02/01/2007). The Cuba Solidarity Campaign constantly publishes news and information on Cuba in the *Morning Star*.

comparison to organisations such as Justice for Colombia that was born as a trade union campaign and relies entirely on the support from the Unions.

As emerges from Rob's interview, the Trade Unions on the other hand strongly rely on campaigning organisations in order to promote an ideology of internationalism and a particular understanding of international solidarity. When I interviewed some senior representatives in UNISON, CWU or PCS[20], who are also important figures within CSC, they explained that for them international solidarity campaigns were really important. Organisations such as CSC and VIC work towards the construction of international trade unionism, and this is crucial for trade union organisations. For this reason trade unions not only affiliate to solidarity campaigns, but they also provide different types of economic support. Economic support comes in many ways and forms; it could be expressed through the funding of projects and events, or by giving campaigning organisation venues and resources upon which they can rely. Particularly interesting in this regard is the fact that, in April 2008, CSC moved office from the Red Rose Club to an office free of rent given in solidarity by UNITE.

In the ethnographic context of CSC, therefore, the concept of network seems to be a fundamental analytical and methodological tool. This is because it is only by tracing the networks established between campaigning organisations and Trade Unions that we can shed some light on the social world in which CSC is embedded.

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[20] UNISON, CWU and PCS were born in the last decade, out of the merge between different unions. Between 1979 and 2000, union membership has largely declined. To get an idea of this decline it is important to look at the numbers presented by the TUC website. In 1979, for instance, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) membership was 2,086,000 (making it easily the largest union then); by 2000 it had fallen to fallen to 858,000. Over the same period, the 253,000 members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) had shrunk to 5,000. To face this situation, in the last two decades different unions have been forced to merge, and this merging activity has defined much of my fieldwork with CSC.

Union mergers in the public services were dominated by the creation in 1993 of UNISON (which has remained the largest union since) and the eventual emergence in 1998 of one very large civil service union, the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), covering all but the top and specialist grades. The formation of the CWU in post and telecommunications in 1995 crossed the divide between public and private ownership. Most large unions continued to absorb smaller ones in the private sector. AEEU and MSF merged in AMICUS in 2002, which then merged with the TGWU to form UNITE in 2007 (Trade Union Congress Website http://www.unionhistory.info/timeline/1960_2000_5.php, date accessed 03/05/09). UNISON, PCS and UNITE have strong connections with CSC, which are usually supported by personal relationships between leaders of the Union and organisers of CSC. One example of this is provided by the fact that Bob Oram - who is a National Representative of UNISON - is also a very good friend of Rob, and Tasha's boyfriend.

As mentioned earlier, in the social movement literature the concept of network is of fundamental importance. This is because many have argued for the impossibility of understanding collective action without analysing the social and political networks that make social protest possible (Diani and Della Porta, 1999; Diani, 2003; Castells, 1997; Melucci, 1996; Tarrow, 1998). According to Diani and Della Porta, for instance, the very definition of social movements lies on the notion of social *network* (1999:117).

In the last decade, as a result of the recent techno-historical developments, the concept of network has gained a new prominence in social analysis. Following the work of Castells (1996, 1997) scholars started to perceive the 'network' as a privileged mode of social organisation; a mode that was diffused and sustained by the very extension of new information and communication technologies. Particularly influential for the growth of interest in the concept of network was the work of Bruno Latour (2005), who argued that the social was defined by a networked interconnection between human and non-human agents. The work of Latour will be discussed in further detail in future chapters. Latour contended that anthropology is unable to follow these networks (Knox *et al*, 2006). Indeed, for him, the discipline's focus on face-to-face interactions limits the ability to acquire a more general perspective on the making of networks within society.

In contrast to Latour, Strathern (1996) has argued that anthropology is perfectly capable of following networks, between people, technologies and representations. However, as Strathern has shown – and as this research project aims to show - the type of knowledge on *networks* that anthropology can produce is very different from the sociological one (1996:521). In fact, scholars such as Barry (2001) or Latour (2005) maintain a distance from the lives of the people they are focused on, in such a way that people become abstractions in the description of a scientific process (Knox *et al*, 2006:127). On the contrary, anthropological approaches to the study of networks place human actions and beliefs at the centre of their analysis. In focusing their analysis on human action and beliefs, anthropologists more then sociologists are confronted with the problematic nature of networks in everyday practice, with their fragility (Edelman, 2005), and with the fact that networks are constructed through complex human processes of negotiation.

During fieldwork, the embedded dynamism and mobility of the network as a methodological and analytical approach has enabled me not only to map the complex social interactions between different organisations, but – as we shall see in the next chapter – to better understand the role techno-social spaces play in the making of a social movement. However, as mentioned, in using the concept of

network to understand and describe the ethnographic reality of CSC, I also encountered two main problems. In the first place, similar to Green's (2002:185-187) research on women's organisations in London and Manchester, I was confronted with the problem that the reliance on the concept of network – and therefore *connection* - obscured the continuing importance and power of *disconnections*. In fact, as emerged during fieldwork, interconnections and overlap among organisations are only one aspect of the social world of CSC. Another important aspect to be taken into account is the way in which alliances and networks serve to exclude *other* organisations and political groups.

This is particularly evident if we return again to the layout of the SERTUC main hall on the day of the Global Solidarity Conference, and analyse it not in terms of the presence of CSC, VIC, JFC, BL and PSC, but if we consider the absence of *other* Latin American solidarity campaigns. Here I am referring to organisations such as the previously mentioned *Colombia Solidarity Campaign*, or *Hands Off Venezuela* (HoV)*,* and *Rock Around the Blockade* (RATB). The SERTUC Conference on Global Solidarity was not the first time in which the stalls of these organisations were not present. At the Latin America Conferences in 2007 and 2008, the stalls of these organisations were not allocated a place (even by paying). On all these occasions, the organisations pitched the area *outside* Congress House with their leaflets and stalls in order to address conference delegates.

Looking at the history of these organisations sheds some light on the politics of exclusion that are promoted by the Trade Unions and campaigning groups such as CSC. *Hands off Venezuela* (HoV) was born right after the attempted coup in Venezuela in 2002. Therefore, when the *Venezuela Information Centre* (VIC) was founded, Hands off Venezuela already existed. As one of the organisers of the group told me, at the time HoV made numerous attempts to create a network of solidarity and establish the ground for collaboration with VIC. The organisers of VIC however always rejected this alliance, on the basis that the people involved with HoV were linked to the *Socialist Appeal*, a British publication produced by a group of British Trotskyists active in the Labour Party. The history of *Rock Around the Blockade* and its relationship with CSC is similar in many ways, with the exception that CSC was founded before RATB. The group was established in 1995, by the *Revolutionary Communist Group*. The Revolutionary Communist group evolved from the "Revolutionary Opposition" in the International Socialists (forerunners of the Socialist Workers Party). It publishes the *Fight Racism Fight Imperialism Newspaper*. Both groups share Trotskyist perspectives of internationalism, anti-imperialist views, and the belief for the necessity of a socialist revolution in Britain.

These beliefs and political ideas are considered by CSC organisers and members as utopian and counter-productive, and they do not wish to be associated with such forms of politics. Hence, through everyday practices the people involved with CSC or VIC are constantly engaged in making sure that the boundaries between them and groups such as HoV and RATB are clear and defined. In this framework, instead of focusing on the making of networks, CSC and VIC would focus on the destruction of network, and on processes of disconnection. These processes, according to some informants who wish to remain anonymous, are constantly strengthened by power elites such as the International Department of the TUC, which have specific political interests in legitimising the work of one solidarity organisation over another.[21] All these findings suggest that the concept of network (and connection) as a methodological and analytical tool can be extremely problematic, because it overshadows the importance of disconnection. The networks that are established between organisations such as VIC, CSC or TUC are equally important in terms of social significance to the *absence* of networks between these organisations and groups such as Hands off Venezuela or Rock Around the Blockade.

The concept of network as a tool for ethnographic analysis of a social movement is problematic for a further reason. This is reflected in the fact that an organisation like CSC engages its everyday activity in the construction of infinite numbers of networks with other organisations. However, for the people involved, different networks have different levels of significance. When I first started fieldwork, I analysed CSC's website and looked at the page on 'networks'. There I found a list of links to national and transnational organisations, and believed that I could get in contact with the members and organisers of this groups to acquire data on CSC's national and transnational networks of action. When I asked Rob to explain the connection between these organisations and CSC, he told me that those links had been established in 1998 - shortly after the website was launched – but that they soon lost contact with those campaigns and groups. Those networks for the people involved with CSC had little significance.

During fieldwork I was confronted with a number of situations similar to this one, where it became clear that for the people involved some networks had a meaning and others did not. For CSC the networks that had a real meaning were the ones that were being negotiated within concrete political spaces - such as TUC

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[21] As we have seen with reference to the example of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, TUC leaders oppose anti-imperialist politics because it undermines the interest of British workers abroad.

Congress House or the London Living Room of City Hall.[22] It was by analysing the different networking practices of CSC that I reached the conclusion that - as White (1992) suggested – a social network is first and foremost a network of meaning (White, 1992:97). White's contribution was central to the understanding of networks, and largely influenced the work of those scholars – especially within anthropology - who started to understand the network not merely as a form of social organisation, but as a cultural construct that is socially produced (Green, 2002; Green *et al.* 2005; Knox, *et al.* 2006; Riles, 2001; Strathern, 1996). The understanding that social networks are culturally and socially constructed prompts a reflection on the cognitive maps through which social actors make sense of, and categorize, their social environment (Diani, 2003:5).

Inspired by these perspectives, I found it necessary to create a concept that would enable me to analyse networks by looking at the larger picture: one that considered the boundaries and disconnections, as well as the shared experiences and ideological constructions that made networks meaningful. Therefore, I have coined the term *ethnographic cartography*. By relying on the idea of 'map', my goal was to uncover that networking processes are linked to practices and narratives of place-making (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b; Green et al, 2005). Here it is important to point out that my understanding of ethnographic cartography draws heavily from the work of Bruno Latour (1988, 2005), who has argued that the social is "not a special domain, a specific realm, or particular sort of thing, but only a very peculiar movement of re-association and re-assembling"(2005:7). In this framework, I understand the map of a social world as being created by alliances and associations, which are constantly constructed and destroyed within complex social networks of power. An ethnographic cartography is intended here more as a movement, as something that is constantly in the process of being constructed rather than as a structured reality.

The concept of ethnographic cartography, therefore, enables us to understand that networking processes create different 'spaces' of ethnographic enquiry which interact with one another in the construction of everyday social experience. As the next part of this chapter will show, the 'ethnographic cartography' of a social world does not only develop upon the 'concrete' spaces where political and economic networks are made and unmade, such as the main hall at Congress House. It is also constructed by the imagined spaces of identity narratives and shared

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[22] Following the election of Boris Johnson as Mayor of London, and the growing success of the Conservative Party within the London Assembly, the London Living Room as a space of political action, might have lost its significance for the people of CSC. This could open an entire discussion on the meaning of space, and how networks of action construct specific political spaces.

experiences, which create the basis for commonality amongst networked organisations.

Identity Narratives and Shared Experiences: Mapping the Imagined Spaces of an Ethnographic Cartography

As mentioned elsewhere, when I first entered CSC, and was introduced to office workers, members and volunteers, I started to acquire the certainty that I had been thrown into a profoundly British, white, middle-aged, middle class reality. Despite some members coming from different Latin American backgrounds, overall people within CSC are usually British nationals, who identify strongly with Cuba. Travelling to Cuba, participating in the work brigade, and building relationships with Cubans is highly regarded amongst members, organisers, and volunteers. The trans-national relationship with Cuba is a strong emotional and political motive within CSC, one that is central to the organisation's everyday life. A quote taken from an article published on the *CubaSí* (Summer, 04) by Ruth Winters of the Fire Brigade Union can offer a firm example of this:

> "The best way to learn about Cuba is to go there, see it yourself. When you see the reality, push yourself a bit further. Imagine what they could do with their economic freedom restored. Imagine what it would be like in the way of infrastructure, economic development, mediation and eradication of poverty; imagine what it would be like without the blockade. But don't stop at imagining get involved. It is said that Cuba gets into your blood and it certainly got into mine."(Summer, 2004:14)

Direct experience of Cuba is highly regarded within CSC, and a similar attitude can also be found in the other solidarity organisations that are working with Latin America. The idea is that people should build on their own lived experience of the country in order to construct political involvement. Although direct experience of the country is of fundamental importance in creating a common ground for the people involved within CSC, what seems to be far more important is the *image* of Cuba and the way in which this relates directly to people's own self-identification.

Within CSC and its networked world Cuba is an image, one that is constantly constructed primarily by alternative media practices; an image that is highly evocative and has much more to say about people's relationship to British politics than their relationship to the island. Cuba is an imagined space, one that is constructed in comparison to Britain through a powerful *game of mirrors*. By

exoticising Cuba in extremely positive terms, its image is constantly placed in radical opposition to Britain through ideologically powerful dichotomies, such as collectivism vs. individualism, public interest vs. private interest, humanitarian policies vs. market-led policies. This process of comparison is evident in the construction of news pieces and articles which appear on the *CubaSí*. Positive news of Cuba is often discussed with reference to a negative situation in Britain. An example of this can be found in the introductory paragraph of a news-piece on a Cuban student who toured Britain. The article stated:

> "Shortly before 20,000 students demonstrated for 'Grants not Fees' in London a young Cuban student toured the UK as a guest of CSC. She talked about free education in third world Cuba, and the 'Battle of Ideas' to raise Cubans' cultural, educational and social level..." (*CubaSí*, Winter 1999:18).

The game of mirrors between Cuba and Britain is sustained by the shared idea amongst members and organisers that Cuba represents an example, an alternative reality which helps to highlight the contradiction of the political system in Britain, and possibly transform it. This latter point is better explained by Trish:

> **T**: Our aim is to give a voice to Cuba in Britain, although it isn't the voice of Cuba, because we are not the Cuban Embassy and we don't say what the Cuban Embassy says. But we put Cuba in context in Britain to try to explain what is good about Cuba, what its achievements are, and how it can serve as an example for change here."

One fascinating aspect of the *game of mirrors* between Cuba and Britain is that this is often played on notions of class conflict, where Cuban achievements are compared to the achievements of the working classes in Britain. In this respect, I found it extremely interesting that at a South London CSC meeting a volunteer and organiser in her fifties, Morag, compared the Cuban health achievements to the working classes' battle for the NHS in the UK just after the Second World War. For many within CSC, the Cuban Government had done for its citizens and workers what they believed the Labour Government should have done for them. Indeed, as I have been told once by Jan, who volunteered regularly for CSC: "The example of Cuba shows to all of us the lost promises of the Labour government, in terms of public health, and free education." As can be seen, Cuba – as an imagined space - is what brings people together in collective forms of political action.

Also, class within CSC is a powerful form of political identification and imagination. Most people within the office come from working class origins. Often personal narratives reveal a background of poverty, financial uncertainties and social injustice; a background of parents working as servants, in the factories, or in local fish and chip shops. This is evident within the personal history of Trish:

T: I don't come from a politically active family at all, they were never members of a political party; they were never active. I grew up in a little village. But there was nothing happening.

V: Where was the village?

T: In Essex. It's only about 50 miles away from here, but it's a completely different world from London, and there is nothing. It was just farming area; well it was farming area when I was growing up but now there is nothing there. And also my family didn't have any Trade Union background.

V: So your mum and your dad weren't members of any trade union?

T: No my mum worked in fields and factories when I was growing up. I suppose for the way I was brought up, you know we hadn't any money, I had some sense of justice or injustice, which led me towards a law degree in college. So I studied law and during my first year at college, I read about law centres. The idea was that of representing people in areas of law where there're no lawyers representing them, areas that are not profitable for lawyers at all. But the idea was to help people, sort out their lives; defend them against injustices. In my first year of college I started to become politically aware, and got involved in student campaigns. But in the law department there was almost no one politically active. So I tried to connect with other bits of the college, but also I decided to qualify as a solicitor so that I could work in a law centre, and like that I felt that I had a purpose. I didn't want to make any money or anything. And, that's what I did. So when I was at college it's when my political activity started.

V: And those were the Thatcher years...

T: Absolutely! Oh yeah I was at college between 1983 and 1986. I moved to London in 1983, which was when Thatcherism was really taking hold, and within my first year the Tories abolished the GLC (Greater London Council) - which you know now Ken Livingstone and the GLA (Greater London Assembly) has kind of re-enacted - in

a different form and for different times. But you know Ken Livingstone was in charge of the GLC at that time, and that was abolished from the Tories' government. And there was also the miners' strike, and I participated in helping people to collect money and all that. My political activity however, was kind of ignorant but I sort of had a sense of injustice.

In Trish's biographical account, class conflict defined her life experience as she grew up in the Thatcher years, and triggered her own political involvement. Within CSC many others shared a similar biographical experience and this impacted on their understanding of political action. The recognition that class is an important space of identification brings us to the very heart of debates on the notion of 'new social movements' and their relation to identity politics. As I have explained in the introduction to this thesis, the creation of identity politics, as a term, was born out of a theoretical approach that recognises an historical shift from movements based on objective class relations to movements based on subjective identities (Hall in Collier et al. 1995: 213). In the new social movements literature, there has been a widespread understanding that 'new' social movements were 'new' because they were grounded in civil society, were based on issues of identity rather than class, were trans-nationally interconnected, democratically organised, and were independent from the state (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Castells, 1983; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Melucci, 1996; Touraine, 1985). On a similar line of thought, Byrne (1997) explained that in the last 30 years there has been the rise of a 'new' type of politics in Britain: the politics of social movements and campaigning organisations who detached themselves from class politics and from the fixed classifications of the left/right, focused their political participation on single issues, and confused the lines between the personal and the political (1997:1-25).

Different scholars, and especially anthropologists, have shown (Alvarez, 1998; Escobar, 2004; Gledhill, 1994; Pratt, 2003; Fox and Starn, 1997) that the idea of imputing common characteristics to social and political struggles, such as the ones of being devoid of class identification, is itself deceiving. In this framework the works of Pratt (2003) and Escobar (2004) are a pivotal example of this, because they have shown how class is still a fundamental feature of contemporary political movements. For this reason, in understanding the ethnographic context of CSC we must take into account the fact that, as Escobar (2004) has argued with reference to black activists in Colombia, the focus on identity should not exclude issues of class, but should instead recognise new forms of class identification.

One important aspect that emerged during fieldwork was that, in people's biographical accounts, class boundaries were constantly blurred and confused. Indeed, on the one hand university education, work, and a reasonable degree of wealth[23] places them amongst the middle classes. On the other hand, within everyday conversations, anecdotes and jokes, people place a strong emphasis on working class imaginaries and origins. Similar to what emerged in Walkerdine *et al's* (2001) study on working class girls, therefore, within CSC class also seems to have become more of a subjective/emotional matter, rather than as something which is the result of an 'objective' fact, such as wealth or labour.

Furthermore, amongst CSC there is another element that plays a central role when reflecting on class, namely what Walkerdine et al identify as the "left's fantasy of the middle classes for which the working class is seen as the 'phantasmatic site of revolutionary consciousness" (2001:17). In fact, for many CSC members and organisers, class is more of an imagined space than a real-life experience. This pattern emerged within a conversation I had with Tasha, the Communication officer at CSC. Although recognising the fact that she should be classified as middle class, she told me that since she was a very young girl she perfectly knew on 'which side to stand'.

> **T**: One time I asked my father what was the difference between the higher classes and the working classes, and he replied that an easy way to think about it was by looking at the difference between the Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood. Since then, I knew on which side to stand".

Like the image of Cuba, which is constructed through the game of mirrors, also class constitutes an imagined space for political identification. In order to better understand these imagined spaces that bring people together in collective forms of political action, we need to take into account the *historic-political context* in which CSC as organisation developed and from which these spaces are constructed. By talking of historic-political context instead of merely historical context I intend to stress the importance of understanding history in relation to political transformations when understanding the creation of imagined spaces for political identification. My argument is that it is people's shared understanding of the historic-political context in which they lived that creates the basis on which people can build their own political understandings and identifications.

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[23] Some of them being also property owners.

A key concept that can be of help in this discussion is Pratt's idea of *identity narrative* (Pratt 2003). Pratt has argued that we should understand identity as narrative, and therefore recognise the way in which this is organised on two different axes. One is the *biographical axis*, which establishes who we are through the medium of time. The other is the *hierarchical axis*, which suggests who 'we' are, through opposition and the creation of the *other* (2003:10). The previous part of this chapter has already explored the importance of the hierarchical axis in mapping this social world. It did so by mentioning the politics of exclusion that are constantly created and legitimised by CSC and its political alliances. Indeed, as it has been shown organisations such as *Rock Around the Blockade* or *Hands off Venezuela*, were often constructed as an imagined *other* (Said, 1978). Here, however, I wish to focus on the biographical aspect.

The biographical aspect of identity narrative is of fundamental importance, because it explains - to a certain degree - the way in which political belonging is constructed through time, and therefore through various historical contexts and political discourses. One aspect that surprised me in talking to people at CSC was the fact that they referred to different political discourses and historical contexts when defining themselves politically. Class consciousness, feminist discourses, anti-racist political understandings, anti-globalisation ideals were all brought together in fairly clear narratives of political belonging. What fascinated me most was to notice how, although fragmented and complex, identity narratives often overlapped, or followed similar paths, creating the ground for shared experiences and understandings.

It is by looking at this very personal interconnection of identity narratives that we can shed some light on the meaning of networking practices between solidarity campaigns and the Trade Unions. Most importantly, it is by looking at the intersection of identity narrative that we can better understand the personal experiences, beliefs and understandings which create the basis for the construction of this networked social world. This is a world where internationalism, solidarity, progressive policies, activism, workers' rights, collectivism, and participatory democracy constitute the means for the construction of shared meanings. It is a world where people have fought against the Thatcher government; have seen the rise of New Labour 'hoping and praying that what Tony Blair was doing was just talk to get the Conservatives out of power'.[24] Most importantly, this is also the world where the researcher is confronted with a profound sense of disillusion. This emerges effectively from an interview with Tasha:

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[24] Quote taken from an informal conversation with a CSC worker.

V: what do you identify with?

T: (silence) what do I identify with? (Pronounced more as a statement to take time...) (Silence) that's a fucking good question Veronica! (silence). I don't know actually, I don't know. With people on the Left, I suppose, who agree with the same things that I agree with.

V: ok... and what are these?

T: equality, anti-racism, internationalism, anti-war, equal rights, equal pay...

V: and in this framework how far do you consider yourself related to the Trade Union movement. Do you identify with it?

T: Oh yes, anyone of the Left would have to be really closely identified with it because that's where the left in this country comes from. The Trade Unions have set up the Labour Party. The most progressive movements in this country all come from the Trade Unions and are funded by them. Maybe not all but certainly the ones that have achieved something (silence). Although I am beginning to feel that the Trade Unions Movement is slightly more moribund now (laughs) and it's losing its way because of its link to the Labour Party that's completely (silence).... gone against everything that the Labour Party should, or that everyone thought the Labour Party should stand for! In this regard it is interesting to question how much do I identify with the Trade Unions. In my current role, I have to identify, because I mean we wouldn't exist without the support we get from the Trade Unions. The people in the Trade Unions hold on to notions of internationalism; Left causes are close to their heart! That's very important for us, it's what we are.

 T: When Labour came to power I had really, really high expectations because it was brilliant, it was a party, and there was a real sense of hope. I thought: what's going to happen? It's going to be fantastic! I was looking forward to major transformations. But then everything turned into a fucking nightmare. And now you have to really re-consider whether you vote for them again.

V: But what did you think it would do? What are according to you those 'major transformations' that didn't occur?

T: It's not so much about the major transformation that didn't occur. Because, you know, when it comes down to it, there are still

major parts in the capitalist system, which are not going to change despite the government. It's the bad things that they did. That you didn't expect them to do, like start dismantling the NHS or carrying on supporting arms trade, and the wars. Before the election I always identified really clearly as a Labour voter, since the election, possibly since working at CSC as well, but now I don't know.

Tasha's standpoint is widely shared within CSC and other networked organisations. One late evening at the office, I was having a cup of tea with Trish and Frank – the eldest member of CSC who sits on the executive committee and volunteers on a weekly basis for the campaign. As we chatted about the political situation in Britain, details emerged on how after the years of opposition to Thatcher, they looked at the rise of New Labour with positive scepticism: they believed in it whilst being at the same time critical. That the politics of New Labour contrasted with their own ideologies and interests was evident much before the 1997 general elections with the change of the party's constitution in 1994. Yet, as Frank explained, people on the Left hoped that the Labour government would bring about social transformation. The overall feeling of hope is expressed also in the winter 1996-97 issue of *CubaSí*, where a full page is dedicated to the statements of Labour MPs on changing attitudes towards Cuba. Yet disillusionment was soon to prevail. The following issue of the magazine publishes a letter[25] from Tony Blair in which he "makes it clear that the Labour leader is more in line with US thinking than the Conservative party (*CubaSí*, Spring, 1997:7)."

If the first seeds of disillusionment have to be found, as Frank suggested, before the 1997 elections, discontent was strengthened in the first five years of New Labour governance, when – as Rob pointed out – "people have seen the country involved in one war after another from Kosovo to Afghanistan". The escalation to disillusionment seems to have reached its peak in 2003. According to Ben, a worker at *Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (CND) and member of CSC and VIC, for instance, with the failure of the 2003 antiwar movement things have dramatically changed and scepticism and discontent pervaded the political scene in Britain. From my conversations with people within CSC and other campaigning organisations it seems that the 2003 events affected older and younger generations in similar ways. Frank told me that he started voting Labour in 1945 and stopped in 2003.

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[25] It is interesting to notice that the letter is dated June 1995, yet *CubaSí* only publishes it in the Spring 1997, issue.

Discontent, disillusionment and scepticism in the Labour Party and in governmental politics in general are therefore pervasive elements of the social world of CSC. In this context people's identifications with Cuba and Latin American politics acquire a great social significance, which should be contextualised by looking at Laclau's concept of *dislocation*. For Laclau (1990) all identities are dislocated. This is because identities are discursive constructs that clash with the reality/structure of things. According to him the feeling of dislocation, although traumatic, is also a condition of possibility, of social and political creation and re-articulation. For Laclau, dislocation makes radical politics possible, because people become politically involved and construct their identities as a response to this feeling of dislocation (1990:60-65).

His argument, I find, fits very well with the standpoint of this research, and in particular with the understanding of a bound interconnection between alienation – intended here as a feeling of distance - and imagination as a political project. As this last part of the chapter has shown Latin America, for the social world of CSC, like class, is an important imagined space where individual understandings and experiences become shared images for political identification and action. These powerful forms of imagination, this thesis will show, can shed some light on the reality of social movements in Britain today, and on the creative ways in which people imagine new possibilities.

Conclusion

In introducing the concept of *ethnographic cartography* this chapter played on the notion of space. Space was intended here in the concrete sense as describing the different overlapping sites in which the Cuba Solidarity campaign builds its political action. At the same time, space was also understood in its imagined sense as being constructed through practices of imagination that guarantee political identification and cohesion of a group. Concrete and imagined spaces, it has been argued, provide us with important keys of analysis on the social, political, ideological and biographical levels of the social world that will be described in this thesis. The aim of this chapter was to map these spaces.

At first therefore, the discussion looked at the lived space of CSC's office and described its hectic yet at the same time personal working life. As has been mentioned, working for an organisation such as CSC is 'not just a job' for the people involved. It is more a life choice triggered by a will to professionalize one's own political activism and social commitment. The dusty office on Seven Sisters Road with its hectic life and cardboard boxes, therefore, was the first coordinate of this research. However, by referring to the SERTUC conference on Global

Solidarity, it has been argued that the everyday reality of CSC is a complex one, which extends through a variety of multi-sited and networked spaces of fieldwork. In fact, it has been argued that the Cuba Solidarity Campaign is embedded in a social world of great interest that is constructed through the making and unmaking of networks between international campaigning organisations, the Trade Unions, the *Morning Star Daily* and other political factions in Britain. In other words, the Cuba Solidarity Campaign – alongside many other organisations – is one of the many actors in the making of a networked political movement.

In describing the social reality of CSC, therefore, I have suggested that the concept of *network* seems to be a fundamental analytical and methodological tool. This is because it is only by tracing the networks established between campaigning organisations and Trade Unions that we can shed some light on the social world in which CSC is embedded. However, during fieldwork I encountered two main problems in using the network approach. In the first place, I have noticed that although networks and connections were central in the making of a political movement, equally important for ethnographic enquiry was the absence of networks, or in other words, the disconnections between CSC and 'other' organisations such as the *Rock Around the Blockade* or *Hands Off Venezula.* Therefore, drawing from Green (2002) I was concerned about the fact that an emphasis on networks and connections would overshadow the social significance of disconnections.

The second problem I encountered during fieldwork was related to the social meaning of networks, and the fact that although networking processes defined the everyday reality of CSC, different networks had different meanings for the people involved. In the light of this experience, I have argued that it is important to understand *networks* not merely as a form of social organisation, but as cultural constructs that are socially produced. One important implication of understanding networks as being culturally and socially constructed is that it prompts a reflection on the cognitive maps through which social actors make sense of and categorize their social environment (Diani, 2003:5). In other words, if we want to understand the meaning of networks, we must analyse the shared values, beliefs and experiences that bring people together in networked forms of political action.

By introducing the concept of *ethnographic cartography,* therefore, my intention was to propose an approach that simultaneously traced the political networks between organisations, and explored the shared biographical experiences and ideological constructions that made these networks possible. As has been shown the social world of CSC is not only constituted by the interconnection of concrete spaces of political action (such as the TUC Congress House or the House

of Parliament), but it is also constituted by the interaction of imagined spaces of political opposition. Cuba and Latin America, for the social world of CSC, like the image of the working class, are important imagined spaces where individual understandings and experiences become shared images for political identification and action.

It is by mapping the interconnection between concrete and imagined spaces of political action – it has been argued - that the cartography of the social world of CSC starts to emerge. This is a world that is based on values of internationalism, solidarity, progressive policies, activism, workers' rights, collectivism, and participatory democracy. It is a world where people have fought against the Thatcher government; have seen the rise of New Labour with great expectations. Most importantly, this is also a world that has been largely affected in recent years by a profound sense of disillusionment in British politics. In this context people's identifications with Cuba and Latin American politics acquire a great social significance, because they shed some light on the reality of social movements in Britain today, and on the creative ways in which people imagine new possibilities.

In conclusion, playing on different notions of space the metaphor of *cartography* fitted particularly well with the ethnographic context of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. In fact, as has been shown, the ethnographic spaces of contemporary political action are networked, multi-sited and involve the juxtaposition of both real life spaces (e.g. the office, Congress House, the House of Commons, the Leftfield) and imagined ones (e.g. biographical histories and shared experiences, the image of Cuba). It is only by looking at the interaction between concrete and imagined spaces – this chapter contended - that we can shed some light on the everyday construction and experience of political action, and on the social significance of these political movements in Britain today. Here, however, it is important to ask ourselves: by looking at both imagined and concrete spaces have we considered all the spaces that define the ethnographic cartography of a social world? Or have we missed something out?

Introduction

The previous chapter explored some of the social, political and historical aspects that provide us with an understanding of the social world described in this thesis. As shown, the social world in which CSC is embedded is one that is defined by the political networks and economic alliances between single issue campaign organisations and the Trade Union Movement in Britain. It is a world in which a profound sense of disillusionment with British politics is counteracted through imaginative practices of political identification with Latin American countries. By relying on the concept of *ethnographic cartography*, therefore, chapter one was concerned in highlighting the interaction of both concrete and imagined political spaces in order to describe this social reality.

As explained, the visually evocative concept of ethnographic cartography is understood here as a response to both an ethical and a methodological issue. On one hand, the image enables us to understand that there are parallels to be traced between the ethnographer and the cartographer because with their subjective perspective they both contribute to the practices of making the social world they try to represent (Harley, 1989: 3-6). Thus, if the previous chapter aimed at mapping the social world of single issue campaign organisations in Britain by looking at the political networks and at the overlap of biographical experiences, it did so through the eyes of the ethnographer, which are veiled by a subjective interpretation. On the other hand, the concept of ethnographic cartography is used in order to highlight what becomes clear during ethnographic fieldwork: namely that there are many different and interconnected levels of ethnographic enquiry that need to be taken into account when describing the networked social reality of political movements.

This chapter will show that there is a further level of ethnographic enquiry that we must take into account when mapping the everyday context of political organisations such as the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. This is the level that connects imagined spaces and concrete ones. It is a level in which imagination meets lived experience through the discursive construction of meaning. In other words, this is a level that is defined by the everyday mediation of political action, and therefore, by all those practices of production, transmission and identification with collective messages. Immersed in the internet connected and media dominated context of contemporary Britain, the social world of the people involved with CSC is a very

technological one and most practices of political mediation take place within media technologies. Hence, it will be argued that it is misleading to analyse the ethnographic reality of contemporary social movements by overlooking these techno-social spaces.

As will be shown, media texts, practices, ideologies, and understandings have long been part of the social world of campaigning organisations and the Trade Unions in Britain, which throughout their history have relied on the production of magazines, leaflets, press releases, videos, images and an almost infinite variety of media productions. Due to the technological developments of the last fifteen years, these techno-social spaces have multiplied and media related practices have come to dominate the everyday reality of the people involved with CSC. In chapter four, I will consider in greater detail the impacts of these technological transformations in the everyday context of CSC; this chapter, however, has another goal. Its aim is to offer a first exploration of the many techno-social spaces that define the ethnographic reality described in this thesis. Instead of asking questions about the socio-political impacts of the advent of the World Wide Web, it will consider alternative media practices in a historical and ethnographic framework. By doing so, my aim is to shed some light on the social significance of alternative media for the people involved in political action, and also to highlight the very personal and emotional dimension embedded in these mediated *spaces of imagination*.

Mediating Political Action: the Mediated Spaces of an Ethnographic Cartography

The 24th of October, 2007 was not a usual day for the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. Cartons with the latest edition of the *CubaSí* magazine crammed the corridors and rooms of the small office on Seven Sisters Road. It was the 'mail-out day' and volunteers and office workers were all gathered in the communal room, packing up the magazines to be sent to members or key figures in the Trade Union Movement and other affiliated organisations. That day people were complaining about the fact that there were too many leaflets to be sent with the magazine, and thus that it would take us longer than usual. I looked around the room and was happy to find the same familiar faces. Myra, a theatre actress in her seventies, with a long black braid and twinkling blue eyes greeted me with her usual enthusiasm. Frank, who had travelled from Cambridge, despite his 86 years, in order to offer his help, was sitting in a corner of the room next to the radiator. When I entered the door he looked up beneath his glasses and smiled. Paul, a 35 year old printer from Norwich, had taken once again a day off his annual leave in

order to participate in the mail-out day, and was supporting Dean in the distribution of coffee, tea and biscuits.

That day was the fourth and last mail-out day since I had started fieldwork, and as in the other cases, it was a proper social event. Overall we must have been around 15 people between office workers and volunteers. Divided into four different long tables, we constructed chains of 'production' in order to make sure that the 5000 copies of the *CubaSí* were packed on time. Some of us were involved in assembling the letter of the director, the leaflets and the magazine. Others would place the whole package into the envelopes, and two office workers would go around the room to collect the envelopes and guarantee that they were kept in groups of 25. Amongst sandwiches, coffees and teas, the *CubaSí* magazine passed from hand to hand while we chatted about Cuba and the work brigade, about the 40th anniversary of the death of Che Guevara or about the response article written by CSC's director that had recently been published in *The Guardian*.

That day, however, was a very different mail-out day from the others I had been part of. It was a day of crisis for CSC. In the afternoon, Rob came into the communal area to tell us that the American President George W. Bush was going to make a speech at 5.30 pm (UK time) announcing the new U.S. measures against Cuba. According to a press briefing issued by the White House, President George W. Bush would announce the creation of a multi-billion dollar 'Freedom Fund' for Cuba. Bush's speech would address Cuban citizens directly, and would call on all nationals, the police and the military to act against their government, in the name of 'freedom'.[26]

For someone like Rob or Frank who, in the 1980s, had been involved with the Chile Solidarity Campaign - and many others who have been involved with the Nicaragua Solidarity movement - the fact that a U.S. President called on national citizens and emphasised words such as 'freedom' and 'action' in relation to a Latin American country was a real threat. They remembered when U.S. intervention policies supported the National Guard in Nicaragua which brutalised the population for decades (Chomsky, 2007, pp. 156-157). They also remembered the US contribution in overthrowing the socialist government in Chile – that was

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[26] The site of the White House hosts the entire speech of George W. Bush (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071024-6.html, date accessed 29/10/2007). In this regard, however it is also interesting to read Tariq Ali's article in order to acquire a better understandings of the way in which the speech was perceived by those who support Cuba's right to self-determination in the UK (http://www.counterpunch.org/tariq10242007.html, date accessed 27/10/2007).

democratically elected – and CIA's support of the Pinochet coup, which took place on the 11th of September, 1973 (Chomsky, 2007:111; Ensalaco, 2003: 125).

Tension and discontent, thus, invaded the atmosphere: Myra made a series of bitter sarcastic jokes against the Bush administration, while Frank sat quietly in the corner of the room shaking his head. As we discussed the possible outcomes of the situation - in the main office - Rob, Stephen, Tasha, Trish and Dean were all involved in Internet research, phone-calls, and email exchanges. All these practices were aimed at jotting down - as quickly as possible - a press release and an official response from the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. Not even an hour later, shortly after the postman had come to collect the latest edition of the *CubaSí* magazine, the *CubaUpdate* online newsletter was sent out to its 3000 subscribers. The newsletter called on all members and friends to do all they could to respond to press reports and to participate in an online debate - organised by the White House that evening - in order to 'let them feel the level of UK's outrage at Bush's most recent statement'.

The mail-out day in October 2007 was one of the most vivid examples of the way in which the everyday reality of CSC was defined by a continuous overlap between real-life spaces and situations (the office, the communal room) and mediated ones (the *CubaSí*, the *CubaUpdate Newsletter,* and online action). As a participant observer, I realised that I could not analyse people's actions, conversations and social relationships without noticing their entanglement with media technologies and practices. On that specific day, the great majority of interactions amongst people seem to be connected in one way or another to understandings or actions which directly related to information and communication technologies. It was this juxtaposition of different social and technical realities that appealed to me the very first moment I entered the office of CSC.

To an observer who entered for the first time the small office on top of the Red Rose Club, the variety of media technologies and forms that were present in the room could not pass unnoticed. The six desks - scattered within the two rooms - were all equipped with individual computers and telephones. All around the dusty room, bookshelves were filled with leaflets, posters, and the various copies of the *CubaSí* magazine. On one shelf, a digital photo camera and a video-camera were left lying on their own, whilst hidden behind Dean's desk the suitcase of CSC's laptop was barely noticeable.

Throughout my first day at CSC, by relying on different media, people talked, communicated, and exchanged files, images and opinions. Communication amongst office workers and volunteers would equally be defined by face-to-face

interaction or online exchange within the computer mediated platforms of the Intranet and the emails. Furthermore, throughout the day - via computer wires or telephone lines - office workers engaged in regular and simultaneous communication exchanges with other political and media organisations in Britain and Cuba. From the first day, therefore, it became evident that political action within CSC was planned, organised and experienced in great part by relying on the terrains of information and communication technologies.

Media texts, technologies and practices did not only influence the organisation of political action, but seemed to define a great part of the everyday life of the people involved with CSC. Office workers and volunteers spent their entire day in front of the computer, producing or consuming media texts. Their tube journeys home – especially following the proliferation of the free newspapers such as the *LondonLite* or the *Londonpaper*[27] which were handed out at Finsbury Park[28] tube station – involved continuous engagement with media messages and advertising. Even their evenings at home would often be spent in front of television screens or laptops. During lunches, meetings and social events, conversations would often engage with the discussion of an article people had read, a film they had watched, or music they had heard. Thus, their everyday engagements with information and communication technologies involved a variety of different practices, which differed from media to media, from context to context, and from individual to individual.

The multiplicity of media practices in their plurality of forms was at the beginning of fieldwork a matter of confusion. However, despite my informants' multiple everyday engagement with the media being of various kinds, there were certain media practices that had a collective meaning for the people involved, and were central to their experience of political action. Therefore, in the multiplicity of media engagements that defined the everyday reality of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, the primary concern of this research project was to explore the social and political significance of those practices that involved the production, the transmission and the reception of *their* media texts.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the political aim of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign is to defend Cuba's right to self-determination, and to persuade the British public that Cuba represents an alternative in the current neo-liberal system. In this framework, much of the political project of CSC is centred on

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[27] The *LondonPaper* and the *LondonLite* were free newspapers, which were distributed at London Underground stations on weekday afternoons between 2007 and 2009. The Londonpaper was published by News International, which also publishes *The Times* and *The Sun*. The LondonLite was instead published by Associated Newspapers, which also publishes the *Evening Standard*.

[28] Finsbury Park tube station is located in north London and is the nearest station to the office on Seven Sisters Road.

combating the negative representations of Cuba. In order to defend Cuba's image, people within CSC constantly engage in monitoring the platforms of big media organisations such as the *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *the Evening Standard*, *the Sun* etc, and seek access to these platforms by sending letters, writing articles and organising interviews with famous Cuban personalities. These activities are aimed at highlighting the political discourses and ideologies that defines much of news reports on Cuba within mainstream media. Furthermore, CSC has also been involved since 1978 in the production and organisation of its own media platforms. As the next parts of this chapter will show, these media spaces have a strong emotional and personal importance for the organisation. This is because it is within these mediated spaces that activists construct their image of Cuba and their very sense of political belonging.

The *CubaSí* Magazine, the History of the Organisation and the Production of Collective Memory

Of the many media platforms that define the production of news within the Cuba Solidarity Campaign the *CubaSí* magazine is the oldest, and remains the most important. Published for the first time in 1986, as a follow up of BCRC newsletters, the printed magazine remains today an important campaigning tool, which organises and promotes action, mediates the political beliefs, choices and experiences of the organisers, and transmits these meanings to their members. Today the organisation publishes between 5000/6000 copies quarterly, which are then distributed freely to all members and affiliated organisations, as well as to key figures in the Trade Unions and other networked organisations. The magazine is also sold for £2.00 to the general public at conferences and events, or for £0.75 to all local groups who wish to sell it at their own meetings. A detailed analysis of the audience is difficult to convey, given the different ways in which the magazine is distributed. This is not only because media producers and readers often overlapped, but also because as Downing (2003) has noticed, it is extremely difficult to provide a detailed analysis of the audience of alternative media which are produced by social movements.

Through participant observation it emerged that members of the campaign usually share their copy of the magazine with relatives, friends or colleagues, and it is not clear whether affiliated organisations display the *CubaSí* in their branches. Hence, tracking down informal distribution channels is almost un-achievable; especially because distribution is often guaranteed by creative and imaginative initiatives from members and individuals. The example of Tony Caccavoni, a London black cab driver, is perhaps the most illustrative in this regard. Tony's cab

is not black; a Cuban flag is painted on it. During his day driving around the streets of London, Tony often listens to the radio and participates to all the debates within which Cuba is involved. Some members told me that within BBC Radio he is known as Cuba Tony, and I did not have the chance to verify whether this is true. He also makes sure that he distributes the old copies of the *CubaSí* to his clients. As the example of Tony suggests, mapping the audience of the magazine is almost an impossible task. This is especially true when the researcher attempts to gather details on how the audience changed in the history of the publication.

Fig. 1 Tony Caccavoni's Taxi parked outside CSC Office

When the British Cuba Resource Centre was founded in 1978 the organisation produced a small number of copies of a newsletter. This newsletter, as Colin Groves, a former organiser of the BCRC explained to me, was the very heart of the group because it constituted the only means of communication between the organisers and the few hundred members. At the time, the editorial choices for its production were made by a collective of volunteers. Articles, content, and style were thus negotiated within a group of un-trained individuals who produced the newsletter following personal understandings of journalistic practices. In 1986, the newsletter became the *CubaSí* magazine. After a few editions a young activist and free-lance journalist Steve - who had come back from a Brigade in Cuba - offered his voluntary support to edit the magazine. He then became the main editor of the

CubaSí up until January 2007. Commenting on his own personal history, Steve explained:

> **S**: I have been a member of BCRC all the way through up until it turned into CSC, in 1991. BCRC had a newsletter which was called *CubaSí*, and I used to help putting that together. But it was a very *ad hoc…*irregular and casual type of publication. This is also because at that stage the only technologies that we had were typewriters. BCRC was also a small organisation, with not many people involved, it was a different type of organisation to what CSC is now. When new technology began to become more available, *CubaSí* depended much on individuals willing to give their time and effort. When BCRC became CSC and I had a career in journalism, the secretary of the campaign Tim Young asked me to be the main editor. He had a computer at home - one of the first PCs - and he said to me "you should do it because you are a journalist"...but I was reluctant to do it.
>
> **V**: why were you reluctant?
>
> **S**: Because I was aware of the work it involves. But anyway, I went to his house and worked on the first edition of *CubaSí* that I was involved in. We did it on his computer using Word. That was the first time that we published the magazine, and it turned out to be just a 3 or 4 pages of A3 folded paper. Then we found someone who could do it more professionally for us who was Gavin's sister, a graphic designer, and she did the first design: the picture of Estella Bravo on the front cover, this was in 1991. From there we went to 16 pages, than back to 12, then increasingly more, then we went glossy, colour and on from there.
>
> The thing is that we had lots of constraints and the organisation didn't have any money. The only thing that we paid for was the designer and she charged us at a really discounted rate. I didn't charge for my time, although all the work was done by me, in my spare time. We didn't have money to pay for the colour printing, so all the thing was done, as we say, on a shoestring for a long, long time. And in fact the magazine did give the impression to people that we had more money than we really did, because it looked much better than something you'd get for the amount of money we were working with. So it was all about commitment, political

commitment. I think that we did the best we could in our circumstances.

In his account, Steve mentions political commitment and the lack of economic resources. These are common patterns in the history of the organisation and its magazine. Yet what is interesting to point out is the fact that, despite the lack of resources, in the most difficult times, the production of the magazine was seen as a main priority. In this regard, Trish's account is perhaps the most interesting.

> **T**: In 1990, when Cuba announced the special period, back in London the BCRC had fallen into nothing. Largely it felt as if the executive had disappeared, most were un-contactable or just didn't want to be involved. You know you can't blame anyone, because it is their spare time and they are busy in their lives. But the group of people I knew from the brigade and I kept producing the magazine.
>
> The *CubaSí*, when I first joined in 1988 had coloured front-page, and the guy who did the cover and the images inside was a photographer. And he did all the design and the artwork for nothing and it was good while he was doing it. But of course all that went to nothing.... I was living in Elephant and Castle[29] in a flat. Everyone would come to my flat and we would be cutting out little reports, little news items from *Granma* and sticking it on an A3 paper. I used to photocopy it at work, which I wasn't really meant to do but I did, and then sending it out to the members, and it was really, really basic. Things got better once Tim Young became the secretary, CSC was then founded, and Steve took over the production of the magazine.

As it emerges in Trish's and Steve's interviews, the *CubaSí* magazine has always been central to the campaign, it followed them in their development as an organisation. Members, organisers and volunteers often attach collective memories to its production processes and its technological development. More than once I have been asked by people to understand the fact that for them the magazine cannot be detached from an understanding of the organisation, because it represents the way in which CSC as a campaign has developed. This is evident if we take for instance a conversation I had with a long time member and local group

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[29] Elephant and Castle is an area in South East London on the border between Zone 1 and Zone 2, which is known as a rough area.

leader of CSC Luke[30]. Luke has been involved with the campaign since the late 80s when he travelled to Cuba on a brigade. Being in his fifties, Luke has always been politically active as a member of the Communist Party. Today, however, his principal political commitment is defined by his participation with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, and his political goals are all channelled towards protecting Cuba's image in the international arena. During his semi-structured interview, Luke mentioned the importance of the magazine in the history of the campaign, and explained how the development of the *CubaSí* mirrored the development of the organisation:

> **L:** I like the way the magazine is presented overall, I think that you can get a very professional feeling about it. It's nice to be part of something that looks good, that it's well produced etc.. For me the *CubaSí* was very important from the start. I looked at some of the issues of the magazine as I was preparing to talk to you, and I noticed how the *CubaSí* has become more and more professional. I mean professional in the nice sense of the word, it's become more glossy and the format has had a precedence over the content. That is a bit of a shame, but I think that what's good about this transformation is that the message has become stronger and stronger over the years. This I think reflects also the success the campaign has had within the Trade Union movement and at governmental level.
>
> Everything the campaign has done is reflected in our magazine, and I wouldn't imagine CSC without the *CubaSí*. I think the magazine is a written version of CSC, it is a written record of what we have done in the years. But perhaps the most important aspect of the magazine goes beyond the focus on Cuba itself, because the *CubaSí* can be perceived as an archive of our movement, and the progression we have made. You know campaigns come and go, and I think keeping track of them is good for the Labour movement and the progressive politics in the UK. It is of central importance that you understand this.

Luke's interview shows that people's perception of the magazine is often linked to an historical perspective; one that analyses the development of the campaign in historical progression. The same understanding can be found also within many

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[30] Fictional Name to respect interviewee's choice of anonymity, for the same reason I am not mentioning here the local group he is working for.

other interviews with members, local group leaders or organisers of CSC. In fact, on a variety of different occasions, when asked to talk about the magazine my interviewees replied that they perceived it as a record of what the campaign is doing and has done in the years. This connection between the history of the organisation and media technologies is not surprising, especially if we consider the fact that within the social world of CSC people's understandings of technologies are regularly inter-connected to discourses on the passage of time. It emerged during fieldwork that activists' personal and collective histories were often interlinked with reflections on the development of technologies, and this association enabled them to confer their life narratives with a linear structure of progression.

In this regard, Steve's personal history is a good example. In an informal conversation over lunch, Steve once told me that it was difficult for him to disentangle his political commitment and journalistic profession. In chronological sequence, he then narrated his professional and political involvement, from the Wapping printers' strike[31] to the present days, when he could edit and produce the *CuabSí* magazine from the comfort of his living room. In his narrative, like in the ones of many others, historical and technological developments cannot be separated. By referring to the way in which historical processes and technological developments are often bounded together in people's personal accounts, we can better understand why - when talking about the history of the organisation - people within CSC often refer to the way in which the magazine improved. This is because, to them, the magazine seemed to represent a material and tangible demonstration of the passage of time. It was their historical archive; the material memory of what they have done and achieved as organisation.

Luke mentioned that the *CubaSí* magazine can be perceived as one of the many political archives of the Labour movement. His understanding finds many similarities with the work of Williams (2009), who suggested by looking at the

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[31] The printers' strike is considered a turning point in the British Newspaper industry (MacNair 2003, 153-177). Rupert Murdoch, owner of *The Times, The Sunday Times, The Sun* and *News of the World* decided to introduce computerised technologies in the newspaper business, making thousands of printers redundant. At the time the printers' union was one of the strongest ones, following the success of strike action in 1981, his decision was thus made with the belief that he would have to face massive strike action. The printers went on strike in January 1986. The prohibition of showing acts of solidarity between workers of different unions, together with the fact that Murdoch had prepared for the strike just as Margaret Thatcher had prepared for the coal strike made the printers' strike fail (Reitan, 2003: pp 65-66). On the 26th of January 1986, Murdoch demonstrated that he could print two mass circulation newspapers without the employment of any of his printers (MacNair, 2003: 153). With more than 1,262 arrests and 410 police injuries, the failed strike represented a real blow to organised labour. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/15/newsid_3455000/3455083.stm,date accessed 5/03/2008).

Miners' Strike of 1984, that the production of alternative media acted as 'a force of collective memory' at a time when the British Government and dominant media acted 'as forces of erasure' (2009: 13-36). Indeed, alternative media such as the *CubaSí* document the struggle that different left-wing organisations in Britain had to engage in, in order to counter-act the representations of the 'loony-left' (Curran *et al*, 2005) which dominated mainstream media in the Thatcher years. In a beautifully written account of the British Left and the media in Britain - which analyses the representation of left-wing political organisations by dominant media organisations between the 1980s and today - Curran *et al* (2005) show that during the Eighties tabloids and newspapers constantly assaulted left-wing political groups by picturing them as deviant and loony. According to the scholars, dominant media organisations were particularly fierce against the Greater London Council, which was led by Ken Livingstone and other London based left-wing organisations that supported it (2005: 39-46).

An extraordinary example of representations of the 'loony left', which refers to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, can be found in an article which appeared in the *Sun* on the 26th of February 1987. The article claimed that the borough of Brent was providing cash to enable black youths to visit Cuba, but that the cash was not available to white ones. The article began by saying 'A Loony Left council is splashing out at least £9000 to send a group of black teenagers on an all-expenses paid jaunt to communist Cuba' (Curran et al, 2005:93). In the spring issue of the *CubaSí* magazine, the Cuba Solidarity campaign tried to counter-act such an inaccurate and racist view. Their argument was a sound one. In fact, as Curran et *al* (2005) have shown, not only was the money for the programme not public money of the Council, since it was cash that had been fund-raised by a group called Caribbean Exchange, but also there was no evidence that such an organisation favoured black youths over white ones.

Therefore, I believe that is important here to establish an important connection between media production, the history of a social world and collective memory. As emerges from the above discussion, activists' lived experiences are turned into collective memories through practices of alternative media production. In other words, it is the documentation of their achievements that constructs the historical narrative of the organisation. This perspective could lead to the understanding that the pleasure of political action is linked to forms of documentation and historicization. This research project sets the foundation for the development of such an understanding, by uncovering the bound connection between political action, personal histories, and alternative media production.

This connection became more evident than ever, when on a summer day, as I was interviewing Rob we went through the old issues of the *CubaSí* together. Rob kept flipping the pages of the magazines that were produced at the end of the Eighties, and he recognised people - pointed out their names, and he re-called episodes, anecdotes and impressions of the time. A similar situation happened also when I went through old issues of the magazine with Trish. As she looked at past versions of *CubaSí*, she laughed and joked with me on the type of language that was used at the time and on the ways in which politics was actually enacted. As we were reading a 'political report' of Thatcher's Britain, I asked whether she didn't find it amusing that at the end of the day what was written there was history, she turned page after page which reported a reality of strikes and struggle against the policies of the Thatcher government and replied "history? Not really... this is my life."

Material Memories and Biographical Narratives: Alternative Media, Memory and Emotion

It is by looking at the connection between collective memories, the history of political action, and alternative media production that can we better understand the meaning of the magazine for the people involved. Only by understanding this connection can we better appreciate why for many it is impossible to imagine the organisation without its magazine. These later points emerge in an interview with Catriona. Catriona is a nineteen year old executive committee member of CSC, whose family has been involved with the campaign since she was five years old. She was brought up in Peckham, an area of London where she witnessed class conflicts, crime, and social injustice. As I was talking to her, she demonstrated a strong political commitment, and a deep fascination for countries such as Cuba and Venezuela. During a semi-structured interview, she told me that the *CubaSí* magazine had a central importance in her life, and then added:

> **C**: I wouldn't imagine the campaign without the magazine. We need it to know what is going on. Without the *CubaSí* I couldn't imagine how people would keep in touch with the organisation.
>
> **V**: What? But you have the online spaces...
>
> **C**: Yes, but, for instance I don't read them and you can't really feel for them, not as you do for the magazine. They are not that important. The magazine has always been the way in which I kept in touch.
>
> **V**: If you were to find three adjectives that defined the *CubaSí* what would they be?

C: Oh, that's difficult... I suppose: interesting, informative and important.

V: Important?

C: Yes for me (short pause) And for the world in general (laughs). No, seriously speaking. If someone did something to the *CubaSí* I would be very, very angry. You know the *CubaSí* represents the effort of people who struggle for what they believe in...and you can't destroy it.

Catriona raises important reflections on the different ways in which people relate to online and printed media. Indeed, as we will explore in chapter four, people relate differently to the *CubaSí* and the other online platforms, and this relationship tells us a great deal about the way in which internet technologies are re-shaping the experience of political action and media activism. Here, however, I want to focus on the fact that in her interview Catriona mentioned a very important aspect that defines the relationship between people within CSC and their magazine: emotional attachment.

Many within the campaign seem to be emotionally attached to the magazine, to the point that as I was carrying out my research I almost reached a stage of data saturation when I was asking whether people were ready to replace the magazine with only an online version. Almost no one – whatever age group they were – would renounce the *CubaSí*. During fieldwork, expression of emotional attachment to the magazine accompanied the everyday life within and outside the office. At the mailout-day mentioned above, for instance, Myra was upset because some copies of the *CubaSí* had been damaged in the delivery. She looked at me and commented 'the problem is that people don't feel for the *CubaSí* like we do'.

What I realised, during my time at CSC, is that emotional attachment to the magazine was directly proportional to people's involvement with the organisation. For those who had followed the campaign in its development the *CubaSí* magazine meant a lot to their lives. This later point emerged particularly strong in an interview with Roger. Roger is today 70 years old with a long white snowed beard and sparkling blue eyes. He was born near Gatwick airport in the late 30s and often talks about his childhood and the war. In 1956, against his own wish, he was due to be sent to invade the Suez Canal as part of the Royal Air Force. In accordance with his own political beliefs, he did the best he could to stay out of Suez and at the same time he started following the events of the Cuban Revolution.

In the late 60s, Roger went to Cuba to see for himself the achievements of the revolution. He became involved with the British Cuba Resource Centre as soon as it was founded, and since then solidarity to Cuba defined a major part of his political involvement. For years Roger has been part of the Executive Committee of the campaign, being in charge of the *Granma International* memberships. Today he is an active member and volunteer of the organisation. Similar to Frank, he travels weekly to the office of CSC to offer his help and support. In his interview, Roger showed a strong emotional connection to the *CubaSí*:

> **V:** What do you think of the *CubaSí*, would you imagine CSC without it?
>
> **Rg:** Oh no, no, absolutely not.
>
> **V:** Why not?
>
> **Rg**: *CubaSí* is the expression of the vast majority of the members of CSC, it fairly accurately respects the views of the people, and I respect the integrity of the editorial staff. If I see something in *CubaSí* which challenges a right-wing perspective - like the bit about the doctors going to Pakistan or the offer to send doctors to New Orleans - I would photocopy the sections and send it to the friends and people that I know. Because they are either not sympathetic or committed as I am, and I want them to know what's being done in their name.
>
> **V:** what does the *CubaSí* represent in your life? How would your life be without it?
>
> **Rg:** dreadful...
>
> **V:** Are you saying that for my research?
>
> **Rg:** (Laughs)....no. I am serious. It would be absolutely horrifying not to have *CubaSí*, it's an integral part of my life. But to be honest also to read the *Morning Star* everyday is an integral part of my life.

As can be seen from Roger's interview, emotional attachment defines people's relationship to the *CubaSí*, but it also defines their relationship with other media forms of the social world in which they build their political action, and in particular with the *Morning Star*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Morning Star* daily was launched in 1930s as the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and was known as the *Daily Worker*. In 1966 it was re-launched as *Morning Star*, and since then it has been produced by a co-operative of people from the Labour party. Today the newspaper is an integral coordinator of the Trade Union movement. The

Cuba Solidarity Campaign constantly publishes news and information on Cuba in the *Morning Star* and a representative of the newspaper sits on CSC's executive committee.

Similarly to Roger's case, the *Morning Star* has been an integral part of the life of the people involved with CSC and its social world. As I was interviewing local groups' leaders across the country for instance, I was not surprised to find a copy of the newspaper lying on the floor of their living room, or a mention of the newspaper in the account of their personal histories. Especially when talking to members of the older generation, the life narratives of my informants were constantly interconnected to the history of the *Morning Star*. Frank for instance recalled how during the war - when he was sent to India to be a Morse code operator as part of the defensive strategy against the Japanese army - his mother would send him the *Daily Worker*. The newspaper would reach him with 6 months of delay, but he didn't mind and it was a great joy for him to read it, at a time when the very fact of being in the army 'went against everything he believed in'.

In conclusion to this part, by looking at the interconnection between biographical experiences, alternative media and political action I have considered the way in which the relationship between people and their media, such as the *CubaSí* magazine or the *Morning Star,* is defined by a strong emotional attachment. It is bearing in mind these feelings of attachment that we can better appreciate the meaning of alternative media for the people involved with the campaign, and try to propose a theoretical framework in which we can better understand them: a framework that - as will be explained below – considers alternative media as important ethnographic spaces for the construction of political imaginations and identities.

Spaces of Imagination: Alternative Media and the Construction of Political Identities

Printed media such as the *CubaSí* or the *Morning Star* are embedded in the history and everyday reality of the social world of CSC, and for this reason hold a strong personal and emotional appeal for the people involved. What seems to be emerging, therefore, is that these alternative media are of central importance in the ethnographic cartography of a social world. They are the spaces situated *in between* the concrete spaces of political action and the imagined ones that we explored in the previous chapter. This is because it is within these terrains that biographical experiences are mediated in shared political beliefs. By mediating

collective experiences in shared narratives these 'spaces' are the sites within which collective imaginations and political belonging are constructed.

As mentioned, the relationship between media practices and political belonging has first been explored by Anderson (1991) in his book *Imagined Communities*. According to Anderson, newspapers and novels were the 'technical means' for representing the kind of imagined community that the nation was (1991:25). Anderson contended that newspapers conferred a sense of simultaneity, and this sense of simultaneity created a feeling of collective participation. Drawing heavily from his work, therefore, when I first started fieldwork I was not surprised to notice that there was a strong connection between political identity and media practices.

Interviews and informal chats with my informants all highlighted this strong connection. When asked how they had become politically involved for the first time, many of my informants would refer to the involvement with or consumption of some alternative media. Whilst Myra told me that *Private Eye* had changed her life and made her become politically active back in the 1960s, Christine[32] - a long time member of CSC in her sixties - told me that when she was in her teenage years she started getting interested in politics by reading the *Daily Worker* (formerly *Morning Star*). One fascinating aspect of Christine's biography is represented by the fact that her political involvement was a reason of conflict with her father - a small entrepreneur from the North of England. Thus she told me that she used to buy the *Morning Star* and bring it home just to challenge him and make a clear statement on her political views.

During the interviews both Myra and Christine made an association between their own political identity and the media they consumed. This connection between political identity and media consumption was also often taken for granted in other interviews with my informants. In this regard, this extract taken from an interview with Tasha is particularly interesting.

> **V:** How far do you think there is a relationship between news and one's own politics?
>
> **T**: Completely, generally especially in the job I do people who read *The Guardian* consider themselves on the Left. Now, I don't. If you read what *The Guardian* says it's not on the Left at all. People who read the Morning Star, you know that they are part of the Communist Party or the Trade Unions, you know they are on the Left. You know in this country, especially amongst the Left papers... you know exactly what they are and probably what they do.

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[32] Fictional name to protect the informant's choice of anonymity.

V: But what newspaper would you identify with then?

T: what politically or as a person? As a person it would be probably *The Guardian*, because it's more rounded, and I would say that I have more interests in my life than just the Trade Unions...

V: ...and politically?

T: [silence]. I don't think...I don't know...it wouldn't be the Morning Star, I don't think none of them really...oh well no I suppose the *Morning Star*, but that doesn't mean that I agree with everything it says.

V: But if you were somewhere isolated and you could read only one thing what would you read?

T: well, definitely *The Guardian* cause it had more information...and you know I learned how to read between the lines when I read *The Guardian* I take everything it says with a big pinch of salt....especially on Latin American issues...

V: and in terms of feeling of belonging?

T: oh! as sentiment it's gotta be the *Morning Star*...you know it's been running for what 70 years? It is not fantastic but you know it's run on a shoe string and it's the daily of the Left. And the *Morning Star* it's also a little gossip magazine of the Left you know...when you read it you'd say, oh that general secretary has gone there, and there was that meeting etc. So as far as Trade Unions are concerned, it's close to the community and you do read it to know what the various people are doing...(laugh)

In her interview Natasha seems to take for granted that there is a connection between identity and media. Similarly to Tasha, during fieldwork, many activists would often refer to the ways in which media were linked to one's own sense of belonging. Different interviews and informal conversations with my informants emphasised the ways in which publications such as the *Morning Star* or the *CubaSí* provided them with information on issues related to their political interests, which were not covered by dominant media (e.g. in this case Labour Movement and Solidarity with Cuba). In this framework, many suggested that these publications were the expression of a world, a world in which they participated through information. Therefore, reading media that are linked to particular political groups is seen as a central definer of one's own political participation and feeling of belonging to a group.

All these points emerged also in Tasha's interview, although at first glance Tasha's perspective seems to be extremely contradictory. On the one hand she claims that people who read *The Guardian* cannot be identified with the Left. On the other hand – by drawing a line between the way in which she saw herself politically and personally – Tasha suggested that personally she identified more with *The Guardian* ("I would say that I have more interests in my life than just the Trade Unions"), but politically she identified with the *Morning Star*. This apparent contradiction, I believe, is particularly insightful because it highlights the intricate complexities that scholars have to face when they wish to understand identity.

Within anthropology, the concept of identity became a pervasive one during the nineties when scholars started to apply the term in order to describe those collective processes of identification which were based on ethnicity, culture, gender or politics (Amit and Knowles, 1996; Escobar, 2008; Friedman, 1994; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b; Malkki 1995; Pratt, 1997). As post-colonial and globalisation theories started to emerge in the discipline, the notion of identity was seen as particularly accurate in order to define the more flexible, blurred and fluid forms of collective belonging that the globalised world had created. Embracing Anderson's social constructivist formulation that communities were imagined constructs, anthropologists started to neglect essentialised definitions of community and collective identities which saw them as 'wholes', 'systems' or 'social facts'. On the contrary they instead focused on community and collective identities as relational concepts, which defined those processes of collective negotiation that are involved in the construction of a common 'we' (Amit and Rapport, 2002; Amit 2002; Anderson, 2002; Cohen, 2002).

At the same time, however, the concept of identity became pervasive in anthropology – in contrast to the more problematic notion of community - because scholars recognised that it was impossible to understand the social construction of collective forms of imagination without looking at the central role played by individual agents. Indeed, at the end of the nineties, anthropologists started to recognise that the focus on community as a theoretical concept and analytical tool over-estimated bound-ness, and treated individuals as incidental to their social relationships and cultural institutions (Rapport, 2002:159). However, as different scholars have shown, to ignore individual consciousness in this way, to seek simply to read it off from socio-cultural forces and forms, is to exaggerate individuals' vulnerability and underestimate their resilience (Cohen, 1985; Morris, 1994; Rapport, 2002:159).

Drawing from these theories, therefore, my own understanding of identity is as a flexible concept that defines the dialectic interplay between one's own sense of

self and the person as social and collective imagination[33]. Here it is important to understand that this dialectic interplay is not free from tension and conflict. On the contrary, according to my own understanding, identity is the very site of struggle and negotiation. People do not always identify with collective imaginations, and being associated with a particular group is not always a positive experience (e.g. class, political parties etc.). As we have seen in the previous chapter, for instance, although the history of CSC as an organisation is connected to the Labour Party, people within CSC no longer want to be associated with its politics and collective imagination. In this framework, activists are questioning their role as Labour voters, and their place in the Trade Union movement. One day, for instance, as I was talking to Diana - a book editor in her late forties who has been involved with CSC since the very beginning of the campaign – she told me that she had cancelled her Labour Party membership after many, many years. When I asked her to explain me the reasons why, she looked very disappointed, sipped her coffee, and simply added: 'I no longer belonged'.

The individual sense of self is often in contradiction with the construction of collective imaginations, since these often clash with real life experience. In this framework, as we have seen in the previous chapter with reference to Laclau (1990), all identities are eventually dislocated. It is by looking at the dislocation of identities, and at the ways in which people constantly negotiate their own sense of self with collective imaginations, that I came to the conclusion that identity signifies more a social process than a social category. In this framework, similarly to Escobar, I see identity as a relational concept, a concept which defines both self-consciousness and participation to communities of imagination and practice (Escobar, 2004). Identity signifies for me a process of negotiation between "sameness and difference" (Said, 1978; Collier, 1985) that works both at the individual and collective levels. The understanding of identity as a flexible and

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[33] I came to this understanding also by reading some work on the anthropological theory of the person, and in particular by coming across Mauss' famous distinction between one's own sense of self (*moi*) and the social and cultural category of moral person (*personne*) (1985:3). Drawing from Mauss, I recognise that human beings have a sense of self which is different from the culturally constructed understanding of the moral/collective person (eg. the good Christian, the good citizen, the good activist). Both of these levels – I believe - contribute to the construction of people as persons. However, seventy years later, in contrast to Mauss, I do not believe that the sense of self (*moi*) should be understood as a universal category that survives in a Kantian way *a priori* (Collins, 1985), as the true side of individuals that is constantly masked by *personne* (the cultural category of the person). On the contrary I see the self not as a category, but more in Cohen's style (1994), as a feeling of individuality and distinctiveness from the group. In this framework the self appears to me to be defining all those very personal processes of self-construction, negotiation and incorporation to a specific common "we" (personnes).

relational concept, as a complex social process of conflict and negotiation between individual and collective imaginations, is of central importance in the analysis of the relationship between belonging, imagination and media practices.

As has been shown in the previous part, alternative media practices enable the construction of a *collective imagination*; they are the principal spaces in which the image of the group is constructed and feelings of belonging are reinforced. It is for this reason that, according to many, the magazine represents their 'collective voice', by documenting their achievements as an organisation and setting out what the campaign is and should do. Yet, the construction of collective imagination - of a collective voice - is a matter of constant negotiation and conflict within the group, because it is a process that suppresses individual and minor voices. In this framework, although it creates the ground for the construction of feelings of belonging to the group, it also generates power conflicts and internal tensions.

This latter point becomes particularly evident if we consider the case of the North London Local Group. During fieldwork, the North London Local Group was lead by a couple of activists who had anti-imperialist and revolutionary understandings of political action and would often associate with groups such as *Rock Around the Blockade*, which were politically opposed to CSC's National Office. For this reason, during fieldwork the conflict between the North London group and the CSC National Office was particularly fierce and ended with the resignation of its leaders.

One important aspect is that in this conflict alternative media played a fundamental role. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, on the one hand the CSC national office tried to harmonise internal dissent by writing articles on the importance of collective cohesion within the campaign. These articles would often re-state the offices' understanding of what the campaign should be or should do. On the other hand, the North London Local group expressed its discontent towards the national office, by refusing to sell the *CubaSí* to their local events, and instead sell copies of the *Fight Racism Fight Imperialism*[34] or *The Militant*[35]. These acts of internal resistance were causes of great distress for the people who identified with the dominant line of the campaign as proposed by the Executive Committee, through the national office. This is because, not only did the North London Local Group decide to distribute its own literature which clashed with the political ideologies of the campaign, but they would do so by using CSC's name and attach

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[34] As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Fight Racism Fight Imperialism* is published by the Revolutionary Communist Group, and usually sold from Rock Around the Blockade.

[35] The Militant is a newspaper published by the Socialist Workers Party that publishes news on Unions and Cuba.

it to particular political messages. As Gordon once suggested, people could not confuse the boundaries between CSC and publications such as the FRFI or the Militant, because "it is all a matter of 'either/or', 'us and them".

Identity is something that is always in the process of being constructed, and social groups are constantly engaged in the negotiation and definition of a collective imagination with which members can identify. In this respect media practices are of central importance, because it is within these mediated terrains that these processes of negotiation and construction are often taking place. For this reason, drawing from the work of different anthropologists (Appadurai, 1996; Herzfeld, 2002; Marcus, 1999) I believe that we should understand media as *spaces of imagination*, where political identities and ideologies are constantly negotiated and constructed.

The understanding of alternative media as *spaces* is of central importance to social analysis because it demystifies assumptions that see information and communication technologies as abstract objects or forms which can be analysed through a set of categories. As discussed in the previous chapter, space is not 'something' that is set, as time *a priori* and on which people's existence and experience can be defined. Space is constantly shaped by everyday social processes and understandings, conflicts, negotiations and beliefs. Drawing from the work of Pfaffenberger (1992), Ingold (2000), and Latour (1986, 2005), this research embraces the idea that, in understanding media as spaces, the technical and the social cannot be considered as two distinct spheres. In this framework, media are techno-social spaces, which are defined by technical and social process and are constantly transformed by everyday practice (Couldry *et al*, 2004; Munt, 2001).

In conclusion, it seems to me that any ethnography of social and political movements cannot overlook these important *spaces of imagination*. However despite one exception (Edwards, 2005), in the anthropology of social movements these media spaces have rarely been taken into consideration. Drawing from Marcus and Holmes' (2006) concept of para-ethnography, which I have explored in the introduction to this thesis, this research project is born out of the belief that it is of central importance to direct anthropologists' attention towards these sites of research. This theoretical and methodological shift is of extreme importance at a time in which – following the advent of new information and communication technologies – these spaces of imagination are multiplying.

New Technologies and the Multiplication of Media Platforms: Alternative Media in Theory and Practice

In the past the *CubaSí* magazine was the only alternative media space within CSC, and the magazine has long been at the heart of the campaign. Following the technological developments of the last fifteen years, however, new mediated spaces have emerged, and today the campaign strongly relies on multiple online media platforms, as well as on their offline ones. In the mid nineties the campaign had bought its first computers, and in 1996/1997 CSC launched its first website, by relying on free-service offered by Pop-Tel[36]. Having undergone different designs, the website has become today an important online platform for the construction of political action, for the promotion of CSC's events and for the production of news and information on Cuba.

As emerged from the description of the mailout day, today CSC also relies on production of its online newsletter: the *CubaUpdate*. The newsletter was created in 2003. At that time, two members of the organisation produced two different online newsletters, which they would sign with the name of CSC, but which in fact clashed with the image that the National Office and the Executive Committee wanted to provide to the general public. The newsletter was created as a way to quickly respond to events and as 'defensive strategy' to protect the campaign's collective imagination. The *CubaUpdate* is today sent every fortnight[37] to more then 6000 members and organisers. It is an effective way in which members and organisers are kept updated with the latest information on Cuba as well as with the events of the campaign.

Online spaces for alternative media production multiply with uncontrollable pace, and during fieldwork CSC had opened a *YouTube* account and a *Facebook* group. The *YouTube* account was created out of a technological necessity. Indeed,

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[36] Poptel was a British internet and on-line service provider that was run by an employee cooperative (worker cooperative) from 1986 to 2002. Poptel was a partner in the Manchester Host - an early example of a municipal networking project, whose aim was to foster social and economic development in Manchester, by encouraging the use of on-line communications and information services by businesses, public sector and voluntary organisations. Poptel became known as a provider of Internet services to the Labour Party, and the idea was to strengthen the International Trade Union Movement. It launched the successful bid to create a top level Internet domain for use exclusively by cooperatives and communities. As Agar et al. (2002) suggested, by 2000 the Manchester Host no longer existed and Poptel distanced itself from its political aim of creating a network for international trade unionism (Agar *et al*, 2002: 269-272). In September, 2002 it was "demutualised" and broken up into smaller businesses. Staff from the web development department formed a new co-operative, Poptech (now Fused Technologies) and OSG Co-op (now Midcounties Co-operative) took over the operation (Bibby, 2003).

[37] Excluding 'emergency' situations such as the one described with the mailout day.

following the Latin American 2006 Conference, CSC wanted to upload its videos on the website. Due to the lack of economic resources[38] their website was not designed to have a quantity of videos uploaded. Therefore, the director of the campaign decided to open a YouTube account and to use it as storage for their video material. The Facebook group was set up by Catriona, the younger member of the executive committee, and has become today an important space for the sharing of information about Cuba and the promotion of the events of the campaign. One important aspect of all the different online and offline media platforms within CSC is that they are all interconnected in such a way that the messages of the campaign reach the public through a complex dynamism of intertextuality.

As can be seen, during fieldwork the online spaces of CSC multiplied at an incredible pace. The pace at which *spaces of imagination* for the construction of oppositional identities and ideologies are multiplying in Britain should motivate anthropologists to consider these mediated platforms as fundamental sites of research in the ethnography of political movements. The multiplication of alternative media platforms certainly triggered the emergence of new research in media studies. In the last decade, media scholars have started to turn their attention to the media produced by social and political minorities. One of the first to initiate this trend in English speaking[39] academic circles was Downing (1995, 1998). A critical Marxist, Downing looked at the media produced by political movements and coined the term *radical media.* Downing was particularly fascinated by the fact that these media forms were radical not only in terms of content, but also in terms of organisations and processes, in the sense that the people who produced them challenged hierarchical understandings of corporate media organisations.

In contrast to Downing, who focused on the realities of social and political movements, Atton (2002) looked at various media forms which were produced by social minorities and proposed a much more impure and hybridised understanding

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[38] It is worth mentioning here that Pippa Norris (2001) has thoroughly explored the idea of 'digital divide' by looking at global and national unequal distribution of information and communication technologies. In the context of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign the lack of technical resources is a reality that organisers constantly try to contain by relying on cheap and creative strategies, such as the opening of the YouTube account.

[39] It must be noted that during the seventies Latin American scholars started to carry research on 'alternative communication practices' (Dervin and Huesca, 1994). However, at the time, scholars who were interested in alternative media were usually isolated, and the international exchange of research findings limited.

of these practices, when he coined the term 'alternative media'. According to Atton's (2002) perspective, 'alternative' includes an extremely diverse range of media, from zine publishing and video productions to small presses, and thus it is not restricted to media that are linked to social movements. In his analysis, however, Atton (2002) does not exclude the political aspect of alternative media, but he insightfully argues that scholars cannot understand and conceptualise these media practices only by referring to their counter-hegemonic content. He suggested that any model must consider alternative and radical media not simply in terms of differences in content and medium/carrier but in relation to how communication as social process is construed (2002:24).

Through an analysis of different case studies in Britain and on the Internet, Atton (2002) highlighted one fundamental characteristic of alternative media productions, namely that they are based on social participation, horizontal communication and non-hierarchical relations. In contrast to dominant media organisations, alternative media publications are structured in such a way that the roles of editors, writers, and readers are loosely defined and keep interacting, blurring and interconnecting in an ongoing process of collective negotiation and horizontal communication (Atton,2001:7-29). This 'structure' of most alternative media organisations shows, according to Atton, that alternative media are embedded within people's lives, and thus are an inextricable part of their living (Atton, 2002: 95).

In the last years, following Downing and Atton's debates, scholars researching alternative media have been involved in challenging and thought-provoking discussions on the way in which we can most properly understand them (Couldry and Curran, 2003; Coyer et al, 2007; Waltz, 2005). Within these debates, further consideration has been given to the social and political dimension of alternative media. By bringing together the insights of both Atton and Downing, for instance, Waltz (2005) calls for a distinction to be made between alternative and activist media, where the latter are defined by those media forms which actively engage their readers in some kind of social change (2005:3). According to Waltz (2005) the distinction enables us to understand that activist media can also be 'alternative', but that some forms of alternative media – such as fanzines – are not necessarily involved with social and political change (2005:4).

Opposing the idea that we can group together different types of media forms under a unique concept such as 'alternative media', other scholars started to coin a variety of different approaches. 'Citizens' Media' (Rodriguez, 2000) 'community media' (Howley, 2005) autonomous media (Langlois and Dubois, 2005) 'tactical media' (Garcia and Lovink in Hall, 2008:128) 'our media' (McChesney and Nichols,

2002) etc. were all used to provide greater insights into media forms produced by groups of individuals that operate at a grassroots level. Without disregarding the insights offered by these scholars, my understanding is that the continuous dwelling on definitions obscures rather than illuminates the social significance of these media practices. As we have seen in the previous part - especially with reference to political action and the collective memory of a political group - these media productions have a great meaning for the people involved and are deeply embedded in real life social processes and relationships.

Furthermore, trying to describe alternative media by applying a set of categories (e.g. hierarchical relations vs participation, top-down vs horizontal communication, ideological contents vs counter-hegemonic contents etc.) may make us overlook the often contradictory and complex nature of these media practices. Indeed, if binary categorizations of reality – such as alternative and mainstream media – can become important conceptual tools, anthropology shows that everyday realities are characterised by the constant interaction, interconnectedness and the blurring of these binary definitions.

Atton (2002) and Downing (2001) have argued that alternative media differed from mainstream media because they were defined by non-hierarchical relationships and horizontal communication processes. During fieldwork, I found it impossible to apply these understandings to the context of CSC. This is because in the production of the *CubaSí* magazine and other media platforms people had specific roles – as contributors, editors, designers, etc. These production roles reflected the power relations and internal hierarchies of the campaign, with Rob having the last word on content and form. Here it is important to understand that this hierarchical organisation of alternative media production is a relatively recent phenomenon, and that the magazine has undergone a process of change, where the actors involved wanted to make the magazine 'more professional and mainstream'.

When the organisation was founded - similar to Atton's and Downing's descriptions - the BCRC's newsletter was produced by a collective of people who democratically voted what was going to be included in the magazine and how it would be written. As mentioned, in the early Nineties, Steve took over the production of the magazine and became the main editor. Although invested with a hierarchical position, Steve relied on the open participation of members and local groups' leaders across the country in order to produce the magazine. In 2002/2003, Steve had to resign from his role, when he moved to Cuba for a year. Thus, the national office of the campaign took over the production of the *CubaSí* and all the different media spaces.

Today, the *CubaSí* largely reflects the political and economic interests of the national office, and participation is negotiated through internal conflicts and tensions. In contrast to the past participation has been reduced, because the CSC national office engages in trying to make the magazine more professional, and therefore avoid publishing the articles of those members who – as happened in the past - write very personal experiences of their travels to Cuba. Yet this is not to say that people are not allowed to send articles and opinions; on the contrary, people's contributions are very welcomed. However, today, articles are usually chosen to meet editorial necessities, and thus contributors vary from local group leaders, members of the executive committee, experts on certain topics, or Trade Unionists. Here it is important to understand that all office workers are extremely aware of the power of media production, and are really careful in applying this power. The following extract of an interview with Tasha is insightful in highlighting the complexities and negotiations that are involved in the production of the *CubaSí*.

> **V:** do you think the *CubaSí* reflects the different perspectives within the Campaign?
>
> **T:** different perspectives within the campaign? (laughs) I mean there is a democratic process, in the organisation so the magazine reflects the decisions of the AGM. You know, anyone could come to the AGM and say that the magazine should cover this and that and contribute to it. In that sense, I'd say it does reflect the different perspectives of the campaign. You know in the past there were times when the *CubaSí* was produced merely by Steve and Rob would see it only once it was printed.
>
> **V:** but before Steve, the magazine was produced as a collective...
>
> **T:** Was it? Oh god that must have been a bloody nightmare! Probably that was the only thing they did...at the moment everyone can write in and submit an article and it is our decision whether to publish it or not. I know that this could be problematic, but we simply wouldn't have the time to discuss every little issue with everyone. We try our best to listen to everyone. But we are much bigger now, and our magazine should represent a certain degree of professionalism, we can't write about people's personal feelings for Cuba anymore, we should try to be more professional, to talk to a wider audience who does not care whether Mr X or Y has done this or that in Cuba...

As can be seen, the magazine has undergone a process of centralization, where alternative media production within CSC has been concentrated in the hands of the national office. According to Tasha this process was necessary in order to come to terms with the growing number of people involved with the campaign. As Steve pointed out, the fact that the national office took over the production of the magazine was important for CSC. This is because, according to his point of view, any organisation needs to integrate its activities with its own media productions. During interviews, many members and local groups' leaders seemed to share Steve's perspective and told me that the centralisation of the magazine in the hands of the national office (and the diminishing of participation) was part of a positive transformation. When asked why they perceived it as a positive turn, some of my informants pointed out that – in contrast to the past - today it was much easier to follow the events and actions of the campaign, and thus to feel more participative and connected. Other informants instead suggested that the centralisation of the magazine in the hands of the national office has granted the publication with a far more professional appearance, and this makes them proud.

As we have seen in the previous part of this chapter, and especially with reference to Luke's comments, the focus on professionalism and on the development of the magazine is an issue that is strongly felt within CSC. This is because, as I have pointed out, the development of the magazine is perceived by members and organisers as reflecting the development of the organisation and this is very important for the people involved. Julie's[40] perspective enables us to explore these points in further detail. Julie has been an active member of CSC since the late seventies until she became an important trade union representative. As she took up her new job she had to decrease her commitment to the campaign, because the union she was working for did not clearly state its political affiliation. As she was telling me this, I looked surprised. She smiled looked away and said 'You know those were the Thatcher years'. Today Julie has returned to be an active member and local group organiser of CSC. Following is Julie's brief reflection on the centralisation of the magazine.

> J: At the beginning the *CubaSí* was very basic, but in the mid nineties, the professionalism of the magazine became more evident. Today, if people want to know what we do, they have to read the magazine, the magazine connects all groups…but it also serves for counter-information. Because it tells it as it is in Cuba it doesn't take the stances that national newspapers would. The

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[40] Fictional Name to respect interviewee's choice of anonymity.

CubaSí reflects what we have done and are doing, it has become much more professional and I am proud of this.

As emerges from the above discussion, within CSC people are willing to compromise horizontal communication processes such as participation for a desire to become more professional, hierarchical and mainstream. In this framework, the division between alternative and mainstream media practices is at times blurred and confused in everyday experience. Now, there is a further aspect that we need to take into account when referring to the alternative/mainstream dichotomy within CSC. As we shall see in the next chapter, the *CubaSí* magazine engages in the production of narratives that oppose the cultural hegemony of neoliberalism. In Britain, therefore, the magazine can be perceived as a form of mediated resistance to dominant ideologies and narratives. At the same time, however, if we are to place the *CubaSí* in a Cuban context the magazine becomes mainstream, in the sense that it legitimises the Cuban government's dominant narratives and ideologies. In Cuba, therefore the magazine turns itself from a medium of mediated resistance to a tool of governmental propaganda. Through research on the past issues of the magazine it emerged that - especially in the Nineties - the magazine was used by Cuban universities within English courses as literature to improve students' English skills. On a number of occasions Cuban students would write to CSC to show gratitude for the fact that the magazine supported their Government.

In conclusion to this chapter, in everyday contexts people involved with the social world of CSC experience the constant overlap and blurring between alternative and mainstream media practices. However, one important point that cannot be overlooked is that many understood their media practices as being in radical opposition to national newspapers and mainstream media. Therefore, although there seems to be an overlap between alternative and mainstream media in practice, within people's *imaginaries* the divide is often very clear. Therefore, as will emerge in greater detail in the theoretical discussion of next chapter, I believe that the difference between alternative and mainstream media needs to be found not by looking at practices and content but by uncovering the different ways in which people imagine what they do as a political project, and contextualise their media practices in opposition to 'other'.

Conclusion

By exploring the different media spaces within CSC, and uncovering the very emotional and collective importance that some media practices and terrains have

for the people involved, the aim of this chapter was to demonstrate that the ethnographic cartography of a political movement would be incomplete without an analysis of the level created by information and communication technologies, and an exploration of *alternative media*. Of the many media platforms that define the political reality of CSC - it has been argued - the *CubaSí* magazine is the oldest one and remains the most important. The magazine has always been central to the campaign; it followed the people involved in their development as an organisation. It is for this reason that it is often perceived as the material memory of the group, which documents the passage of time as well as their achievements as an organisation. It is by looking at the relationship between alternative media production, the history of a social world, and collective memory, that we can properly understand the meaning that alternative media have for the people involved, and better comprehend their personal and emotional dimension.

In understanding the personal and emotional dimension of these media forms, I have argued, it is of central importance to turn our attention on the way in which alternative media act as spaces of imagination, for the construction of collective feelings of belonging and the political identity of the group. Indeed, as has been shown, many within CSC associate the consumption and production of particular forms of media with the construction of political affinities and identities. As it has been explained, however, this research project understands *identity* not as a fixed and unproblematic category, but as a relational concept that is made possible through complex social processes of negotiation within the group (Amit and Rapport, 2002; Escobar, 2004; Pratt, 2004).

The understanding of identity as a flexible and relational concept, as a complex social process of conflict and negotiation between individual and collective imaginations, is of central importance in the analysis of the relationship between belonging, imagination and media practices. Indeed it is by recognising the dialectical interplay between the individual and the collective, and by looking at the complex processes of negotiation in the construction of collective imaginations, that we can better appreciate the central role played by media practices. This is because it is within these mediated spaces that these processes of negotiation and construction are often taking place. Therefore I have argued that it is of crucial importance to understand alternative media as *spaces of imagination*, where collective imaginations and feelings of belonging are constantly constructed through complex processes of conflict and negotiations.

In this framework, therefore, it seems reasonable to believe that the ethnographic cartography of a political movement would be incomplete without an analysis of these rich and fascinating *spaces of imagination*. In the anthropology of

social movements, however, these media spaces have rarely been taken into consideration. Drawing from Marcus and Holmes' (2006) concept of para-ethnography, this chapter contended that it is of central importance to direct anthropologists' attention towards these complex and fascinating spaces of research, especially at a time in which these spaces are multiplying. Indeed, as it has been shown, following the advent of new technologies the spaces of imagination of CSC and other networked organisations have started to multiply at an incredible pace.

In media studies, in the last decade, more and more scholars started to turn their attention to the media produced by social and political minorities. As it has been argued, this growing interest in alternative media forms was an appropriate response to the proliferation of alternative media in the new media environment (Meikle, 2002). Drawing from the work of Downing (2001) and Atton (2002), these scholars started to engage in fierce debates on how to best define and characterise alternative media in opposition to mainstream. Without disregarding the different insights, this research strongly believes that the continuous dwelling on definitions obscures rather than illuminates the social significance of these media practices for the people involved. Most importantly, this chapter contended that trying to describe these alternative media by applying a set of categories (e.g. hierarchical relations vs participation, top-down vs horizontal communication, ideological contents vs counter-hegemonic contents etc.) may make us overlook the often contradictory nature of these media forms, and the constant overlap between the 'alternative' and 'mainstream' in everyday practice.

Indeed, as this chapter has shown, in the everyday reality of CSC alternative and mainstream practices often blur and overlap. However, although the two concepts overlap in practice, in people's imaginaries the division between alternative and mainstream is usually very well defined. In contending that alternative media are spaces of imagination for the construction of political identity, and that there is an overlap between alternative and mainstream media practices, this chapter leaves the reader with more questions than answers. Indeed, we are forced to ask ourselves: How does this work? How are these social processes of imagination and belonging guaranteed by media practices? Most importantly, in what ways do people involved in alternative media production imagine their media practices as oppositional political projects?

Chapter III - Ideology, Imagination, and Media Rituals: Concepts and Theories for the Anthropology of Mediated Resistance

Introduction

Through the concept of 'cartography' the two preceding chapters were meant to provide ethnographic evidence of the central role *alternative media* play in the realities of social movements. As argued, alternative media are important ethnographic spaces where collective imaginations can be constructed and legitimised, and where feelings of emotional attachment to the group can be experienced. This chapter will further investigate the connection between alternative media production, power relationships and collective feelings of belonging. It will show that alternative media practices are used simultaneously to legitimise the relationships of domination within the group and to build collective feelings of belonging. All these ethnographic observations, it will be argued, may leave the reader with a confused understanding of the difference between dominant and oppositional media forms and of the complex social processes that media practices enable. In order to unravel these complexities, this chapter will focus almost exclusively on theory and will argue for the importance of combining theories from anthropology and media studies. It is in the cross-fertilisation amongst disciplines and by bringing together their theoretical analyses of the relationship between ideologies, collective participation and signifying practices that we can better understand the complex social processes that media enable.

Therefore, the discussion will be divided into three main sections. The first part will engage with an historical exploration of the concept of ideology and the way it has been theorised with reference to the media. The project itself is ambitious. This is because the discussion will try to cover the main theories - without doing justice to their complexities - that have linked ideology to signifying practices, through historical perspective. From the Marxist scholars and the contributions of the Frankfurt School to the works of British Cultural Studies and those of anthropologists interested in signifying practices, the discussion will explore the notions of ideology and hegemony, and will propose a possible understanding for their internal complexities.

In advancing the concept of *ritual*, however, the second section of this chapter will argue that the analyses of the relationship between media and ideology have always overlooked the emotional dimension of media processes. Indeed, as will be argued, if it is true that media practices are linked to processes of ideology construction, it is also true that – as seen in the previous chapter – they serve to guarantee a feeling of cohesion and belonging. Therefore, the discussion will focus

on the advantages of an approach that considers media as *rituals*. As it will be shown with reference to Couldry's (2003) work, and by engaging with the anthropological theory of ritual, understanding media as rituals enables us to better appreciate the dual dimension embedded in media processes. This is because it is only by considering media as ritual that we can better explore how media practices serve at once to reinforce dominant relations of power and to guarantee a feeling of cohesion and belonging.

It will be argued that the understanding of media as ritual implies that all forms of media involve the construction of ideology as well as the construction of a feeling of belonging. Therefore, this chapter will counteract those understandings that see oppositional cultures as non ideological (Thompson, 1990), and will demonstrate that the production of alternative media within political groups cannot and should not be analysed without looking at the power relations internal to the group. However, the second section of this chapter will end with an important question, if all forms of media need to be understood as rituals, what is the difference between dominant and oppositional media? How can we understand the social significance of alternative media in wider society?

The third section of this chapter will address these questions. I endeavour to show how, with the production of subversive and alternative media, and everyday criticism to market-led media conglomerates, groups such as CSC create the basis for a serious re-consideration of the relation between media and ideology in contemporary societies. In order to understand their importance, it will be argued, and better appreciate the way in which the production of oppositional discourses within society leads to social change, we must re-frame our understanding of the relationship between media and ideology, by looking at the concept of *imagination*. It is by considering the imaginative tension which defines people's engagement with meaning construction (or deconstruction) that we can gain some insight into the complexities of contemporary struggles over representational resources and meanings (Coudry and Curran, 2003), and the social importance of mediated resistance.

Alternative Media Practices between Identity, Ideology and Resistance

As emerged in the previous chapter, I had approached fieldwork believing that alternative media practices were defined by horizontal communication and non-hierarchical relationships (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001), however - since the beginning of my time at CSC - I was confronted with a situation that did not coincide with my hypothesis. Indeed, as it has been shown, horizontal communication and non-hierarchical relationships were crucial to the way in which

the *CubaSí* was produced in the past. In contrast to the past, however, the *CubaSí* and other media spaces today largely reflect the political and economic interests of the national office, and participation is always negotiated through internal conflicts and tensions. Indeed, as explained, although encouraging members and local groups' leaders to participate with articles or other contributions, office workers are often confronted with the problem that people's articles and materials are not in line with the image of the campaign that they wish to promote. In this framework, within CSC, alternative media have become today a space in which the National office constructs its own understanding of what the campaign is and should do, and transmits it to the members. They have become thus the ideological tools of a small group of people within the organisation, which aim to construct a particular image of the campaign and of Cuba.

In order to construct and legitimise a specific image of the campaign, as we have seen in the previous chapter, CSC's national office often relies on its media spaces to harmonise conflicts, and to put forward a clear message of 'what the campaign is and should do'. This latter point emerges particularly well if we consider the content of the Summer 1995 *CubaSí* issue. At the time CSC was a very different organisation; there were no paid workers, and the Executive Committee was constituted by members that belonged to very different political groups, and also included the leader of the North London Local Group. In that context, open confrontations and conflicts at the Annual General Meeting or in other collective spaces were more common.

In the Summer 1995 issue, a two page news article presented the report of a CSC Annual General Meeting, where numerous 'ideological' conflicts between the national office, local groups and members took place. Two pages before the article, CSC's editorial team published a long feature piece that tackled the problem of different ideologies in solidarity organisations worldwide. Using ICAP (Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People) as an authoritative voice, the article reads that - according to the Cuban organisation - 'Britain is in fact leading the way in contrast to other European movements who are ideologically fragmented'. According to my own interpretation, the editorial choice to publish the two articles in the same issue was not coincidental; it was a deliberate attempt to address the internal conflict that had emerged during the Annual General Meeting, and harmonise it through the construction of meaning.

As ideological tools alternative media are used also to construct a specific image of Cuba; one that focuses on the 'revolutionary and progressive achievements' of the socialist government. In order to do so, the national office is

constantly engaged in the production of *uncritical and positive news.* An interesting example of uncritical and positive news production can be found in the editorial of the Summer, 2001 issue, which deals with the tragic news story of two Cuban teenagers who died in the wheel-bay of a plane directed to Gatwick, because they mistakenly believed that it was flying to Miami. With fascinating ability in ordering meaning for their political agendas, the editorial's headline reads "A Lesson in U.S. Hypocrisy".

The article, instead of uncovering the national reasons why the two youngsters were determined to leave Cuba, suggests that the U.S. immigration policy is to blame for the wave of Cubans exiled. This is because U.S. immigration laws encourage Cuban citizens to flee their country by granting them with residence Visa as soon as they touch U.S. soil. By pointing its finger at the U.S., therefore, the *CubaSí* magazine constructed the meaning of the news piece in such a way that did not challenge the positive image of Cuba. The focus on positive news and on the construction of a sanitised image of the island is at times a reason of discontent for the members of CSC. Laura,[41] a volunteer and long time member of CSC, for example, expressed her frustration that within CSC or the *CubaSí*, the issue of racism in Cuba is never addressed. During fieldwork I was confronted with people who often suggested that the *CubaSí* magazine was at times too 'ideological'.

It emerged from my findings that members and local groups' leaders are aware of the fact that the National Office is using alternative media as ideological tools, and that there are clear issues of power involved in their media practices. At the same time, however, throughout fieldwork it was difficult to find people who criticised office workers for their media practices; because they believed that the national office was moved by a genuine interest in the success of the campaign. For them the ideology of the national office 'was a good ideology'. Furthermore, ideological construction of uncritical solidarity to Cuba – despite generating some tensions – is a collective political discourse within CSC, and is part of what I referred to in the previous chapter as collective imagination.

Within CSC many believe that there are so many negative messages about the socialist island that: 'every column inch spent on lamenting an aspect is one less spent on more important issues' (*CubaSí*, Winter 1999:12). This political discourse is a collective one which is being negotiated piece by piece - in a tension between collective and individual imaginations. Many within CSC believe that at the individual level members and organisers can be critical about Cuba, whilst at the collective level people should not emphasise contradictions because "there are so

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[41] Fictional name, in order to comply with a request of anonymity.

many negative messages about Cuba that there is no need for us to add more". Therefore, despite being ideological, the image of Cuba is what unites them, is what renders them a political organisation. It is the ground on which their ideology against neoliberal values is constructed. Therefore, even if members and volunteers recognise that the national office transmits a sanitised and ideological image of Cuba, they also believe that such ideological processes of meaning construction are necessary in order 'to get the message of the campaign across'.

On their part, it is important to point out that office workers are very aware of the 'power' that they have as media producers, and during fieldwork they often engaged in collective discussions on their editorial choices and on the way in which people perceived the magazine. In this framework, although alternative media practices within CSC involve issues of power, they also involve elements of reflexivity amongst the members of the national office, who remain sensitive to the cultural and political conditions that affect their choices. It is not surprising that people within the national office show awareness of the power they have as media producers. This is because, coming from Marxist backgrounds, people like Rob, Trish or Steve believe that there is a bound connection between ideological processes and media practices. For them, specific ideas and meanings conceal relations of domination. According to their point of view, dominant media serve to legitimise particular neo-liberal discourses and capitalist relationships.

By bringing forward the example of Cuba, within their magazine therefore their principal aim is to show that there is an alternative to the neoliberal system. As argued in chapter one, their image of Cuba is often constructed in opposition to Britain though a complex and fascinating *game of mirrors.* Their intention is not to propose that Britain should undergo a socialist revolution, but to highlight how state intervention – and a limitation to corporate power - can lead to important civic transformations. Most importantly, by placing the policies of the Cuban and the British Government in antithesis, they are constantly trying to argue for the importance of putting social welfare first. In this framework, despite alternative media practices being ideological, within CSC, they are also counter-hegemonic, in the sense that they are perceived as projects of political resistance.

The idea of this chapter was born after noticing the many different and contradictory processes that defined alternative media practices, and the fact that they were at the same time sites of power and resistance, of ideology and identity. Indeed, as can be seen from the above discussion, alternative media practices are used simultaneously to legitimise the relationships of domination within the group and to build collective feelings of belonging. Furthermore, despite being

ideological, most of the practices of CSC are also counter-hegemonic, in the sense that they are oriented at challenging the neoliberal values promoted by dominant media. What follows is a theoretical discussion, which explores some of the main theories on the relationship between ideology, resistance and the media. My intention is to develop a cross-disciplinary approach which sheds light on the complex human processes that are embedded in the everyday mediation of political action.

Part I: Ideology, Hegemony and Alternative Media: An Overview of Concepts and Understandings

Media and Ideology: an Historical Analysis

> "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class, which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, (...) [The individuals composing the ruling class] hence amongst other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age, thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of an epoch" (Marx and Engels, [1846] 1970:68).

The above quote, taken from Marx and Engels, seems to be the point of departure for any discussion on the concept of ideology, both within anthropology and media studies. Scholars have referred to it over and over again, in shared recognition of its importance. Marx and Engels' quote is particularly powerful, because it recognises the premises for any understanding of ideology: namely that ideas are often – if not always - bound to issues of power, to relations of domination. Marx and Engels' contribution to the understanding of ideology was also seminal for a further reason. This is because, in the *German Ideology* they argued that ruling ideas become particularly powerful because they are 'abstracted' by historiography and are treated as truths, which define a whole epoch.

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A captivating example of the way in which ideas come to invest a 'universal' significance is provided by their deconstruction of the notion of 'free trade', when they highlight how the concept that stands for 'spontaneous exchange' signifies in truth exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions (Marx and Engels, 1988:23). Again, a similar argument is put forward in the section of the *Capital*, where Marx ([1887] 1999) discusses the 'mystical veil' (or fetishism) attributed to commodity, and our notion of value. This very understanding that the power of dominant ideas lies in the fact that they are presented to society as social truths, as natural facts, defines the majority of contemporary approaches to ideology in both media studies and anthropology.

Marx and Engels' understanding of ideology was fundamental in shaping academic debates on the issue. However, their contribution, as many have shown, cannot be applied without criticism. One important aspect of Marxist formulations is that in 'the epoch of the bourgeoisie' ideology needs to be understood always in the framework of class antagonism (Marx and Engels, 1970). However, the emphasis on class antagonism overlooks other relations of domination present within society, such as gender or ethnic relations (Thompson, 1990). As has been shown in the previous chapter, recognising these other relations of domination, which are not considered in Marxist theory, does not imply that in contemporary contexts class is no longer relevant. On the contrary, class is still an important characteristic of contemporary antagonisms, and is still a central issue on which to understand ideological constructions. However, as mentioned, class is today an extremely blurred and complex concept: one that moves away from people's 'material life conditions', or a clear idea of class antagonism (Marx, 1988:19).

Developing further Marx and Engels' idea that the ruling class owns the means of mental production, Gramsci suggested that the dominant classes secure hegemony through the constant structuring of the 'ideological front' (Gramsci, 1985:389). An example of this is presented with reference to the church, when he claims,

> "I admire and envy the priests who succeed in obtaining such visible results with cultural propaganda. In reality we do not pay much attention to this slow process of intellectual stagnation by the clergy. It is something impalpable, which slides along like an eel, limp, which does not seem solid, and yet it is like the mattress that resists cannonades better than the walls of Liege." (Gramsci, 2006:17).

Drawing from Marx and Engels, Gramsci developed a much more dynamic understanding of ideology, for which ideology cannot merely be perceived as a system of abstracted political illusions imposed by the dominant class on the proletariat (McLellan, 1988: 8). For Gramsci, instead "ideologies are historically necessary, they have a validity which is psychological, they organise human masses and create a terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle etc.' (in Durham and Kellner, 2006:15). As Gramsci formulates it, the way in which ideology operates within society is a complex social and cultural process; a process which allows the dominant classes to secure their hegemony not through coercion, but through consent (Mouffe, 1979:185). With his analysis of ideology, Gramsci was fundamental in directing social theorists' attention to the media as ideological apparatuses: especially because he suggested that the press was the most dynamic and prominent part of the ideological structure of society (Gramsci, 1985:389).

Although crucial in defining the debates around ideology and the media Gramsci was not the only theorist, of his time, to establish a relationship between dominant ideas and mass media apparatuses. Parallel to his contribution, the members of the Frankfurt School – which included scholars such as Adorno and Horkheimer and Benjamin - were creating the first coherent body of works for the understanding of the relationship between mass media and ideology (Durham and Kellner 2006:xi). Here, it is not surprising that scholars, such as Gramsci, Benjamin, or Adorno and Horkheimer, believed strongly in the connection between media and ideology to the extent that they felt the urge to study and explain it. Indeed, all these scholars shared a similar historical context: all of them had seen the rise of the totalitarian regimes of Mussolini and Hitler, and had experienced how media and art can become powerful tools for ideological propaganda (see Durham and Kellner, 2006:xii).

The understanding of the relation between media and ideology, however, did not limit itself to the totalitarian regimes, and this is evident in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer. Exiled to the United States, the two scholars made one of the most important contributions to the understanding of the ideological role of mass media in modern societies. They did so not by looking at the European situation which they had left behind, but by analysing the ideological constructions of American society. Focusing their attention on American media (film, newspapers, radio broadcasting etc.), Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) claimed that they were cultural industries that created subservience to the system of consumer capitalism ([1944] 1997:120-168). In the era of the culture industries, the two scholars contended, there is little space for individual resistance or personal views; freedom

is a formal ideal, the power of imagination is constantly repressed, and the revolutionary is always subdued to consumer culture (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 146-150).

The link between mass media, ideology and capitalism is also evident in the work of Habermas (Habermas in Durham and Kellner, 2006). Elaborating on the Frankfurt scholars' perspectives, Habermas argued that to understand the ideological role of mass media in modern society - and their link to both capitalism and ideology - we need to approach their analysis in an historical framework. According to Habermas, during the revolutionary period of the French revolution and part of the 19th Century the press was the 'public sphere': a space for public opinion in which the state could be criticised (Habermas in 2006:78). The democratic potential of the press, Habermas argued, was transformed by the increased commercialisation of its medium. With the rise of consumer society, the scholar contended, the content of the press was depoliticised, personalised and sensationalised, and this led to a structural transformation of the public sphere (Thompson, 1990: 113).

Following the work of Gramsci and the scholars of the Frankfurt School, the media have become one of the principal terrains in which to address questions on the way in which ideology operates within modern societies. In this regard another fundamental contribution, was the work of the French philosopher Althusser (1971), who following on from Gramsci, introduced the concept of 'ideological state apparatuses' (ISA). Althusser contended that no class can hold its power without exercising control over both the repressive state apparatuses and the ideological state apparatuses. The ideological state apparatuses are institutions which pertain to the public domain and include religious, educational, legal, political as well as of course communication institutions (1971:143-144).

Yet reflecting on the role played by the ISA, Althusser understood that ideology constantly influences individuals through everyday practice within the ISA (1971:84). Following Althusser's contribution, ideology can no longer be perceived as a form of consciousness, or better false consciousness. Rather, it should instead be perceived as an unconscious process, in which through everyday practice the individual constructs himself as a subject. It is reasonable to trace the line of similarities between Althusser's understanding of the way in which ideology operates within the ISA, and the body of literature on the subject that emerged following Foucault's (1994) contribution. Along similar lines to Althusser, Foucault argued that power permeates all levels of society, and it manifests itself not through repression but through the construction of unconscious processes of self-construction. Hence power everywhere is a constructed *truth* that is embodied and

internalised by the individual in the construction of his/her subject (1980, 110-140). By claiming that subjectivities are constructed and incorporated within social discourses, Foucault replaced 'commonsense' notions that our identity is the product of our conscious, self-governing self and, instead, presented individual identity as the product of discourses, ideologies, and institutional practices (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 2000:xiv).

Foucault's understanding of power has been central to both anthropological studies on power and identity (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) and media studies. Within media studies in particular Foucault's contribution was crucial to develop a series of studies within critical psychology that explored the ways in which media images and texts contribute to the construction of the Subject (Blackman and Walkerdine 2001; Rose, 1999). In fact, as Rose suggests, the irony of our modern society, where the expertise of subjectivity has become fundamental to our ways of being governed and governing ourselves, 'is that we believe, in making our own subjectivity the principle of our lives, that we are freely choosing our freedom' (Rose, 1999:11).

All these currents of thought are particularly important to highlight the subjective dimension of ideology and better explain the links between media, ideology and the construction of identity. However, as we shall see in the next parts of this chapter, the focus on the power relationship embedded in the construction of subjectivity does not really apply to a study of alternative media, nor to the ethnographic context of CSC. This is because, although being linked to issues of power internal to the group, media practices within CSC work to create a collective feeling of belonging: a feeling that has more to say about people's opposition and resistance to capitalist ideologies and practices rather than about domination.

Media, Ideology and Resistance: Understanding Ideology and Hegemony

The understanding that ideology is inferred on society through consent is the very basis for a first formulation of the relationship between media, ideology and power within contemporary society. If power is everywhere and media practices play a central role in the production of the inequalities of consumer culture, then it might appear as it emerges from the works of Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) that in contemporary societies there is little space for cultural resistance. It is important to point out that Adorno and Horkheimer deliberately chose to avoid reflecting on resistance, since with their contribution on the culture industries they were responding to Benjamin's formulation that oppositional culture can be empowered by artistic and media practices (2006:31). According to the two scholars, Benjamin

was too optimistic, and did not consider the fact that in the era of the consumer culture, the whole world is passed through the filters of the culture industries and culture is affecting everything with sameness' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997:45).

For them, the consensual subservience to consumer culture that is created by the media is total and absolute; it is one that does not leave any space for individual creativity or resistance. This is far from being true, as Foucault pointed out, and as I have mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, just like the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localised in them, so too the multitude of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a:20). Power is everywhere but so is resistance. What scholars must do therefore is to understand the relation between power and resistance, and how these are linked to media spaces and practices.

The British Cultural Studies scholars have appropriated and re-elaborated Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' as a way to construct a coherent theoretical framework which discusses the relation between media and ideology, but also incorporates a reflection on marginal and oppositional cultures. Both Althusser and Gramsci formulated the hypothesis that the ideological structures - or the ideological state apparatuses - were not only the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle (Althusser, 1971:147). On this line of thought, British Cultural Studies scholars elaborated the idea that if hegemony is acquired through consent, this consent is always achieved through a struggle, which is enacted, at least in part upon the media. In looking at sub-culture Hebdige (1979, in Durham and Kellner, 2006:147) for instance pointed out that the struggle between dominant and marginal cultures often leads to the incorporation of the latter into the dominant. Another fundamental insight is offered by Williams's ([1980] 2006) definition of the difference between 'alternative' and 'oppositional' cultures, for which alternative cultures do not carry within them the intention of transforming society, whilst oppositional cultures bring about projects of social change (Williams: 2006:138).

In re-elaborating the concept of hegemony, British Cultural Studies have understood that the imposition and maintenance of ideology within a given society involves a social and cultural struggle between dominant and residual cultures, and that this struggle is often fought within the media. Most importantly, as Fenton (2003) noticed, British Cultural Studies scholars understood that hegemonic struggles can also be lost and this "introduced more complex understandings of

power relations in society that cut across culture, economics and also allowed human agency, albeit moderated, to enter the equation" (Fenton, 2003:3).

Parallel to the British Cultural Studies works, although not focusing on the media, anthropologists have also been going through a powerful re-discussion of issues of power, politics and symbolism. In the works of Asad, Wolf or Mintz, the issue of colonialism as dominant ideology emerged in a powerful re-discussion of its legacy to anthropology, and to the cultures studied by it (Donham, 1990:8). The focus on colonialism, on its powerful tactics of creating consent among the people studied, created a more complex understanding of culture, power and the practices of ideological domination and resistance that are present in the colonial encounter. The works of the Comaroffs (1985; 1991; 1992; 1993; 2002) together with the work of Bloch (1986), are a vivid example of the influence of such a turn. With their contributions, these scholars highlighted the fundamental role played by signifying practices such as symbols and rituals in both processes of colonial domination and resistance.

British Cultural Studies scholars focused on the media whilst anthropologists focused on the signifying practices embedded in symbolism and ritual, yet their different works find a middle ground in the emphasis on the centrality of communication processes to the understanding of practices of cultural domination and resistance. Furthermore, in the works of both disciplines one can find a theory of ideology, which considers the ways in which ideology is constantly transformed and re-invented through everyday social processes. In opposition to the scholars of the British Cultural Studies, however, anthropologists approached with criticism the notions of ideology and hegemony, and rejected the idea of replacing the concept of ideology with the concept of hegemony. Indeed, for the British Cultural Studies scholars whilst the concept of ideology was 'radically limiting', hegemony embraced a 'totality' (Williams, 1979 in Durham and Kellner, 2006:134), and thus was a more appropriate theoretical tool then ideology.

In opposition, the Comaroffs argue that Marx and Gramsci referred to both terms in exchangeable and often dialectical ways. In order to prove their point they rely on a comparison between *The German Ideology* and *Capital*. In the former, ideology is perceived as we have discussed it above: as a set of ideas that reflects the interests of the ruling classes. In *Capital* by contrast ideology is not named as such, and it is not said to arise mechanically from the politics of class domination, but resides unseen in the commodity, in the way in which economy and society are structured (1991:20-21). Furthermore, in looking at Gramsci, the Comaroffs argued that there is a passage in *The Prison Notebooks* in which Gramsci speaks of ideology in 'the highest sense' (1991:23). This re-reading of

classical Marxism brings them to argue - in contrast to the British Cultural Studies' scholars – that hegemony cannot replace ideology, but has to be understood as existing in 'reciprocal interdependence' with it. Indeed, according to the two scholars, whilst ideology consists of constructs and conventions that have come to be shared throughout a political community, hegemony is part of a dominant worldview which has been naturalised; and having hidden itself in orthodoxy no more appears as ideology at all (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:24-25).

This research project strongly relies upon Comaroff and Comaroff's formulation that ideology and hegemony have to be understood in reciprocal interdependence. Drawing from their work, I wish to propose a possible definition of hegemony and ideology, which is open to criticism and transformation. On one side this thesis approaches ideology as defining *those collective processes involved in the construction of beliefs and the ordering of meaning, within a particular political group, which serve both to guarantee the cohesion of the group and sustain the relations of domination within it.*

On the other side this thesis approaches hegemony in broader terms than ideology. It understands hegemony *as a cultural and social struggle for visibility and consent of a particular group ideology, which takes place within the larger society. A struggle in which all groups are involved (both dominant and resistant), and which defines the encounter of 'cultures'.*[42] One of the basic premises of this research project lies in this understanding of hegemony as a dynamic struggle over meaning, and thus in the belief that it is of extreme importance to give voice, at least as far as the ethnographic method can go, to those people who are involved in struggles over meaning, in the hope that their ideological constructions acquire visibility and that they can destabilise the power of dominant ideologies.

In conclusion to this section, following the influence of Marx and Engels' definition of ideology, we should understand that power relations are often legitimised through the production of abstracted truths, and therefore are tightly linked to media and signifying practices in general. As shown, scholars within both anthropology and media studies have critically re-examined Marx and Engels' concept of ideology, and presented more dynamic understandings of the ways in

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[42] Here culture is understood in relation to ideology, a perspective that recognises the criticism made by Marxist scholars to the classical anthropological conception of culture that overstressed the implicit, systemic and consensual; treated symbols and meanings as if they were neutral and above history, and ignored their empowering and authoritative dimension (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:20). Yet, in opposition to Marxism, the understanding of culture is here approached also with reference to the subjective dimension, one that considers the importance of the emotional tension involved in people's acceptance of particular symbols and worldviews.

which ideology operates. By looking at media and signifying practices - at the way in which people construct and transmit their meanings of the world – these scholars provided fundamental insights on the dialectics between power and resistance, and on the interdependence between ideology and hegemony.

As discussed - within the context of CSC - alternative media practices are ideological. As we have seen, in a similar line to Marxists' understandings of ideology, the national office relies on its media practices in order to construct its image of the campaign and of Cuba. Both these images work as abstracted ideas, which imply specific political discourses of how solidarity or political opposition must be experienced and organised. Relations of power and economic interests affect the everyday reality of CSC, and, I believe, the social reality of any political group including those that try to eradicate social hierarchies.[43] After what has been discussed, it is not surprising that the national office of the campaign relies on its media productions to mediate meaning in such a way that maintains social discourse, legitimises the relations of power within the group and harmonises conflicts. Therefore, overlooking the ideological aspects of alternative media practices would be a fundamental mistake.

The understanding that alternative media practices are ideological is of central importance for this research. This is because it serves to counteract the standpoints of those scholars, who argue that 'revolutionary language cannot be mythical' (Barthes, 2000:147) and that 'contestatory symbolic forms cannot be considered as ideological' (Thompson, 1990:68). As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the prism of 'ethnographic thickness' (Ortner, 1995) enables us instead to highlight the ideological processes of oppositional groups, and demystify romantic assumptions that see these groups as non-ideological.

It seems to me that overlooking the ideological dimension of oppositional discourses would be detrimental for our understanding of the struggle for

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[43]Here I am referring to the post-anarchists' political strategies that will be discussed in chapter 5, and which dominate the social realities of the global justice movements. As will be argued, these groups, which are based on anti-hegemonic and autonomous discourses, organise themselves in ways that deconstruct social hierarchies and relations of power. My belief is that relations of power are still present within these groups. To support my belief I am afraid that I do not have ethnographic evidence collected amongst the movements of global justice. However, scholars (Day, 2005) have looked at the Italian Autonomist group in order to explain some of the practices and strategies of the movements for global justice. My direct experience of the autonomist groups in Italy, and especially of the realities of the community based social centres, is that although they rely on autonomous discourses and non-hierarchical organisations, power relations within the group are in fact a social reality and are consolidated and legitimised through the construction of specific ideologies.

hegemony. Furthermore, as Laclau and Mouffe (2001:68) have pointed out, Gramsci coined the term hegemony to refer to a political strategy. In contrast to the beliefs that pervaded the Russian communist party, which presumed and took for granted working class unity, in *Notes on the Southern Question* (1926) Gramsci noted that subordinate classes were fragmented and permeated by diverse cultural discourses.

According to Gramsci, the revolution as understood by Marx in *Capital* had failed because the capitalist ruling class had achieved cultural hegemony over civil society. In his understanding therefore, by building alliances and associations with other oppositional groups, workers (or better the Communist Party in Italy - PCI) had to achieve a cultural hegemony first and foremost within the subordinate classes of civil society, and then take over the State. Ideological processes are, therefore, central to oppositional groups who - as explained in the previous part - are involved in a struggle for hegemony and constantly try to get their message across. Here it is important to understand that these struggles over meaning are often directed to the construction of new values that can become dominant within the state, and they are not - as Gramsci suggested - directed towards a construction of a 'class unity', with revolutionary intent to take over the state. Drawing from these understanding, I reached the conclusion that alternative media are at the same time ideological and counter-hegemonic.

In conclusion to this part, however, it is important to understand that the focus on domination and resistance explains only some of the social processes that are embedded in the production of alternative media. Indeed, as we have seen, within CSC, the construction of mediated meaning serves to consolidate relations of domination and oppositional discourses within a group. Yet it is also intended to create a feeling of belonging and cohesion. It seems therefore that media practices have a dual dimension, an ideological and an emotional one. This double dimension that seems to define people's engagement with mediated meaning is the subject of debates within media studies between scholars who see media as a sort of 'social glue' in Durkheimian fashion which creates belonging (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Maffesoli, 1996; Scannell, 1996; Hartley, 1999) and those who analyse media in terms of political economy (Debord, 1967; Kellner, 2003; Durham and Kellner, 2006). Hence, we must ask ourselves: how are we to conceptualise this double dimension of media practices? Which approach is the most appropriate for us to understand the complex social processes that are involved in the way in which meaning is produced, transmitted and received through the media?

Media as Rituals: the Advantages of a Cross Disciplinary Approach

The construction of mediated meaning, whether it is practiced by dominant or oppositional groups within society, seems to involve an ideological and emotional dimension. To address this complexity, this research project advances - following Couldry (2003) - the understanding that media can and should be seen as *ritual*. Such an approach, which brings the theory of anthropology and media studies together, will enable us to recognise the complex social processes involved in the construction and reception of mediated meaning, and understand in detail how these social processes work. Therefore, let us briefly review the literature on ritual, and see how this literature can enable us to better understand the processes related to the construction of mediated meaning.

The first fundamental understanding of ritual can be found in Durkheim's (1995) work in the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Grounding his analysis on a functionalist approach and by referring to Australian Warramunga rituals, Durkheim contended that rituals were processes through which moral values and social order (the serious life) was constructed. This is because through collective rituals and assemblies, the hierarchical division between society's 'sacred' and 'profane' spheres was established, and hence the values of society were established (God, nation etc.) (1995:34-36). Despite recognising that the construction of meaning was central to rituals (e.g. the division between sacred and profane), Durkheim chose not to focus his analysis on the power relations that these meanings legitimised, and instead looked at the emotional force that rituals had for collective experience. According to him, the sociological 'function' of ritual was to strengthen the emotional feeling of a collectivity and to renew a common emotion of belonging that was absent from ordinary life. By establishing the role of the sacred, rituals created a 'collective effervescence' and brought people together, in a shared enthusiasm for social norms (1995:209-222).

As mentioned before, Durkheimian approaches to the understanding of media have proliferated in media studies. An example of this can be found in the work of Dayan and Katz (1992), who - with their concept of 'media events'- suggested that in contemporary society television acts as a ritual by re-instating a feeling of collective togetherness and participation. According to them through media we become aware of each other as social wholes. This same understanding can be found also in Anderson's (1991) theory of imagined community, when he examines the role of printed capitalism in the construction of a feeling of togetherness and

simultaneity. However, Anderson does not consider media as 'events', nor does he adapt an explicitly Durkheimian notion of ritual. Furthermore he introduces a fundamental complexity in the understanding of the relationship between media and forms of belonging, because he highlights that belonging is guaranteed through the social construction of discourse, hence through ideology.

Therefore in understanding media as rituals, as Couldry suggested (2003), it is better for us to move beyond Durkheimian approaches and consider in detail the anthropological literature on the subject. This is because it is within anthropology that we can understand ritual for its complexity, and hence that rituals do not act only as affirmation of what we share, but they also work as management of conflict (2003:4). In this framework Turner's work is of central importance. According to Turner society is not bound together through some form of Durkheimian solidarity, but is constituted by divisions and internal conflicts. In this framework, social order is often guaranteed by a dialectical interplay between social structure (society's values and ideas of social order) and *communitas*. Turner uses the concept of *communitas* as an analytical tool that allowed him to represent the 'feeling of togetherness based on emotion and difference, that is opposed to the rational social structure that stresses uniformity' (1974:241). Ritual is for Turner a medium through which relationships within societies are learned and reinforced by mediating the contradictions between communitas and social structure (1974:241).

Turner's work on ritual influenced a variety of different approaches, because due to his understanding scholars started to analyse ritual by looking at the ideological discourses that were constructed within it. In this regard, we can refer for instance to the work of Bloch (1986) and Bourdieu (1990). Developing Turner's understanding that ritual harmonises conflicts, Bloch explored the ideological role of ritual though Marxist lenses. He showed how - amongst the Merina of Madagascar - ritual was the medium through which elders legitimated and consolidated their power, through a complex dialectic of symbols of blessing and violence. According to Bloch, whilst symbols of violence reinforced elders' authority, the ones that were associated with blessing emphasised joy and illumination and thus strengthened collective participation.

Bourdieu (1990) criticised Turner for focusing on the different stages of ritual (separation, liminality and reintegration) overlooking the fact that ritual serves to fix boundaries within society, and to create a distinction between what is legitimate and what is not. According to Bourdieu the most interesting aspect of rite is the one that attracts least attention. In the case of male initiation rites, for instance, the most important aspect is not merely what creates a man as a man but most

importantly what detaches him from the rest (e.g. women). Bourdieu contends that rituals can be understood by referring to the Latin saying 'you are teaching a fish to swim', because they are acts of social magic that state the obvious: 'how to be a man'. Rituals teach people how to act as women, men, fathers, mothers or citizens, in other words they are rites of institution that construct identity (1990:119-121). They construct identity through boundaries; boundaries that can be found in nature (e.g. natural boundaries, or biological boundaries).

This summary of ritual theory, however brief, enables us to develop an approach that sees media as rituals, and thus shed some light on media practices. This is because it is only by recognising that media act as rituals that we can understand that they are *social processes* through which relationships within societies are learned and reinforced, and at the same time through which feelings of social cohesion and togetherness are created. As Turner (1974) would say media as ritual 'are simultaneously the time of communitas and social order' (Turner, 1974:241). This understanding fits perfectly well with Marxist approaches to ideology, especially the ones that considered the relation between media and ideology as dependent upon the power of certain symbols. However, the understanding of media as ritual can be of great importance for shedding light on the complexities of the relation between media and ideology, especially by calling into question human tensions, beliefs and practices.

An approach that understands media as rituals enables us to investigate the relationship between people, media and ideology by looking at the power of symbols and at their human significance. Once again Turner's work is here particularly insightful. By focusing on the multi-layered and condensed aspects of ritual symbols, Turner argued that dominant symbols, although being impregnated with moral and normative aims (the ideological pole), also reflect people's sensory experience, emotions and feelings (the sensory pole) (1967:30). It is this unusual aspect of symbols, and the way in which they are constantly associated and maintained through ritual, that constitutes their utter importance, because they offer insight into the uncovering of the processes through which social norms become at the same time 'obligatory and desirable' (1967:31).

Therefore, through ritual, as Turner explains it, dominant symbols bring the ethical and the juridical norms of society into close contact with strong emotional stimuli (1967:30). As Althusser's work (1971) has shown, this understanding of the way in which symbols operate through ritual fits particularly well with reflections on the relation between media and ideology. The idea that symbols - constructed and transmitted through ritual/media - transform social norms into

realities which are at the same time obligatory and desirable is my focus here. This latter understanding is evident in Barthes' (2000) seminal reflection on the role of myth in modern societies. Taking for instance the example of bourgeoisie wedding, Barthes (2000:141) argues:

> "The big wedding of the bourgeoisie, which originates in a class ritual (the display and consumption of wealth), can bear no relation to the economic status of the lower-middle-class: but through the press, the news and literature, it slowly becomes the very norm as dreamed, though not actually lived, of the petit-bourgeois couple. The bourgeoisie is constantly absorbing into its ideology a whole section of humanity which does not have its basic status and cannot live up to it except in imagination, that, is at the cost of an immobilisation and impoverishment of consciousness" (2000:141).

His example clearly addresses the way in which an ideal - such as that of the petit-bourgeois wedding – can become a collective social norm that reaches also lower classes (or different social groups), and becomes both obligatory and desirable. The importance of Barthes' contribution is, however, that he highlights the key role dominant media play in making modern 'myths' appear natural, universal and desirable. They do so by harmonising the contradictions within society and making social inequalities appear natural. Here, we can trace lines of similarities between Turner's (1967) and Barthes' (2000) arguments. In fact, in exploring girls' initiation rituals amongst the Ndembu,[44] Turner realised that, whilst the ritual itself presented symbols which referred to boundaries and conflicts, people's interpretation was linked to understanding of harmony and cohesion (Turner, 1967:22-23). In this regard, Turner suggested that - although at times symbols do represent social conflicts - in the whole framework of the ritual these symbols are ordered to stress the harmonious and cohesive aspect of social relationships (1967:33).

In a chapter called *Operation Margarine*, Barthes makes a similar argument when he suggests that the power of myth does not rely in the fact that it hides contradictions or problems, but that it distorts them by harmonising these contradictions into a unique message. An example of this is offered by his reflection on mediated representations of the army:

> "Take the army, show without disguise its chiefs as Martínets, its discipline as narrow-minded and unfair, and into this stupid tyranny immerse an average human being, fallible but likeable, the

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[44] Here I am referring in particular to the symbol of the milk tree.

archetype of the spectator. And then at the last moment turn over the magical hat, and pull out of it the image of an army flag flying, triumphant, bewitching, to which, like Sganarelle's wife, one cannot but be faithful although beaten *(from here to eternity)"*. [Barthes, 2000:41]

By looking at myths in modern society, Barthes enables us to understand that media – like rituals - order symbolic meaning in a way that harmonises contradictions, makes social norms obligatory and desirable, and naturalises relations of power. As we have seen above, this understanding of media as rituals applies very well to the context of CSC, where media practices are used to harmonise conflicts, legitimise particular discourses about the campaign and Cuba, and create collective feelings of belonging. Yet if the concept of media rituals is central in the understanding of the social processes embedded in media practices, and if all media can be perceived as rituals, we need to ask ourselves what is the difference between alternative media and mainstream media?

According to Barthes, the language of myth is the language of the Right (2000:147), because revolutionary language cannot be mythical. When the Left constructs myths, Barthes (2000) contends, these myths are very different from the ones of the Right or from the bourgeoisie, because they are *inessential* (2000:147). As argued in the above part, I do not agree with this understanding that oppositional discourses are not mythical or essential. On the contrary as discussed, oppositional discourses are ideological and construct myths in the same way as the ones of the right. As shown, alternative and dominant media practices, need to be equally understood as *rituals*, in the sense that they both involve social processes of ideology and identity construction.

However, I believe that Barthes raises a fundamental point that needs to be taken into account when he states that there is a difference between the myths of the Left and the ones of the Right. Despite not agreeing with Barthes' binary classification between 'Left' and 'Right', because I am deeply aware of the great limitations of such forms of classification (Laclau, 1990:226) I do believe that there is a difference between ideologies that stress participation and equality and others (e.g. the army) which stress the power of a single leader and hierarchical relationships. Hence if we must understand that *all* forms of media (and rituals), involve an ideological and emotional dimension, we also must recognise that the choice of its practitioners to stress one dimension (legitimising power relationships-ideology) or another (creating a feeling of collectivity-identity) defines the different nature of these media practices.

As it emerged above, within CSC, office workers are very aware of the connection between the construction of mediated meaning and relations of domination. In this framework they try to limit their 'power' as media producers through collective reflexive practices. Furthermore, as mentioned, many within CSC empathise with the choices of the national office, and they believe that although the *CubaSí* is at times too ideological, the ideology constructed in their media is a good one. This is because, according to them, the construction of a positive image of Cuba enables people to see the contradictions of the political system in Britain which focuses on neo-liberal values, and places public interest behind corporate interest. In this framework, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, we need to approach the difference between alternative and mainstream media by looking at the different political projects that they embed, and the different social processes that they trigger.

Mainstream media are essentially business groups, increasingly concentrated and globally interconnected, highly diversified and oriented towards segmented markets (Castells, 1997:314), which are however geared primarily by profit-related concerns. In this regard, in Marxist fashion, I believe that mainstream media practices cannot be analysed without referring to the values, myths and meanings that defend corporate interest. Therefore their political projects need to be contextualised by looking at the powerful discourses of capitalism, neo-liberalism, or the globalisation of capital. One fundamental aspect that we need to consider when adopting a ritual approach is that, as Couldry (2003) suggested, dominant media rituals serve to construct 'the myth of the mediated centre' (2003:47). What Couldry suggests is that dominant media organisations present themselves within our global world *as if* they were the centre of the society. Since dominant media present themselves as the centre of global society, as being part of the 'sacred' side of social life, it is not surprising that the values that they construct and legitimise are also the dominant ones within Western societies.

In conclusion to this part, the concept of media rituals is of central importance to this thesis because it enables us to see that media practices like *rituals* involve processes of ideology and identity construction. Furthermore, with reference to Couldry (2003) the concept enables us to understand the power of mainstream media organisations in society. In the following parts I will argue that an approach that considers media as rituals is of central importance for a further yet underestimated reason: the elements of *transformation and resistance* embedded in ritual practices. It is only by recognising these elements and looking at the power of imagination within rituals - the last and concluding part of the chapter will

argue - that we can better grasp the dialectics and complexities of the struggles over meaning and representational resource that affect our contemporary societies, and appreciate the social significance of mediated resistance.

Part III - Rituals of Power, Rituals of Resistance: Media Rituals and the Power of Imagination

The Power of Imagination: Ideology, "Projectual Dimension" and Social Change

Within academia, the analysis of rituals - like analyses of ideology - have often been linked to the 'conservative' aspect of these social processes, namely to their ability to conserve and perpetuate the dominant values within a given society. Rituals are about customs, conventions, traditions and conservation. In a similar way, the understanding of ideology influenced by Marxist analyses has often been linked to the idea that ideological constructions serve to re-produce and repeat power relationships within society. In this framework, both within ritual theory or analyses of ideology, the role of transformation, dissent and resistance[45] has often been overlooked, and when scholars refer to it, they regard it as minimal, not creative, and of not worth of much interest.

This is particularly evident if we take into consideration the work of Bloch (1986). Although recognising that rituals change, and that they change over time, Bloch contended that the changes within ritual are hardly big changes; they are repetitions of the themes already there or expressed elsewhere. For this reason he suggested that ritual is revealed as an area of human activity which is low in creativity (1986:186). However, as Comaroff and Comaroff pointed out:

> "If, as anthropologists claim, [ritual] is a species of activity that deploys the poetic properties of sign to the fullest, it should also be

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[45] As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, British Cultural Studies scholars were perhaps the first to introduce an understanding of dissent and resistance in the literature on the relationship between ideology and ideological state apparatuses such as the media. As argued, by replacing the term 'ideology' with the concept of 'hegemony', British Cultural Studies scholars provided crucial insights on the dialectics between dominant cultures and subcultures of resistance. Drawing from these insights, the last part of this chapter will discuss the struggle of hegemony in further detail. In suggesting that we must look for transformation and resistance, here I do not imply that, as the British Cultural Studies scholars have done, we must consider the struggle between oppositional and dominant forces in a given society. On the contrary I wish to focus on processes of ideological construction, and consider the elements of transformation and resistance *within* ideology. In other words, I contend that we must consider the fact that transformation is embedded in the construction of meaning aimed at legitimising power relationships.

a fecund medium for making new meanings, new ways of knowing the world and its workings" [Comaroff and Comaroff: 1993:XXI].

In contrast to those who contend that transformation and change within ideology and ritual are minimal and not creative at all, this research project strongly believes that, although repetitive in nature, the process of meaning construction that rituals enable is a process in which imagination and creativity play a fundamental part. Ritual must involve transformation and imagination because, as discussed earlier, we cannot understand cultures as closed systems, isolated from the confrontation and encounter with 'other' cultures, be they dominant or oppositional (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993; Mintz, 1974; Asad, 2002). Ideologies and cultures always interact and confront each other, in an endless and creative struggle for *hegemony*. In this framework, the construction of meaning aimed at consolidating relations of power within a given group (ideology) is constantly threatened by the influence of other cultures, and by the historical, political, social and technical transformations that affect wider society. Therefore, my understanding is that *power does not survive historical transformations, unless it has the imaginative ability to predict them and find new ways in which to legitimise itself*.

In this regard, I believe that *imagination* is central to both ideology and ritual. As explained in the introduction to this thesis, I believe that the concept of imagination needs to be detached from the idea of fantasy, which carries with it a connotation of thought divorced from projects and actions (Appadurai, 1996:7, Graeber, 2007b), and should instead be regarded as a social *activity*, something that *we do* (Ingold, 2000: 416), which carries forward intentionality, project and action of a kind. Imagination is understood here as a social project, as referring to those social processes that enable people to construct total images of themselves and society, and organise their action to fit these images. In this framework imagination becomes a social practice, a practice that cannot be detached from processes of ideological construction. This is because projects need to acquire legitimisation and consent in order to become actions.

Therefore the projectual dimension is a fundamental aspect of ritual practices and processes of ideological construction, because it defines those processes of the construction of meaning that are not oriented toward the past, but instead attempt to anticipate future transformations and prepare the terrain for their realisation. The above point is evident in Trish's interview, when she talked about the new director of the organisation who made possible the transition from the British Cuba Resource centre to the Cuba Solidarity campaign:

T: "He was really good because he could see what <u>needed to happen</u> [my emphasis], and he made contact with the embassy and ICAP asking what was the best way to show solidarity to Cuba. And he was really crucial in NSC, which was massive, and he was a key person. So he was the one who really was pushing forward the idea of being a solidarity campaign not only a resource centre which informed people about socialist achievements. And he wanted to show solidarity and build networks with the Trade Unions. At that time to show solidarity meant to send material aid."

As can be seen from Trish's words, therefore, the director of the organisation had a project in mind, a project that needed to become socially accepted and legitimised amongst members and organisers. In order to acquire legitimisation, the central office strongly relied on its media rituals. During the same period, therefore, articles in *CubaSí* started to dedicate increasingly more attention to Trade Union relations and affairs. In the Summer 95 issue, for instance, *CubaSí* published the letter of UNISON's General Secretary, who stated his support for the Caravanistas.[46] In the following issue (Autumn 95) the articles increased, and the magazine included reports covering the news regarding UNISON representatives travelling to Cuba or the success obtained by CSC at UNISON's fringe meeting. This example shows that it would be extremely difficult to conceptualise these forms of meaning construction without taking into account the projectual dimension, and the role of imagination.

Imagination as a social project and a force of transformation, therefore, is present within rituals and the process of ideological construction. This is because social groups (no matter how big they are) are forced to constantly re-frame their ideologies in order to adapt to historical transformations and survive the encounter within different 'cultures'. Power (and ideology in general) needs constantly to re-new itself, in order to survive. The idea that to survive power needs to renew itself, and hence the understanding that it is of central importance to consider the elements of transformation that are embedded within ideological constructions, shares many similarities with Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) work, which explores the changing logic of the *spirit of capitalism*. Their understanding of the 'spirit of capitalism' is very similar to the understanding of 'ideology' that has been advanced in this chapter. According to them, the spirit of capitalism defines 'those

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[46] Group of activists, who defied the blockade and brought material aid to Cuba.

sets of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that helps to justify this order[47] and legitimate the forms of action and predispositions compatible with it' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 10). Throughout its history – Boltanski and Chiapello have argued - capitalism had to coexist with forces of indignation[48] that arose within it, which tried to transform its processes or subvert it through criticism. In responding to these criticisms, capitalism managed not only to survive but to strengthen itself by renewing its 'spirit'.

The most important aspect for this thesis - that emerges within the work of Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) - is represented by their understanding that transformation within society occurs through a dialectical relationship between forces of domination and forces of resistance. They argue that capitalism needs to renew itself because cyclically its moral justification is challenged by social movements and critique in general. They find an example of this in the movements of the late 60s and during the 70s across Europe and North America, and suggest that these movements were crucial in inducing a transformation in the operation and mechanisms of capitalism (2005:167). Indeed, it was responding to the social movements of the 60s and 70s, which criticised consumer culture for its massification of experience, that the capitalism of the 80s renewed itself by incorporating the demand for authenticity through the commodification of difference (2005:443-449).

The recognition that power constantly needs to justify itself, enables us to recognise the various degrees of uncertainty and instability that affect it (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005:27-30). The projectual dimension of power, I contend, is a weak dimension, because it is defined by the unpredictability of success. Therefore, when we analyse ideology and rituals, we must bear in mind that there is a dimension to them which is vulnerable to transformation and resistance. As Bell (1992:208) suggests, within all rituals there is always an element of resistance. It is by recognising this weak dimension of power, the way in which it can be open to resistance and transformation, that we can shed some light on the

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[47] Here it is important to understand that, in contrast to Boltansky and Chiapello, I do not believe that we can perceive capitalism as an 'order'. Rather than an order, capitalism is understood here as a set of different relationships of domination and exploitation that are constantly justified and reinforced through beliefs and values.

[48] The two scholars note that despite the fact that capitalism has changed over centuries, the forces of indignation which have fuelled criticism to capitalism have more or less remained unvaried and can be divided in four sorts: a) capitalism is seen as a source of disenchantment and in-authenticity b) capitalism is seen as a source of oppression c) capitalism is seen as a source of poverty and profound social inequalities d) capitalism is seen as a source of opportunism and egoism.

way in which social protest and critique operate. This is because as Tarrow (1994) suggested it is in the 'openings of authority' that collective action takes place.

When we refer to media rituals and to alternative media practices, I believe, we must bear in mind all these aspects. As we have seen in the previous part, and as Couldry (2003) has argued, dominant media rituals work to legitimise the power of media organisations and their corporate values. By presenting themselves to the global world *as if* they were the centre of society, as being part of the 'sacred' side of social life, the values they construct and legitimise are also the dominant ones within Western societies. If, as it has been argued so far, all ideologies, and all rituals, have a projectual dimension - an element of weakness which can be challenged by critique leading to social change - dominant media rituals also have this dimension. It is in the recognition that values can be changed and modified, in the understanding that dominant ideologies have their openings, that we need to understand the role of alternative media practices.

The Power of Imagination and the Struggle over Meaning and over Representational Resources

It has been mentioned elsewhere that, within CSC, alternative media practices involve simultaneously the production of their media platforms - such as the *CubaSí* - and the construction of strategies of counter-information within dominant media. Both dimensions aim at challenging the power of media through the construction of alternative ideologies and the de-construction of dominant ones. In this framework, CSC - like many other oppositional groups in Britain - is involved in a struggle for hegemony. One important aspect that we need to understand is that within this struggle, however, the forces cannot be understood in terms of a fixed dualism, but should be understood in terms of complex networks of alliances, association and oppositions.

Furthermore, we must bear in mind that forces of domination and resistance that are involved in hegemonic struggles cannot be perceived as balanced or equal. On the contrary - as the example of colonialism suggests - dominant forces (corporate businesses, the army, the church, the governors etc.) can be extremely powerful in achieving consent and imposing their ideology as natural and universal, whilst resistant forces can be extremely weak. The fact that resistant forces can be weak is evident in Scott's (1985) work. By looking at practices of peasant resistance, Scott criticises Marx's conception of 'false consciousness' and suggests that peasants were very well aware of the limitation of their power and it was precisely for this reason that they did not engage in an open revolution, but instead adventured into everyday practices of sabotage and resistance.

It is precisely upon Scott's formulation of the inventive and meaningful 'weapons of the weak' that this research bases its understanding of alternative media practices. In a conversation with Rob it emerged that he is very well aware of the limited effects alternative media practices have. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, alternative media production and counter-information practices are fundamental definers of CSC's political action. And Rob not only engages with these practices on an everyday basis, but also seems to give a great value to them. An example of this can be found in the fact that a full article in favour of Cuba's Health System which he wrote, and which was published by the Guardian on the 18th of September, 2007 was displayed in his old office on Seven Sisters Road, together with the image of his family.

Hegemony is a struggle, a struggle between unequal forces, where alliances are constantly constructed and re-constructed, and meanings are always challenged and re-used. This understanding of hegemony requires that we abandon the notions of binary antagonism, which are embedded in classical Marxist understandings. On the contrary, in contemporary society situations appear much more complex, and therefore we need an approach which takes into account these complexities. Hence, in mapping these complexities this research project strongly relies upon Laclau's (1990, 1996) approach. Laclau formulated that we need to understand the nature of social antagonism as contingent, and that the hegemonic project itself is an ambiguous project (1990:28). He calls, therefore, for a re-consideration of the concept of hegemony; one which considers the struggle of hegemony in relation to its ambiguities. Laclau powerfully suggests that our societies depend largely upon 'empty signifiers', and in order to prove his argument he takes as example the concept of democracy. Empty signifiers are essentially ambiguous, and represent the power of the absence, because instead of reflecting reality, they are absent from it (1996, 38:46).

Despite not reflecting reality 'empty signifiers' still have a fundamental meaning for human beings; their absence has an immense power. Laclau's insight lies in the fact that he understands hegemony as the processes through which different forces attempt to fix meanings to these empty signifiers (1996, 38:46). This formulation is of particular importance for this research project not only because it helps to highlight the meaning of alternative media practices, but also because – as mentioned above - it leaves space for an understanding of alternative media by taking into account their imaginative and transformative tension.

Imagination is fundamental in counter-hegemonic struggles, yet the role imagination plays in counter-hegemonic practices differs slightly from the role imagination plays in practices of ideological construction. This is because - as we

have seen when discussing the relation between ideology and imagination - imagination played a *constructive* role in the creation of new meanings. In counter-hegemonic practices imagination is still a social project, however as a social project of resistance it finds its force in social critique and thus in a deconstructive tension. In this framework, imagination is transformed into an activity, which as Turkle (1975) suggested with reference to the French student uprising of May-June 1968, provides the images by which existing structures can be cracked, open and re-created (1975:86-87). It becomes a powerful political activity, an activity which aims at cracking the myths presented by the forces of power, through alternative media practices.

A fascinating example of what has been argued above can be found again in the ethnographic context of the CSC. During the Christmas holidays of 2006, the *Evening Standard* published a series of articles that attacked Ken Livingstone, the mayor of London, for his visit to Cuba. To be more sensational the articles mentioned the fact that the Mayor of London - when he was in Havana - visited the families of five 'terrorists' who were jailed in the United States in 1998. The article referred to five Cubans, who were arrested in Miami in 1998 for conspiracy, after presenting a file to the FBI which monitored the activities and terrorist plans against Cuba, from a group of exiled Cubans in Miami. Their detention is a matter of international critique, which involves Amnesty International and the American human rights lawyer Leni Weinglass, especially for the fact that they are not granted the right to see their families.

The word 'terrorist' was the empty signifier upon which CSC fought its struggle over naming (Melucci, 1996:180) and it did so by undergoing a powerful deconstructive attack. First Trish called the letter editor of the *Evening Standard* arguing for the importance of publishing a letter of complaint. She specifically asked to re-treat the adjective 'terrorist'. Steve called the journalist who had written one of the articles and said that what he had done contravened the code of ethics of the NUJ. They reported the case on both the *Cuba Update* and the *CubaSí*, and they called on all members and organisers to intervene with letters and complaints. Their deconstructive action was successful, and the *Evening Standard* published both Rob's and Steve letters, and titled the letter page 'Support the Miami Five'.

Empty signifiers, therefore, become the 'space' on which struggles of hegemony are fought. People within oppositional groups constantly engage in the imaginative process of *deconstruction,* a process that involves rudimentary and self-taught discourse analysis. In doing so, people within CSC for instance, have a clear understanding of how news is spun, and messages distorted for the benefit of

a specific ideology. This process allows people to recognise the mastery of hegemonic forces to fix their meaning of the world on specific signifiers, and therefore enables oppositional groups to challenge these meanings through the same channels in which these meanings are constructed.

This struggle over meaning, however, is extremely unbalanced, and this is reflected in people's experience, which is at times cause of profound frustration when they recognise their weakness. One day over lunch with Rob and Dean, we were discussing the notion of freedom. As had happened with Roger once, they criticised the idea that the press in the West was a free press. Indeed, according to their understanding, the press was not free because to publish a newspaper one requires a large amount of wealth. Thus, if in the UK there is little censorship, the press is still a tool of power, for the higher classes and the very wealthy. Rob argued that although the freedom of the press, or the concept of human rights, were concepts of great importance they had been appropriated for political reasons and became powerful political tools. He then looked at me and asked: "How can we attack such powerful concepts as freedom or human rights?"

Despite the actors engaging in the struggle over meaning facing a feeling of frustration and powerlessness, my understanding is that social critique is of central importance in making social change possible. Indeed, the people involved in the social world of CSC have struggled in the last twenty years for a different numbers of issues, such as minimum wage, equal opportunities and anti-racist policies. These values have become widely shared in contemporary Britain and are the basis of different laws and policies. In understanding the role of social critique in transforming society, however, we must bear in mind that, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) suggested, the relationship between capitalism and critique is an ambiguous one, because critique both reinforces and transforms capitalism. In understanding this ambiguous relationship, as it emerges from their work, we could either choose to adopt an optimistic or a pessimistic approach. On the pessimistic side we could contend that critique or social protest helps refine the strategies of justification of dominant powers, and in doing so it enables to hide issues of social injustice even further.

On the optimistic side, however, we could suggest that by asking capitalism to justify itself in terms of a common good, critique can lead to a positive improvement in terms of justice (2005:37-43). Either if we see it in an optimistic light or in a pessimistic light, what becomes evident from Chiapello and Boltanski's work is that critique and social protest often bring about social change, in a never-ending struggle for hegemony. It is only by understanding critique and social protest as a force for social change – this last and conclusive part of the chapter

has argued – that we can better appreciate the social significance of mediated resistance and the meaning it has for the people involved.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that alternative media practices are used simultaneously to legitimise the relationships of domination within the group and to build collective feelings of belonging. I have argued that the construction of ideology and identity are equally important processes in the production of alternative media. Furthermore, I have explained that despite being ideological, most of the practices of CSC are also counter-hegemonic, in the sense that they are oriented at challenging the neo-liberal values promoted by dominant media. In order to explain the complex human processes that are embedded in media production, and uncover the social significance of mediated resistance, this chapter has argued for the importance of combining theories from anthropology and media studies.

Focusing principally on theory, the argument was, therefore, divided into three sections. In the first section I engaged in an historical exploration of the concept of ideology and hegemony, and the way they have been conceptualised with reference to the media. By bringing together the insights of Marxist scholars with those of British Cultural Studies and those of anthropologists engaged in the analysis of signifying practices, I argued that the two concepts need to be understood as interdependent. Whilst ideology can be understood as the ordering of meaning, within a particular political group, which serves both to guarantee the cohesion of the group and sustain the relations of domination within it, hegemony should be understood as a cultural and social struggle for visibility and consent of a particular group ideology, which takes place within the larger society. In this framework, it has been argued that alternative media practices are at the same time ideological and counter-hegemonic.

By exploring the concept of *ritual*, the second section of this chapter has argued that focusing on issues of domination and resistance often overlooks the emotional dimension embedded in media processes. Indeed, if it is true that media involve processes of ideology construction, it is also true that they serve to guarantee a feeling of cohesion and belonging. To address this dual dimension and understand the way in which it operates, I contended we must look at the anthropological theory of *ritual*. Hence, drawing from Couldry (2003) and combining the work of Turner (1967) with the one of Barthes (2000), this chapter has shown how media as rituals order symbolic meaning in a way that harmonises contradictions, makes social norms at the same time obligatory and desirable, and naturalises relations of power.

It has been argued that if all media should be perceived as rituals, and therefore as incorporating an emotional and ideological dimension, the difference between dominant and alternative media rituals can be found in the political project that they embed and in the different social processes that they trigger. In this regard, in Marxist fashion, I believe that mainstream media practices cannot be analysed without referring to the values, myths and meanings that defend corporate interest. Therefore they cannot be explored without looking at the powerful discourses of capitalism, neo-liberalism, or the globalisation of capital. On the contrary, an analysis of alternative media practices should incorporate a reflection on counter-hegemony and resistance.

One important aspect that must be taken into consideration when analysing media rituals and the relationship between alternative and dominant media practices, is that as Couldry (2003:47) has argued, dominant media rituals serve to legitimise the power of media organisations, by constructing the 'myth of the mediated centre'. Couldry suggests that dominant media organisations present themselves within our global world *as if* they were the centre of society. Since dominant media present themselves as the centre of global society, as being part of the 'sacred' side of social life, it is not surprising that the values that they construct and legitimise are also the dominant ones within Western societies.

The concept of media rituals is of central importance to this thesis – not only because it enables us to uncover the ideological and emotional processes embedded in media practices, but also because - with reference to Couldry (2003) - the concept enables us to understand the power of mainstream media organisations in society. However, I have argued that the concept is helpful for a further yet under-investigated reason: it enables us to uncover the transformative and resistant elements embedded in ritual practices. The concluding part of this paper explored this tension, and argued that we must re-frame our understanding of the relationship between media and ideology not only by considering the emotional aspect embedded in people's engagement with mediated meaning but most importantly by looking at the concept of *imagination*.

Imagination as a social project, and a force of transformation, is present within rituals and processes of ideological construction. This is because, social groups (no matter how big they are) are forced to constantly re-frame their ideologies in order to adapt to historical transformations and survive the encounter within different 'cultures'. Power (and ideology in general) needs constantly to renew itself in order to survive. The recognition that power constantly needs to justify itself, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) have noticed, enables us to recognise the various

degrees of uncertainty and instability that affect it. Most importantly, drawing from their work I have argued that the projectual dimension of power is a weak dimension, because it is defined by the unpredictability of success.

Therefore, when we analyse media rituals, we must bear in mind that there is a dimension of them which is vulnerable to transformation and resistance. It is by recognising this weak dimension of power, the way in which it can be open to resistance and transformation, that we can shed some light on the way in which social protest and critique bring about social change. Furthermore, it is in the recognition that values can be changed and modified, in the understanding that dominant ideologies have their openings of authority (Tarrow, 1994), that we need to understand the role of alternative media practices. As has been shown, people rely on these terrains in order to construct alternative ideologies and deconstruct dominant ones. In this frame of thought, alternative media practices need to be understood as being embedded in an endless struggle to counter the cultural hegemony of dominant values. This struggle, as mentioned, is extremely unbalanced and is often the cause of great frustration. In conclusion to this chapter however we should ask ourselves: Have new media technologies transformed the relationship between alternative media, people and political action? Has the advent of the internet empowered the actors involved in these struggles?

Chapter IV - Possibilities and Ambivalences: the Discursive Power of the World Wide Web and its Impact on Political Action

Introduction

Media technologies have long been part of the history and everyday routine of the people involved with CSC, and they have always been important *spaces of imagination* for the construction of oppositional identities and ideologies. However, as mentioned in chapter two, the technological developments of the last two decades and the advent of the Internet have multiplied the media platforms available. Today online networks, connections, media-spaces and practices define people's everyday experience of politics and political opposition. But how are we to conceptualise activists' relationship to internet technologies? How are we to understand the beliefs and fears that they trigger in the people involved? How are these new technologies transforming the process of mediated resistance?

By extending Altheide and Snow's (1979) concept of 'media logic' to the understanding of the advent of the World Wide Web, this chapter will argue that internet technologies have transformed people's political priorities and strategies, and that online action has become a new repertoire of political opposition. In this context, it will be explained, information and communication technologies cannot be perceived merely as 'spaces' that are shaped by activists' imaginaries and actions, but they also need to be understood as 'agents' that affect social dynamics and understandings. By critically applying Latour's (2005) actor-network-theory, this chapter will show that if we are to perceive technologies as *actants*, we must bear in mind that they have become such due to human agency. This is because technologies are embedded with human discourses and imaginations, which - by being naturalised in the technology itself - profoundly affect the everyday layers of social experience.

It will be argued that the belief in the opportunities and possibilities brought about by the internet has profoundly altered the everyday experience of political action, and alternative media production. At the same time, however, the frustrations and anxieties attached to the World Wide Web are affecting activists' social dynamics and understandings in different ways. To understand this ambivalence, this chapter will argue, scholars should look at the discursive power of the World Wide Web, at the way in which it was presented as the technology of freedom and openness. In this way, we can gain important insights into the ongoing social conflicts and negotiations created by the techno-historical transformations of the last fifteen years.

Redefining the Terrain for Political Action: CSC and the 'Media Logic'

Early in 2007, Barclays Bank decided to close the bank accounts of two Cuban organisations, despite the fact that the long-standing accounts held by Havana International Bank and Cubanacan, a state-owned travel organisation, were understood to be healthy.[49] The decision was taken in order to comply with U.S. blockade rules, and thus please the Bank's North American customers. The choice of *Barclays Bank* followed the one of *Hilton Hotels* in Europe to ban Cuban citizens from their premises, and preceded the decision of *Lloyds TSB* to close down Cuban accounts. These policies breached UK and European anti-discrimination trading laws. In order to make public these issues and thus counteract the anti-Cuban wave that seemed to be sweeping across major businesses in the UK, CSC launched its *Barclays* campaign. The campaign was structured around the production of news-bulletins, press releases and articles that were sent to members, key figures in the trade union movement, networked organisations, and Members of Parliament.

On the 26th of April 2007, CSC organised a demonstration in Parliament Square in front of the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, where *Barclays Bank* was having its annual general meeting. For the occasion, office workers decided to use a giant puppet of George W. Bush, which Trish had made in 2003 for the demonstration against the war in Iraq.[50] At the time, the puppet held a Cuban flag. On the *Barclays* demonstration, the flag was replaced with the bank's banner. It took us at least twenty minutes to build the puppet, while people started to arrive at the scene. One of the first persons to arrive was Ken Gill, the chair of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and former president of the TUC. Bob Oram – on the national committee of UNISON – arrived shortly after, together with the MPs of the all Party Cuba group, key figures in other solidarity campaigns, and a few members and volunteers. Overall we were not many, just above 20 people, and once the Puppet was ready - and Dean and I struggled to hold it up – we stood there beneath the burlesque smile of G.W. Bush waiting for the time to go by. Shortly after an hour, we packed up our things and made our way back to the small office on Seven Sisters Road.

Overall the demonstration in front of *Barclays* did not last more than a couple of hours, merely the time to set up the scene and have material to report upon. In

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[49] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/23/cuba.usforeignpolicy (date accessed: 3/03/2009)

[50] The use of the puppet is extremely interesting, because it highlights the way in which CSC is adapting to the repertoires of contemporary social movements, which rely on spectacular and carnival-like strategies as well as on anarchist ideologies (Day, 2005). The relationship between CSC and such groups will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

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this context, there was no direct involvement in the act of demonstrating itself. There was no 'shouting' of slogans or 'face-to-face' communications with *Barclays* representatives, who were entering the building for their annual general meeting. The only thing office workers seemed to be preoccupied with was that photographers and journalists – who turned up for the demonstration - recorded the event. Once we reached the office, all the 'action' started to happen, with the CSC staff engaged in getting the story into local, national or alternative and internet based media. Phone calls, email exchange, the collection of statements, the writing of press releases, the sharing of images and opinions were practices that defined this type of action. When the *GuardianOnline* mentioned the protest the entire atmosphere in the office was filled with excitement.

The *Barclays* campaign, like many other campaigns and forms of social protest within CSC, was entirely centred on media practices and technologies. At first, CSC workers focused on sending out information and news on the issue. They chose to build the campaign on bulletins, press releases and full length articles. By doing so they sought to promote awareness of the situation and to grant themselves political support within the networks of communication and action in which the Cuba Solidarity Campaign is embedded. Furthermore, the experience of the demonstration in front of Barclays Annual General Meeting was entirely influenced by people's understanding of how to construct effective media messages. As it emerges, therefore, within CSC, practices of political action - today - are largely focused and shaped by people's will to construct effective media messages.

This observation fits particularly well with the work of Altheide and Snow (1979), who have shown that – in the late Seventies - political, religious and sport institutions in Britain were starting to be pervaded by a 'media logic' which altered their forms and contexts(1979:10-11). According to the scholars, social institutions and organisations took the initiative and actively re-organised themselves to fit media needs. By uncovering the pervasiveness of the 'media logic' within different social institutions, the work of the two scholars highlighted the power that media organisations had in society. Altheide and Snow's argument is an important one for this research project. However, I believe that we can better understand the pervasiveness of the 'media logic' within political institutions if we refer once again to Couldry's work (2003).

As we have explored in the previous chapter, according to Couldry, dominant media rituals serve to produce, and legitimise the 'myth of the mediated centre' (2003:47). This is to say that they reinforce the idea that the media – like rituals – stay at the centre of society, they are – in Durkheimian fashion – part of the

'serious life'. By applying Turner's (1967) understanding of liminality and Bourdieu's concept of rite of institution (1991), Couldry argues that by constructing the myth of the mediated centre, media rituals emphasise the *value* of media, and serve to create a boundary between what is *in* the media and what is not, between the extraordinary and the ordinary. 'Media logic', therefore, seems to have affected different social institutions not only because media organisations are powerful and influential (Altheide and Snow, 1979), but also because being in the media has become – especially in Britain today – a persuasive *value.* In this framework, therefore, it is not surprising that media logic has affected also the social contexts of political organisations.

The history of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign here is particularly insightful in highlighting the way in which 'media logic' has come to dominate and transform the everyday understandings of political action. This is particularly evident if we consider for instance the concept of *solidarity*. When the campaign was founded, solidarity was largely expressed through the collection and the shipping of aid material to Cuba, to the point that an article on *CubaSí* reports that in 1995 CSC raised £200,000 worth of aid material. In the late nineties, the situation radically changed. Today, the campaign's involvement with material aid has decreased to the point that it is limited to the shipping of musical instruments or ballet shoes through the *Music Fund for Cuba*.[51] This is because four years ago ICAP explicitly asked CSC to stop sending material aid and to focus instead on producing information on Cuba, and on countering the negative representations of its government in Britain.

As we shall see in chapter six, many within Cuba believe that in an internet connected world where information flows freely from one country to another and the message of political movements reaches a global scale, paradoxically the 'wall of silence' between Cuba and the rest of the world seems to be stronger then ever. In the majority of cases Cuba is not a matter of focus for global broadcasting companies and newspapers. It is not news; it is an old, outdated issue. When issues on Cuba are covered, these merely focus either on Fidel Castro or on negative representations of the socialist government. In this context, therefore, media action has been charged with a new and fundamental importance and has come to dominate the agenda of the campaign. Proof of this can be found in the fact that, during the 2007 Annual General Meeting, media action was discussed as

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[51] The Music Fund for Cuba was first established in memory of the singer Kirsty MacColl who before dying in Mexico had been involved with the CSC. The Music Fund for Cuba was set up as a charity with the political intention of reaching those people who would want to get culturally engaged, but not politically engaged, with Cuba.

top priority and placed before parliamentary action, whilst in 1993's AGM it was not even mentioned.

This 'focus on media', therefore has become in recent years a political project for CSC; and has re-shaped the understanding of solidarity in fascinating ways. Today, people seem to link their understanding of political solidarity primarily to processes which focus on counter-information strategies. Counteracting negative representations of Cuba has become for CSC a matter of great importance, one that shapes their understanding of political action and defines 'what they do'. What seems to be emerging from this context is not only that the media logic has transformed people's understanding of what they do within the social world of CSC, but it has become particularly pervasive in the last few years.

The notion that media logic has become especially pervasive in recent times among Trade Unions and pressure groups in Britain is an argument that appears also in the work of Manning (1998). Indeed, as he has shown, Trade Unions and their networked organisations have been profoundly transformed in the last two decades by the new media environment. According to Manning, this transformation was influenced by the fact that during the nineties the communication experts of New Labour pressured Trade Unions to become more effective in their communication strategies, and to develop a new language for the 'Labour movement'. In this framework, therefore, Trade Union organisations and pressure groups in Britain began to develop 'do it yourself' public relations and communication strategies, which transformed the everyday reality of these organisations (Manning, 1998:73).

Manning's work is of central importance to better understand the increased pervasiveness of media logic in the social world of CSC, and it enables us to better explore how, on the basis of the media logic, these organisations started to transform their practices of political action. However, Manning's analysis lacks a through exploration of the idea of 'new media environment'. Most importantly, in considering the changing campaigning strategies of trade unionists, Manning does not address the discursive power of the World Wide Web, and its effect on activists understanding of political action. Indeed, as the next parts of this chapter will show, to understand why media action has become such a powerful repertoire of political opposition, scholars cannot refer only to the influence of media organisations in society or to the *value* people attach to media. They also have to consider the discursive power of the World Wide Web and analyse its impact on contemporary forms of political action.

Internet-Related Beliefs and the New Possibilities of Political Action

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, following the insurrection in Chiapas in 1994, online action started to transform the realities of social movements across the world and created new understandings of social and political struggle (Atton, 2002, 2004; Ribeiro, 1998; Slater, 1998; Castells, 1997; Kowal, 2002; Kidd, 2003; McCaughey and Ayers 2003). If we are to apply Tilly's (1986) approach, the insurrection in Chiapas can be seen as the 'hinge', namely the moment in which an earlier style of protest is irreversibly supplanted by that of its successor. Tilly has often been criticised for emphasising disruption and transformation when looking at the repertoires of social protest. Indeed, as Tarrow (1998) and Trougott (1995) have shown, repertoires are often modular in the sense that different tactics of social protest can be borrowed and adapted in a variety of different ways. Therefore repertoires tend to repeat themselves in the form of cycles, they do not replace one another, but often overlap.

Despite the flaws, however, Tilly's approach is extremely important, because it highlights that it is by looking at repertoires that we can understand important historical variations (1986:36). The conflict in Chiapas brought about an important variation in the repertoires of political action across the globe. Indeed, following the Zapatista insurrection and the creation of the People's Global Action[52] network, political groups - or ethnic and social minorities across the world – started to turn to internet technologies because they saw them as powerful networking and communication tools. Most importantly, as many suggested, different social and political groups decided to turn to internet technologies because they believed that thanks to the World Wide Web, their messages could have a global reach (Diani and Della Porta, 1999; Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Melucci, 1996; Ribeiro, 1998; Slater, 1998).

When in 1996/1997 CSC launched its website, the emphasis on the political possibilities brought about by internet technologies was an influential discourse within the organisation. As mentioned in chapter two, the social world of CSC has first become engaged with internet technologies through the creation and extension of the internet service Poptel (Agar *et al*, 2002). Poptel was an internet and on-line service provider that was run by an employee cooperative (worker cooperative). It became known as provider of Internet services to the Labour Party, and launched the successful bid to create a top level Internet domain for use exclusively by cooperatives and communities. The project was born out of a belief that new technologies were fundamental tools in the strengthening of the

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[52] See chapter one for details on the People Global Action network.

International Trade Union Movement, and in the facilitation of networks of communication and action between different organisations.

In the autumn 1996 *CubaSí* issue, that followed the launch of CSC's first website, 'immediacy', 'efficiency' and 'world-wide direct online action' were key words used in the articles to highlight the advantages the Net would bring to their cause. In the coming years, as we have seen in the chapters preceding this one, these expectations were put into practice within CSC and – similar to other networked organisations - the Internet has transformed and empowered the campaign's political action. Interesting in this regard is the following extract from an interview with Tasha, the communication officer of CSC, who at the time of the interview was 36 years old.

> **V**: Do you remember when the Internet started?
>
> **T**: Yes, Veronica I am old enough (laughs)...
>
> **V**: and do you think the Internet has transformed the way you see political action?
>
> **T**: Yes, in some sense it did. I think it makes it ten times easier to take an action, to join a group and you can build petitions on names and things. You know, you can do that really quickly and cheaply. If we had the technology, we could do like Oxfam who can jam the Inbox of 30,000 people overnight.
>
> **V**: and do you think that's effective?
>
> **T**: yeah...I think it is, because it's public opinion..... For instance why are the supermarkets worried for their green credentials? They are not worried about the environment. They are worried about their customers. I mean on targeted campaigns I think it's really effective. People are always worried about their brands, images etc. Whether it is effective with the Government I don't know, because they know that people easily forget...But you can reach a lot of people. That's it. That's the thing. People would forward it to other people, I mean you can get the message out, to a lot more people, in different countries as well. Hopefully if you cast the net wider you might be able to get a few more fish.

In the above extract many important issues emerge. One of these is that notions of empowerment are often accompanied by notions related to the limits of

the technologies available.[53] Another issue, which is perhaps more central to the argument in this chapter, is represented by the fact that, as Natasha suggests, internet technologies made action much easier, because they have enhanced activists' chances for networking and 'getting the message out there'. During fieldwork I found that many people - within different campaigns - shared the same belief. When talking about internet technologies and everyday practices people often claimed that new technologies had enhanced and improved their political action and media activism. Within their interviews and statements, people frequently referred to the internet as a site in which 'sharing', 'networking' and 'exchange' were facilitated and made possible.

In this framework, according to many informants, new information and communication technologies facilitated the construction and consolidation of political networks, and they referred equally to national and trans-national ones. Like many other solidarity campaigning organisations across the world, CSC has been involved in the construction of inter-continental networks of association and action long before the advent of the World Wide Web. An example of this is provided by the presence of an article written by the Australian-Cuba Friendship Association which appeared in the Spring of *CubaSí* in 1986. Yet the internet transformed these transnational networks in substantial ways. Through email exchange and web-links, day to day communication with other political and media organisations became an un-expensive, immediate and regular practice within the everyday reality of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. This has had a great impact on the way in which, nowadays, political action is imagined and organised. Today, due to instant communication between Britain and Cuba, CSC can respond quickly to any issue emerging on the island by deciding a plan of action with ICAP or other Cuban officials.[54]

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[53] It has been mentioned in chapter two that the lack of technological resources, or in Pippa Norris's (2001) terms the experience of the digital divide, is a problem for CSC, and organisers and office workers are constantly preoccupied with finding ways to solve it.

[54] Here it is important to mention that despite internet technologies having facilitated day to day exchanges with Cuba, in comparison to other countries, connections with the island are made difficult by the fact that Cuba cannot rely on American fibre-optic cables due to the US embargo laws. Cuban officials have often emphasised the limitations of technology within the island to address questions on why the number of Cuban citizens online remains really low. It is difficult to say whether this is a justification for issues of censorship or a reality. However, it seems to be true that Cuba is creating an undersea connection with Venezuela, and that Cuban authorities claim that they expect numbers of citizens using online technologies to increase from the average 2%. (Interesting in this regard is an article published on the 'Reporters without Borders' website http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=20999, date of access 07/09/08. Or to make a comparison

The possibility of constructing and consolidating networks of communication and action is not the only reason for which people believe that the internet is an empowering tool. As emerged in Natasha's interview and during conversations with other members and organisers, in the social world of CSC people also believe that the Internet has granted them easier access to both governmental and non-governmental organisations. In the *CubaSí* issue of Autumn 1996 - which followed the launch of the website - the national office of the campaign expressed its enthusiasm about the fact that they finally could get their message across to the high centres of global power. Such enthusiasm faded shortly after. One year later, in the winter 1997-1998 issue of the magazine, a reader - who defined himself as a 'net-enthusiast' - reports on his own failed attempt to pressure a governmental institution through online action. When he wrote to the White House an email full of anger and discontent about U.S. policy on Cuba, the White House responded via snail-mail:

> 'Thank you for your message. I've been touched by the many expressions of support and encouragement I have received from people everywhere who care deeply about my Administration and about the future of the United States and the world. I am doing all I can to help us meet the crucial challenges that face all of us. Sincerely, Bill Clinton' (*CubaSí* Magazine, Autumn 1997-1998, p.28)

The early enthusiasm in the Internet as a tool which granted access to worldwide institutions was, thus, replaced by a certain degree of scepticism. Yet the belief that new technologies enhanced their possibilities to pressurise corporations and institutions remained strong within the campaign. Another internet - related belief which relates to this point but leads to a further theme is represented by people's conviction that internet technologies have enhanced their ability for networking and 'getting the message across', and hence they contributed in making the construction and dissemination of 'alternative news' much easier. As we have seen in chapter two, the advent of internet technologies has multiplied the spaces for the production of news and information within the campaign. In the last 10 years, the messages produced by the campaign have reached a level of distribution and circulation which cannot be compared to the early nineties.

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with other developing countries it is interesting to visit http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm date accessed 12/07/07)

To better understand the extent to which the production and dissemination of their news has been made easier by new information and communication technologies it is important here to refer back to the above mentioned case of the *Barclays* demonstration. In the past the demonstration in Parliament Square would have probably been reported merely on the *CubaSí* Magazine or in the printed media of the Trade Unions. On the day of the demonstration, due to the many online platforms, CSC managed to distribute its message widely and to achieve a mention on *The Guardian* website. In this context, media activism - which not more then fifteen years ago was centred merely upon the production of the *CubaSí* magazine or the circulation of printed leaflets – has been transformed.

In conclusion to this part, the beliefs in the possibilities brought about by internet technologies have re-defined activists' political priorities and strategies. People within CSC today prioritise media action over other more traditional forms of political solidarity, such as demonstrations or sending aid material. Therefore, by enhancing people's confidence in their own networking and media strategies, internet technologies seem to have 'empowered' media action and amplified the emphasis on the importance of strategies centred upon media technologies. In this framework, they are transforming the way in which political action is being imagined, experienced and organised.

The Discursive Power of the World Wide Web: Re-Thinking Latour's Actor-Network Theory

The previous chapters of this thesis have argued that we need to understand media technologies as 'spaces of imagination' for the construction of political ideologies and identities. However, what emerges from the above discussion on the media logic and on the ways in which activists have transformed their political repertoires, following the advent of internet technologies, is a very different scenario. This is because technologies appear to be more 'agents' rather than 'spaces', which are transformed by activists' beliefs and relationships. In order to come to terms with this evident contradiction I contend - drawing from Barry (2001) - that we should understand the relationship between technologies and social contexts as one of mutual transformation, and therefore that technologies can be perceived at the same time as *spaces* - that are transformed by social practices and understandings - and as *actants*, which are transforming social experience.

The understanding of technologies as *actants* draws heavily upon Latour's (2005) Actor Network Theory (ANT), which suggests that the social as 'realm' or 'thing' does not exist. What exists is the *translation* between different *mediators*

who create traceable associations (2005:108). According to Latour, the social has to be perceived as a type of networked movement, which is defined by the multiple interconnections of human and non-human agents. In this framework, he introduces the idea of *actants.* The recognition of media technologies as *actants* is of central importance for this thesis, because it enables us to better understand the way in which new information and communication technologies are transforming priorities, social relations, and understandings of contemporary forms of political action in significant ways. Despite being central to the general approach of this research, there are some limitations present within Latour's theory that need to be addressed.

As Edwards, Harvey and Wade (2007:6) suggested, when ANT was established as a theoretical approach in the eighties, its claims shared many lines of similarity with anthropological theories, and this is specifically true if we consider the work of Appadurai (1986) on the social life of things or if we look at Gell's anthropology of art and his analysis of things as social agents (1998). Yet, as mentioned in chapter one, there was a difference between the work of the science, technology and society scholars (STS) and that of anthropologists. This is because, as Edwards *et al* (2007) suggested, STS scholars were interested in showing how networks of human and non-human agents created social discourses, and they were especially concerned with the construction of science and scientific facts. Anthropologists, on the contrary, were interested in the human relations that made networks and connections possible, and they sought to uncover the meaning of these relations (2007:5-7). In this framework, as Knox, Green and Harvey (2006) contended, the problem with much of the work of STS scholars is that it maintains a distance from the lives of the people it is focused on, in such a way that people become abstractions in the description of a scientific process (Knox *et al*, 2006:127).

Furthermore, by exploring the networked movement between human and non-human agents, ANT seems to neglect the actual escalation within which non-human agents have become powerful, and the power relations between the human and the non-human. Hence, by emphasising space, and space of networks, ANT suffers what early ethnographies within anthropology used to suffer from, namely *ahistoricity*. Indeed, as Couldry suggested, the spatial virtue of ANT is connected with a limitation: the relative neglect of time (2008: 163-165). It is for this reason that we need to remember the fact that ANT is not well equipped to understand the consequences of the *representations* that technologies embed, and the effects of these representations on everyday life (2008: 165).

Interestingly enough, in his ethnography of *Laboratory Life* (1986) - when Latour had already started working on a rudimentary version of actor-network-

theory (Callon and Latour, 1981) - the dimension of time was present. Indeed, with their work, Latour and Woolgar (1986) show not only that scientific facts are socially constructed, but that the *process* of construction is extremely important to analyse because it involves the use of certain devices (networks of scientists, language, the deletion of phases of the process) whereby all traces of production are made extremely difficult to detect (1986:176). By looking at the processes of construction of the non-human, Latour and Woolgar seem to ascribe them with an historical and hierarchical dimension that is missing from Latour's latest work (Latour, 2005).

Drawing from these critical observations, my understanding is that technologies are *actants*, and thus transform social processes, but have become such because they are embedded with political values and beliefs that are naturalised within the technology itself. Therefore they become *actants* in the moment in which the ideologies, which are attached to them, are presented as the 'natural' characteristics of the technology itself. In this framework, therefore, I believe that in the understanding of technologies as social agents, it is important to analyse the human social relationships and narratives which have produced them and placed them into contexts. This is because, as Agar, Green and Harvey (2002) suggested, technology is never separated from the social conditions in which it exists; ICTs do not simply 'appear' in a place; they are made to appear, and much work has to go into accomplishing this impression. This entails that:

> "How they appear will be associated with the motivations and perceptions of those who work to put them into place, which also means they will be located and perceived as being connected with specific people, organisations, interests and so on" (2002:272).

When CERN laboratories in 1990 announced the creation of a hypertext system, named the World Wide Web (www), they relied on systems of networks which were already in place (http, html, uri etc.). These networks were born at the unlikely intersection between military research (ARPANET) big science (Bell Laboratories which released UNIX) and grassroots libertarian movements[55] of graduate students (eg. MODEM or LINUX). From the intersection of these opposite networks a technology emerged, which was presented by CERN laboratories as the

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[55] Particularly interesting in this regard is the work of Turner (2006), which traces the history of a highly influential group of San Francisco Bay-area entrepreneurs: Stewart Brand and the *Whole Earth* network. The group between 1968 and 1998, through the construction of conferencing system known as WELL, profoundly influenced counter-culturalists and technologists in the understandings of computers as tools for personal liberation, the building of virtual and decidedly alternative communities, and the exploration of bold new social frontiers.

technology of openness and freedom (Castells, 2001:10-33). In this framework, therefore, as Castells has shown, the internet was not merely a new technology but was an ideological construct that was based on ideas of openness, sharing and exchange.

The emphasis on the discursive power of technologies enables us to better understand the beliefs that are embedded within them, and therefore to explain the impacts that they have on political action and imaginaries. As has been argued, the possibilities and beliefs attached to the structure of the World Wide Web have deeply affected the way in which people understand political action and opposition. By improving the possibility of networking and 'getting the message across', Internet technologies have empowered activists' understanding of media action and have transformed this into a privileged repertoire of oppositional politics.

As the next part of this chapter will show, far from perceiving the internet as an unproblematic and empowering force for social change, however, activists' relationship to new technologies is defined by everyday frustrations, anxieties and questions on what media action really means. This is not surprising. Indeed, as Castells (2001) has noticed, the internet – as the technology of openness and freedom' - is an ambivalent construct which offers as many opportunities as challenges. Whose freedom are we talking about? How are we to understand the contradictions between the democratic potential of new technologies and the commercial one? (Castells, 2001:275). Within the social movements literature or the alternative media one, however, there is little exploration of the challenges and frustrations people encounter in the everyday use of internet technologies for political action. When there is, it is not ethnographic (Atton, 2004; Meikle, 2002). But what are the challenges, the fears and frustrations embedded in activists' relationship to internet technologies? If the internet related beliefs have redefined the terrain for political action, what are the effects of internet-related anxieties?

Internet Technologies and Political Action: Contradictions and Anxieties in Everyday Practice

For their discursive power internet technologies are re-defining the terrain for political action. In doing so, however, they are giving rise to a series of questions, contradictions and conflicts amongst the people involved. This is better expressed in the following conversation between a young couple in their early twenties who are both involved in the social world of CSC. At the time of fieldwork, Sian was working as a researcher for AMICUS, which has since merged with TGWU to form UNITE. She was also a member of CSC and VIC. Matt used to be a full-time employee for CSC, and is today the only employee of VIC.

S: I think it is noticeable in the last years, amongst the different campaigns and the Trade Unions, things have changed. Today people think that having a Facebook group is a level of political activity, and they concentrate on online media action a lot. But then things are deteriorating. Members start to think that merely joining a Facebook group shows that you are committed. But actually it doesn't mean anything ...it doesn't change things. There is too much information around, to be effective.

M: You are right, but I think it's also useful...

S: I mean it's useful in terms of advertising and promoting what we do. But you also want lobbying, you want demonstrations, you want protests. Facebook and other online spaces are useful in terms of promoting these activities, but cannot be perceived as a substitute. But that's what's happening now...

M: That is a problem. I think it's a matter of balance. You know blogs are important, and they are important in society, but then people end up working just on blogs. And that's so individual. Since there's lots of negative things on Cuba and Venezuela in the press, it is obvious that for us the blogsphere and online action in general becomes more important. But if people concentrate only on the information side of things, they don't really get involved in lobbying, demonstrating, getting engaged or actively changing people's minds.

The discussion between Matt and Sian shows some of the conflicts and tensions that the use of internet technologies for political action is creating. The excessive focus on media action, according to them, is detrimental for political activism, because it enables people to abandon other forms of political action such as lobbying or demonstrations that are still perceived to be important. During fieldwork, for instance, I witnessed a conflict between the national office of CSC and the North London Group because the latter insisted on the importance of organising demonstrations. The national office on the contrary emphasised lobbying and media practices as privileged modes of political action. For office workers, demonstrations (especially the ones on a small scale) are usually perceived as non-effective (unless they are directed towards particular goals such as the *Barclays* campaign), and as a type of 'gesture politics' that is a 'waste of time and money'.

The conversation between Matt and Sian does not only highlight the problem of priorities, and the fact that by focusing on media action many organisations are neglecting other important political activities. It also raises the problem of information overload. In fact, according to Sian, 'there is too much information around to be effective'. During fieldwork, I found that such an understanding was quite common within CSC and other organisations. Due to the technological developments of the last fifteen years, the messages exchanged amongst networked organisations on a daily basis have reached an unprecedented and almost uncontrollable level. One day, Rob complained about the amount of emails he receives daily and about the fact that with an increased workload he is no longer able to properly follow-up the news and events of the other organisations, even though he would be interested.

This everyday experience of information overload – typified by the amount of emails that pass unnoticed and/or the number of messages that are stored into separate folders without being read – is triggering questions on the worth of their own communication strategies, and thus the very nature of their own political choices and activities. A similar line of reasoning can be found in the work of Lebert (2003) who looked at the social context of Amnesty International and argued that although internet technologies became a privileged mode of political action people questioned the effectiveness of online action (2003:209-233).

In the above conversation another important aspect emerges, when Matt mentioned that the internet is too 'individually based'. During fieldwork this was a common frustration that I have encountered over and over again. Across different organisations, people feel profoundly frustrated by the too often individualist logic of the Internet. According to some, in an era of blogs, individual website and social networking sites, individual messages are often given the same importance as the messages that have arisen out of the tensions and negotiations of a collective of people. In this context - suffocated by the information overload of the online space - the messages produced by oppositional groups, which as we have seen in chapter two are the product of negotiations and conflicts, get lost. This situation is making them question the idea that internet technologies create a space in which their voice can be heard. One day, for instance, the director of CSC told me: 'We try our best. But what should we do when the message of a single eleven year old can achieve a greater importance than our own?'

This reflection challenges understandings that see the Internet merely as a politically empowering medium. As communication tool and network constructor, the Internet seems to be fundamental, but when referring to the construction and transmission of political ideologies (and especially marginal collective voices) the

Internet should be understood for its emphasis on individualism and individual meanings. In fact as Natasha once told me:

> **N**: 'You know it's so difficult out there [in the online space]! You have some websites on which more money was spent that look more polished, more serious, and people might give them more credibility, and that is probably a danger, it will be a danger. You know some of them can have an amazing online presence and actually be only three people.'

As becomes clear following this discussion on internet related frustrations, the belief in the opportunities brought about by internet technologies seems to coexist with frustrations and anxieties that arise through everyday practice and experience. In this framework, it appears evident that the relationship between political movements and new technologies is a complex and ambivalent one, one that is embedded in a tension of empowerment and frustration. All these observations provide us with an answer to the questions raised in the last chapter, or at least a partial one. Indeed, in the previous chapter I have shown that the people involved with CSC dedicate much of their time to challenging dominant ideologies, in an endless struggle for hegemony. However, I have argued that the struggle is extremely unbalanced and that is often the cause of great frustration. Therefore, I have asked whether the advent of internet technologies has empowered the actors engaged in the struggle over meaning? The answer, as this last part of the chapter has shown, is yes and no. Indeed, although internet technologies have empowered activist networking strategies and the ability to get their message across, they have also given rise to a series of new anxieties and frustrations. These frustrations, as will be shown below, are profoundly transforming activists' relationship to alternative media production.

The impacts of Internet Related Anxieties and the Continuing Importance of Printed Media

During fieldwork I was surprised to discover that CSC and the other networked organisations, as well as developing web-based platforms, were still investing their few economic resources in the production of printed activist magazines. As mentioned, the *CubaSí* magazine has a crucial importance for the campaign, and despite the many online platforms that are now available, people within CSC are committed to continue to produce it. The commitment to the production of their magazine often leads the organisation to economic loss. This can be seen for instance from the 2007 treasurer's report, which shows that the expenditure to

produce the magazine was larger then the income (£10,617 vs £8,752). Advertisers usually pay from £300 to £1250 to advertise on the *CubaSí*, and they are carefully chosen in accordance with the campaign's perspectives and actions. However, the money gathered through advertising hardly pays the production of the 6000 printed copies.[56] Despite economic loss, organisers and full time workers still believe in the importance of continuing to publish the magazine, and most members cannot imagine the organisation without the *CubaSí*. Insightful in this regard is an extract from a conversation with Rob:

> **V:** What do you think of *CubaSí*?
>
> **R:** well the magazine has always been important, because it's the way to contact the members. We are a membership organisation, and we have members and you want to keep those members, and you want to get more. If you believe in a country like Cuba, and you believe in creating a campaign like CSC, then you have to make it as successful and professional as possible...So the most important thing is your members. From them you can build outwards, because members not only give you the £15 a year and donations, but equally they are also ambassadors for the organisation, and they can get new members or they can write newsletters, or they can send an email...So each person...you are trying to get them to do more. So you have to gather people, and make them part of an organisation, and to make them part of the organisation you have to give them an 'affinity' to the organisation, and you have to write to them, and give them something in exchange. So the magazine is very important for us.

As emerges in the above interview the magazine is perceived as important because it is seen as the token of exchange between the campaign and its members. Furthermore, as Rob suggested, the magazine is believed to create a feeling of affinity and belonging. As emerged elsewhere, during fieldwork and interviews I almost reached a stage of data saturation where a great majority of informants claimed that they would never replace the *CubaSí* magazine with an only online version. At the beginning, I thought that the reasons behind such a unanimous attitude had to be found in the fact that a great number of members and organisers within CSC are in their 50s, 60s and 70s. If we are to base ourselves merely on an age average the generation issue, therefore, would seem

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[56] This is especially true if we consider the fact that many adverts - such as the one of the Morning Star Daily – are based on ads exchange.

to be the first reason why people prefer to have a hard copy. Yet I contend that this is a superficial understanding, because not only were most people I interviewed extremely familiar with new information and communication technologies, but most importantly, the people in their 20s / 30s and 40s were usually the ones who were more attached to the printed media, and contended that they would never replace it with only an online version. According to my interviewees, in contrast to the online newsletter and the website, the printed magazine conveyed members and organisers with a greater emotional attachment and a feeling of affinity. In this regard the below extract from an interview with Gordon, who at the time of the interview was 28 years old, is indicative:

> **V**: What do you think of the *CubaSí* magazine?
>
> **G**: It's very important, you know, I think it brings the subjects of Cuba to life, closer to home and you feel that you are engaging with the issues, that you are up to date with the latest information, and I find it very, very interesting, everything that it's written into it appeals to me.
>
> **V**: But wouldn't you get the same information on the internet?
>
> **G**: no, because the articles in the *CubaSí* are brilliant and on the internet you have to look through a lot of shit before finding some truth. It's a question of quality and perspective. I want to read about Cuba from someone who wants to help Cuba rather then someone who wants to destroy it.
>
> **V**: do you read the *CubaUpdate* regularly?
>
> **G**: yes
>
> **V**: and do you feel the *CubaSí* could be transformed in only an online version?
>
> **G**: I don't want that, I like to have a hard copy, it gives you a sense of ownership, you possess it, you can read it again. I don't like reading on a computer screen. It is easy to spend hours and hours on a computer when you are at work, and I don't want to do that when I come home, I want to relax, it's more pleasant to read a hard copy. Without the *CubaSí* the different members of the campaign wouldn't have so much of a shared community, a representation that keeps them bound together.

A similar line of reasoning can also be found in many other interviews, in which it emerged that the *CubaSí* is crucial to the campaign because it creates a feeling of belonging by always re-stating an ideal of membership. This understanding is

expressed also by Stephen, the 27 year old former reporter at the Coventry Telegraph who worked for the Cuba Solidarity Campaign:

> **S:** You can't have some membership organisation without a form of literature that keeps members together.
>
> **V:** I know, but you have the Cuba Update.
>
> **S:** not everyone has access to the Internet, especially amongst the poorest and elderly. So you need a magazine through the door. More than that, no matter if members do have computers, reading something on a flickering screen isn't as good as having a magazine with its smell, its feel...and you can read it wherever, and you can store it somewhere. Obviously you can store it in a computer as well, but it becomes a hassle. I think that having a tangible product that people receive is part of the actual thing...of the actual exchange.

The fascinating aspect of the interviews' extracts presented here, is that both interviewees – despite being only in their late 20s – emphasised the idea of materiality in addressing the importance of the *CubaSí*. Furthermore, they related understandings of materiality with notions of ownership, exchange and membership. In fact, according to both of them it seems that the feeling of belonging is given by the material nature of the *CubaSí*, by the fact that it provides them with something that they can own, archive, feel and smell. The emphasis on the material aspect of the printed media, this paper contends, should be understood in the larger framework of the ambivalent relationship between activists and the Internet. Indeed as Rob once mentioned:

> **R:** '[...]the online is so hard to associate with a particular 'product', with a particular organisation. You just read it because it's online, but you can't really associate it with something. You can't really have an affinity with anything really. You got your websites, and your newsletters but than you easily can read something else. You don't stick with it. No one owns the online.'

In contrast to the online platforms, the ethnographic context of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign shows how printed media create a sense of *ownership* as well as the basis for *exchange* within the campaign. By looking at people's emotional attachment to the printed media, with reference to notions of ownership and exchange, I wish to shed some light on the continuing role of these media forms in

the everyday construction of political action. This understanding, I believe is particularly important, because it suggests that new/digital media are not replacing old/material ones but - as the emphasis on materiality and belonging has shown - they may be transforming their meaning.

This is beautifully expressed in the words of Steve, the past editor of the *CubaSí* Magazine and still an active member of CSC:

> **V**: Do you believe, that today the Cuba Update has the same role of the *CubaSí*?
>
> **S**: ...[silence]...you know it is difficult because you are talking about two different media. There would be here a need to analyse it more carefully. The thing is that printed media is far more permanent. It's a natural, physical object and therefore it becomes an artefact in itself. The digital is more ephemeral. You might save it amongst files in a computer but it's not...[pause]. The actual physicality of the magazine makes it become a permanent object, and also becomes collectable, and it becomes a physical record of something that happened. So I think the physicality of the printed media, of the magazine so forth, it's in a way a more permanent and profound communication, and has a meaning for the members. So it becomes something other rather than the mere information that it contains.

In looking at people's different understandings of online and offline media, my interpretation is that internet related anxieties and frustrations seem to be affecting and transforming people's relationship to printed media. During fieldwork I encountered different internet-related anxieties with an effect on social practices and understandings. Another one, which is worth highlighting here because of its effect on alternative media production, is represented by the idea that the Net is not merely a space where the messages of collectives get lost in the information overload, but it is also a space where - thanks to Google - messages are easily tracked, de-contextualised, and appropriated by others. This anxiety of 'lack of control' over the messages produced is a strong one and has affected people's relationship to alternative media production.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, ten years ago the *CubaSí* magazine, represented – something similar to Downing's (2001) or Atton's (2002) descriptions of radical and alternative media - a 'collective space' for debate, where members contributed freely and discussed controversial topics concerning the island. In the last ten years, however, alternative media production has changed

dramatically and has seen an 'ideological' turn. Today, as it has been discussed, CSC's national office has reduced people's participation in the production of the magazine and other media forms. Furthermore, editors and contributors concentrate merely on the dissemination of 'uncritical and positive news' about Cuba. As we have seen, this transformation has been partly triggered by a will within the campaign to become more 'professional and mainstream', in other words to construct a message that is more effective and coherent. However, it is important to understand that the 'ideological turn' and in particular the production of uncritical and positive news has also been triggered by the anxiety of 'lack of control over the messages produced'.

During fieldwork and throughout my interviews with members and volunteers it emerged, as mentioned elsewhere, that the focus on positive news is giving rise to discontent, and people at times criticize the *CubaSí* for being too ideological. Despite discontent, however, members and volunteers seem to understand why the national office needs to focus on such strategies. Indeed, on different occasions my interviewees claimed that it was important to focus 'on uncritical and positive news', especially at a time in which – thanks to new technologies – the campaign no longer had control over the messages produced. Today, the *CubaSí* magazine is interconnected to the *CubaUpdate* newsletter and the website in a process of news production for which all media texts enter the online domain. In this context, debate is no longer possible, because – as Tasha suggested - any critical stance can be appropriated from people of other media organisations who would use CSC criticism for their own agendas and claim that 'even the Cuba Solidarity Campaign says that...'.

The understanding of the 'ideological turn' in alternative media production, within the larger framework of internet related anxieties, raises important questions on a paradox embedded in the relationship between activists and internet technologies. Indeed, it seems interesting that the 'technology of freedom and openness' (Castells, 2001) is actually provoking counter-progressive processes that affect the internal politics of the people involved. In conclusion, Internet - related frustrations can have a variety of different connotations and scales of intensity; depending on personal and individual situations or on the history of a particular group. However, exploring them and describing some of the reactions they are causing is a matter of central importance for anthropologists. As this chapter has shown, the pervasive use of the internet is affecting people's understanding of what they do and the internal politics of groups. By highlighting these complexities anthropologists can demonstrate how the transformations

brought about by the 'technology of freedom' (Castells, 2001) are not always empowering or progressive.

Conclusion

By extending Altheide and Snow's (1979) concept of 'media logic' to the understanding of the advent of the World Wide Web, this chapter has argued that internet technologies have transformed people's political priorities and strategies, and online action has become a new repertoire of political opposition. The understanding that internet technologies have re-defined the terrain for political action – as has been shown - challenges the argument presented in the previous chapters, which contended that media technologies are *spaces of imagination.* Indeed, by transforming activists' imaginaries, technologies appear to be 'agents' rather than 'spaces' that are used and shaped by activists' everyday actions and understandings.

By highlighting the limitations of Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (2005), and instead drawing from his earlier work in Laboratory Life (1986), this chapter has shown that if we are to perceive technologies as *actants*, we must bear in mind that they have become such due to human agency. This is because, as has been argued, technologies are embedded with human discourses and beliefs. These discourses become 'naturalised' within the technology itself (e.g. World Wide Web= openness/freedom), and strongly influence and transform social processes and relations (e.g. understandings of political opposition). Therefore, following Castells I have argued that we need to understand the internet technologies as an ideological construction.

The understanding of the World Wide Web as an ideological construction sheds some light on the complex relationship between activists and new technologies, which is defined by an ambivalent tension between empowerment and frustration. This is because ambivalence is always present within ideological constructions, especially when they influence everyday practices and dynamics. Real life experiences always clash with ideal understandings.

It has been shown that the possibilities and beliefs that activists associate with the structure of the World Wide Web have deeply affected the way in which people understand political action and opposition. Internet technologies have improved activists' possibility for networking and 'getting the message across', and thus have empowered their understanding of media action transforming this into a privileged repertoire of oppositional politics. At the same time, far from perceiving the Internet as an unproblematic and empowering force for social change, activists' relationship to new technologies is defined by everyday frustrations, anxieties and questions on what media action really means. These anxieties and frustrations are

challenging people's understanding of the effectiveness of their online media action and transforming their relationship towards printed media and alternative media production.

By considering the way in which the people responded to internet related beliefs and anxieties, this chapter aimed at offering some insight into the context of political action in Britain, following the advent of the internet. In doing so, it aimed at providing some ethnographic voices that challenge culturally constructed discourses, which see the internet as 'the technology of freedom and openness'. In conclusion, therefore, the relationship between activists and internet technologies is a complex and ambivalent one, which is deeply transforming people's understanding of political action and media activism. To consider these complexities is of central importance for anthropologists. Indeed, as McLagan once argued: 'computer-mediated political struggle is being negotiated piece by piece from the people involved and a discourse that allows us to critically address the complexities and implications of this form of political action is a major priority of our time' (McLagan, 1999:187).

Chapter V - Networked Identities: Internet Technologies, Conflicts of Generations and New Forms of Political Imagination

Introduction

The previous chapter has shown that the advent of the internet has transformed people's political priorities and strategies, and online action has become a new repertoire of political opposition. I have argued that internet technologies have to be understood as 'agents' that affect social dynamics and understandings. However, I have shown that if we are to perceive technologies as agents, we must bear in mind that they have become such due to human agency. This is because technologies are embedded with human discourses and imaginations that have a profound effect on the everyday layers of social experience. In this chapter, I want to extend the argument further and explore the impact of internet technologies on political imagination. In particular I want to uncover the bound relation between imagination, internet networks and new forms of political belonging.

In the social sciences, in the last decade, scholars have shown that - in the global network society - cultural and political identities have become extremely complex to analyse, given the fragility and slipperiness of their forms (Amit, 2002 and Rapport, 2002; Escobar, 2004, Pratt 2003). The stress over the fragile, vague, and multi-sided nature of forms of belonging has placed scholars into conceptual uncertainty to the extent that those who use 'identity' as an analytical tool are questioning its intrinsic validity for contemporary social explanations (see Pratt, 2003:182). This chapter will argue that notions of political identity and belonging are becoming – within CSC and other networked organisations – the very basis of a conflict between generations. Whilst older generations believe in party-based political identity, younger generations distance themselves from the membership politics of the Labour movement, and show a more flexible and networked understanding of political participation.

In order to comprehend the social dynamics and implicit discourses embedded within this conflict of generations, I will argue, it is of extreme importance to turn our attention to the role played by internet technologies. In fact, confronted by diminishing membership numbers, organisations like CSC have started to tackle the generation issue by relying on internet related discourses and practices. This chapter discusses how many within CSC believe that younger generations have been affected by individualist discourses, and for this reason they reject any form of political association and membership. These people believe that internet technologies are the 'key' to solving the generation issue, because they appeal to

young people by emphasising more flexible forms of political participation that are both individualist and networked.

Hence, I will argue that Castells' (2001, 2009) concept of *networked individualism* is important in understanding the reasons why the conflict of generation is largely played within internet technologies. However, it will be argued that his abstract understanding of the network excludes an analysis of the ways in which different social contexts react and negotiate with the values and images that are transmitted through technology. In the context of CSC the concept of networked individualism is useful to explain the communication practices of the national office. However, as we will see in this chapter the focus on *networked individualism* is detrimental to gaining a thorough understanding of the new, creative ways in which younger generations are re-imagining political participation through the technological wires of internet technologies and the network as political imaginary.

"I don't want to define my Enemies and Friends": New Generations and the Lack of Political Association

During the first days of fieldwork in the office on Seven Sisters Road I was taken aback by the average age of the organisers and members. I remember that I was particularly surprised about the age issue within CSC when I first met Frank, who - as mentioned above - with his 86 years of age is the oldest member of CSC. The Christmas holidays were about to arrive. The long days in the London winter were interrupted only by the friendliness of the lunch breaks at the Moroccan restaurant on Seven Sisters Road. One day Frank arrived at the office after a period of absence due to being unwell. Everyone within the office seemed to be delighted to see him, after such a long time. On our way to lunch, we walked down Seven Sisters Road in the winter mist, and Rob introduced me as a volunteer who worked for them throughout the week. Frank looked at me from beneath his glasses, and appeared baffled. He seemed not to be convinced about the fact that I was a simple volunteer, and asked me what I did for a living. I did not have the time to answer, because Rob replied: "Oh she is doing anthropological research on the coming of age in the British Left". Frank laughed and added: "Oh then you are in the right place. I can tell you everything about age!"

The day I met Frank was the first time I realised that the social context of CSC was one that belonged in a greater part to older generations. As time went by, and I participated in Trade Union conferences or events organised by other networked organisations, I started to notice that the lack of young people's participation was a social reality that affected the entire social world of CSC. One day for instance, I

found myself involved in the organisation of a wine reception at TUC Congress House. The Cuba Solidarity campaign was presenting a DVD, which was produced together with UNISON. The short documentary film followed the brigade of Cuban doctors who had been sent to Pakistan – subsequently to the earthquake – as a gesture of solidarity from the Cuban Government. CSC had invited the leader of the brigade to talk about his experience. As Tasha and I were serving drinks to Trade Union members and representatives - and a small group of known people gathered around our table - she laughed and said "There Veronica, you have a real vision on the Trade Union movement". I was puzzled, because I found myself confronted with the image of a room full of white middle-aged men.

The lack of young people's involvement in the Labour movement was a central issue discussed within many different situations. In fact very often my informants would express their concerns about the fact that their type of politics was no longer appealing to younger generations. At times, especially when I was talking to older members, they started to show distress with the idea that their world was dying. When confronted with the question of why they thought that the Trade Union movement was no longer appealing to younger generations, most of the people I talked to would simplify the problem by stating that 'young people just didn't care'. Others would look confused and claim that they didn't know. Occasionally, however, I have been confronted with thorough reflections on the issue; reflections that took into consideration economic and historical transformations as well as conflicts over meaning and representational resources.

In this regard, particularly insightful is the following joint interview with Matt (a full-time employee of VIC) and Sian (a researcher for UNITE), both in their early twenties, who I introduced in the previous chapter. In this section of the interview Matt was discussing the problems of relying on trade union politics when you want to build a successful campaign of international solidarity.

> **M**: If you focus your campaign only on the Trade Unions it is very hard to get young people to participate.
>
> **V**: Why do you think this is?
>
> **M**: Well...just demographically, there are less young people unionised than people in the middle ages. And union membership is going down all the time.
>
> **V**: Why are you saying this? I mean, you both are politically involved and what about your friends? Are they involved in politics?
>
> **M**: When I was at University lots of my friends were involved in politics. Especially the antiwar stuff (2003), and there were a lot of young people. But I guess that following that, young people's

engagement diminished. But that is only one part of the problem, I mean political activism changed a great deal since New Labour. Now young people who'd join the party are all career minded if you see what I mean. And that changes things...it makes it less appealing.

V: what about your friends Sian, are they politically involved with the unions?

S: Yes a lot of them are...most of my friends come from university and they were involved in the student movement, and also the people who I work with... But we are an exception; young people are not usually involved with union politics.

V: but do you think young people don't share the values of Trade Unions?

S: I think that much has to do with the changing economy, and so lots of areas where the Trade Unions used to be active are in decline and young people are not entering those. And there are new areas such as the service industry, IT, information, communication in which Trade Unions haven't organised in before.

V: But what about the CWU (Communication Workers Union)?

S: Yes. But it's predominantly BT workers and the post office. I mean some unions such as NUJ (National Union of Journalists) do have younger members, but they are a very small niche. You know you shouldn't take into account only the changing economy, but also the cultural thing. In the last 20 years the unions have been portrayed in terrible ways, if you take current representations of the unions in dominant media, they all portray them as economic dinosaurs. And that is really not appealing for younger generations. The fact is that there is a generation gap there, and the Trade Unions are just starting to address it...

V: But also international solidarity campaigns such as CSC or VIC do not seem to have much of young people's participation...

M: I mean most of our friends are involved with campaigning organisations, but we are a group which is not representative at all because we come from the student movement. But in general there is a bit of a culture around young people and their relationship with politics. You know some people keep on saying "oh I don't join anything" and that is a bit of a culture. People no longer believe in collective action, and I do think that this is partly

due to what is going on around the internet and all the processes of e-bulletins and so on. It is all so individualised. You know people all want to focus on blogs and they say that it is good to focus on blogs, but that is so individualistic, and in terms of collectively changing society it doesn't bring anything.

As it can be seen from the above interview, various issues emerge that need to be taken into account when understanding the generation issue affecting the social world of CSC. Indeed, as Sian suggests the changing economy, and the slow reaction of Trade Unions to these transformations, can be perceived as one of the reasons for the lack of participation from younger generations. Sian makes a claim on the changing economy that is well-known in academia especially thanks to the work of Lazzarato ([1996] 2006). Lazzarato has argued that the division of mental and manual work can no longer be understood in contemporary society in classical Marxist terms, for which mental work is associated with the ruling class and manual work with the working class. According to Lazzarato, in the global world, scholars should expand their understanding of labour, and focus their analysis not only on the work that it takes to produce material objects, but also on all those areas of labour that are involved in the production of 'the informational and cultural content of the commodity' (2006:133). In this framework, therefore, scholars should recognise that the working class is increasingly involved in forms of immaterial labour, and that the exploitative relations of capitalism have pervaded areas that were relatively autonomous beforehand.

As Day (2005) has shown, there are many flaws in Lazzarato's theory of immaterial labour. In particular, Day is critical about Lazzarato's notion of 'an extended working class' that is created by immaterial labour and is subjected to global capitalist exploitation. According to Day, talking about a global working class - that is united by immaterial labour – flattens a huge field of difference and does not take into account global inequalities (Day, 2005: 145-146). Despite flaws, Lazzarato's argument is important in the sense that it draws attention towards the new areas of labour that have emerged in the global economic landscape and that are affected by social injustice and capitalist exploitation (e.g. call centres). In the above interview, Sian mentions precisely these new areas of labour, when she refers to the 'service industry', and she explains that unions' involvement in this area is still underdeveloped. According to her point of view, this 'failure' on the part of the unions to address economic transformations[57] is intensifying the generation

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[57] One of the economic transformations that unions are just starting to address is the issue of 'precarity'. As Shukatis and Graeber (2007:316-318) suggested 'precarity' is the subject of growing

gap within the Labour movement, because young people are usually employed in these new areas of the economy.

Alongside the new economic situation, Sian and Matt pointed out that there is also another issue to be taken into account when we try to understand the generation gap affecting the social world of CSC: the historical context. As it emerges from the above interview, Thatcherism, the rise of New Labour, and the failure of the 2003 antiwar movement are all seen as causes for the construction of a political culture amongst younger generations which is defined by individualism and disbelief in political parties and collective organisation. That younger generations do not want to belong or associate is a pervasive discourse within CSC, and people often asked me to approach this issue by looking at the British historical context and to understand the discursive power of individualism. This emerges in particular in the words of the director of the campaign which echoed the ones of Andrew[58], a young member of CSC in his mid-twenties:

> **V**: why do you think that CSC membership is now quite 'old'?
> **R**:I don't know. Young people tend to not join anything really. They
> don't want to feel part. It seems as if there was a shared anti-
> culture of any kind of membership. But I don't know why that is.
> The idea of individualism, perhaps. I think Thatcher is to blame and
> the eighties. I don't know. Even environmentalism is pretty much
> an individual exercise. But doing something collective with other
> people, getting involved and organised...no they just don't
> organise, they just float around...

On a similar line of thought as Rob, also Andrew commented on the lack of young people's engagement in the labour movement:

> **A**: The huge problem is that my generation doesn't want to commit
> to campaigning organisations. It fucks me up massively that my
> age group doesn't get involved, doesn't get mobilised. People tell
> me that now there are too many things that one could get involved
> with, there is a massive range of organisations and calls for action.

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debate and collective mobilisation in Europe and as a term it usually refers to a variety of 'non-standard' working arrangements which distance workers from union involvement and workers' rights. Younger generations are usually employed in this precarious position (with flexible working hours, unstable incomes, and short-term contracts).

[58] Fictional name to maintain anonymity.

So they don't know what to choose. That's one argument that I heard, but from my personal experience, I would say that is incorrect.

From university and the friends I have, I got the impression that basically my age group doesn't give a fuck about anything. Perhaps this leads back to Thatcher, and her emphasis that the individual was more important than society...so the greed is right and the greed creates wealth and by becoming more successful you can actually enrich the poor. So I think that my age group has been schooled to believe that they should get as much as they can out of society, without contributing to it...

As it emerges from the above interviews, people seem to believe that there is a political culture amongst younger generations that opposes any type of collective organisation, of membership and belonging. This political culture, they contend, derives from Thatcherism and the powerful discourses of individualism. However, focusing on the legacy of Thatcherism and on the powerful discourse of individualism in order to understand the reasons why, amongst young people, there seems to be an 'anti-culture' of political belonging and association overlooks other issues. Indeed, as the next part of this chapter will show, this understanding excludes a careful analysis of the new forms of political participation and imagination that have emerged in the last fifteen years, and does not consider their pervasiveness amongst younger generations.

The following interview with Rhodri - a 22 year old sociology student involved with CSC - shows someone who strongly believes in getting involved and trying to change the world. Rhodri cares about the world, and for him politics is a personal matter not an individualistic one. Rhodri is central to the development of this chapter, because his interview will be constantly referred to as the example of the way in which younger generations are re-framing understandings of political participation. It is important to understand, that although Rhodri is portrayed here as the ethnographic 'voice' of younger generations within CSC, during fieldwork I had the pleasure to meet many other young people, who reasoned in similar ways, and this emerges in particular in the next chapter. Although methodologically I have always been sceptical about scholars who rely on a single interview to explain their observations, I believe that Rhodri's interview is however crucial for us to acquire a better understanding of the conflict of generation.

V: are your friends politicised?

R: Some of them are and some of them no...

V: and are they members of other organisations?

R: No, I wouldn't say that. Very, very few are members of organisations, maybe as single issue campaigns, but not political parties. I have got a friend who is interested in more feminist issues, other people that are interested in more environmental issues, but they are not members of political parties or organisations.

V: and are some of your friends involved with the Trade Unions?

R: no

V: why do you think is that?

R Generally speaking my friends are University students, they don't work, and when they will be working it is unlikely that they'd want to become unionised, I don't think they'll choose jobs were the unions are active.

V: But what about the student union?

R: Oh no please don't talk about that! They can be so dogmatic...To be honest with you I personally support the unions, and the Labour movement. I am definitely there in spirit, but I don't support them in practice.

V: so you respect Trade Unions' values but you don't identify with them?

R:...No, it's not my life really.

V: but do you identify with single issue campaigns such as Cuba Solidarity?

R: yes I suppose. You know I don't know if I'd get involved with CSC if I hadn't a first hand experience of Cuba. You know I was interested in politics before, definitely, but I think that politics can only really inspire me in a personal way...

V: it's a personal thing?

R: yes is a personal thing. The problem is that I am yet to find a group with fresh ideas. You know I also remain to be convinced. I am reading things everyday that change mind. I am definitely floating. That's why I find it easier to get involved in single issue campaigns, because I definitely feel strongly about it, but if you have to ask me for a bigger picture there are gaps in what I believe and understand.

V: Yet you seem to believe in political involvement?

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R: I believe in a less savage form of capitalism, I believe in the benefits and role of the state. What depresses me in England is that they have taken all ideology out of politics, it's all image, it's all what's perceived to be right and no one is saying anything. Everyone says the same things that the press and a larger section of society wants to hear, but the issues seem to have gone out of politics in many ways. That's the most depressing thing in this country. And there are many things to say, I mean how can it be possible that there are poor people in this country? Especially considering how rich we are! When I think about that, and when I think about what the Cuban Government has done, then I think that there are so many things we can learn out of them. We have lots of social issues that we shouldn't have.

But what I see is that there is no political will to change things...and how do you make that happen? What I think we can do is to pressure the government. I know that is not always effective. I mean Blair has been murdered with the Iraq war; he still remained in power, but that shook up the Labour party. The real problem, however, is that he still went to war; 2.000.000 people, and he still went to war, and that makes people think that all is worth nothing. And that's very, very bad. You see my generation are very cynical, very sceptical, they surrender themselves; you know apathy is a way of surrendering, and I myself go through that and then I think that I can't. But that's being a coward, and you must get involved in whatever way you prefer, there are so many ways, but just get involved.

V: But so you don't identify politically with anything?

R: Hmm...You have to identify a common ground, an issue to tackle. You see here is the difficult thing. I don't want to say when people ask who is your enemy for instance, I don't want to identify my enemies and my friends or my enemies' enemies or things like that... I don't think it's getting the world anywhere this sort of thing...this constant drawing a line...Political solidarity can come in many shapes and forms.

In the last few years, as Loader (2007) has shown, there has been a growing interest in young people's political involvement. The reluctance to vote at national elections and a rise of the average age in political parties and organisations in

Britain have been seen as indicators of an alarming lack of young people's engagement in public affairs. Some scholars contend that this lack has to be understood by considering the presence of a growing political apathy and disenchantment within younger generations (Loader, 2007:2). Indeed, as Rhodri suggested, this is certainly the case. Amongst people of his age there is a sense of disenchantment with political participation. Furthermore, as we have seen also from Matt and Sian's interview, this sense of disenchantment and cynicism has increased - in Britain - especially following the perceived failure of the antiwar movement in 2003.

However, as Rhodri suggests, political causes are close to his heart, and he strongly believes in political commitment and participation. Therefore, if it might be true that many young people are not interested in political involvement, it is also true that there is a wide variety of young activists who engage their everyday routine in trying to promote social change. However, as the different movements for global justice show, and as we shall see later, young activists try to promote social change by distancing themselves from party politics. In this context, therefore, as some have noticed, it is perhaps not younger generations who are disaffected from political participation but rather political parties, institutions, organisations who by focusing on the practices of representative democracy are distancing themselves from young people's understanding of political engagement (Griffin, 2005: 151; Loader, 2007:1-19).

Indeed, as emerges from Rhodri's interview there seems to be a gap between the way in which young people think and experience political belonging, and the ideas of political identity and affiliation that are constantly reinforced by political parties and organisations. Rhodri believes in collective action. What he does not believe in is the idea of "defining enemies or friends", of drawing lines and boundaries and associating with a particular political organisation. As we have seen elsewhere, defining enemies and friends – or in other words establishing sameness and difference - constitutes the very basis for the construction of identity (Cohen, 1985; Collier et al, 1995; Hall, 2000). Therefore, despite believing in political involvement young people seem to be rejecting the classical understanding of political identity, as a relational concept which is defined by the constant construction of 'us' and 'them'.

As will be discussed in greater detail in the following part, people who belong to Rhodri's generation are replacing the notion of political identity with more flexible and networked understanding of 'affinity' and 'belonging'. In this context they inevitably distance themselves from the 'membership politics' promoted by political parties and the Labour movement. As organisations like CSC or the Trade Unions

are witnessing the diminishing of membership numbers and the decrease of participation from younger generations, they are re-framing their own understandings of political identity. The most fascinating aspect of this process is represented by the fact that the conflict of identity is being played in great part within the socio-technical spaces of internet technologies.

Tackling the Generation Issue: Internet Technologies, Individualism and Networked Sociality

Since the very beginning of researching the conflict of generations within the social world of CSC, I noticed that new information and communication technologies were a fundamental space in which the conflict was experienced, acted and negotiated. As emerged from conversations and participant observation, for organisations such as CSC - which rely strongly upon the Trade Union Movement and individual membership - the fact that younger generations do not want to join political campaigns is becoming a serious problem, and full-time staff and organisers try to tackle it. In order to attract young people's participation, organisers and office workers view new technologies as a central political strategy. This emerges from the below extract in an interview with Trish:

> **V:** do you think that CSC is politically appealing to young people?
>
> **T:** Well I'd like it to be, but I think it struggles...
>
> **V:** Why do you think it struggles?
>
> **T:** I think it struggles because we are not reaching young people in the ways in which they communicate, like websites for instance Facebook, Myspace, all that kind of thing. You know we are starting to make use of it but we are kind of behind, we have been quite slow also to start the CubaUpdate. We have to do something about it, it's very important that we do. But perhaps the main problem is that we are connected to the Trade Unions, and that's just not appealing anymore...
>
> **V:** Why do you think the Trade Union movement is not appealing to young people?
>
> **T:** Well, I think it should be but I think that it struggles...I think all the political parties and unions struggle to appeal to young people. You know young people don't share the values...

In discussing the strategies of the campaign in securing young people's involvement, Trish pointed out that CSC struggles to keep up with new technologies. The fact is that whenever the campaign introduces a new mediated

platform, a new one emerges and young people embrace it with enthusiasm. When CSC started to take the first steps in the world of *YouTube*, *Facebook* became another terrain for political possibilities, and after Facebook, it was the time of *Twitter*. For a small organisation such as CSC keeping up with the pace of technological developments is often a frustrating task, because they have to come to terms with the lack of human and economic resources. This incapacity to keep up with technological novelties often leads full-time workers and organisers to believe that they are not able to communicate with young people effectively, and that this deepens the gap between generations.

Despite struggling, people within CSC and other networked organisation seem to share the belief that the 'key' to solving the generation issue needs to be found within the socio-technical domains of internet technologies. This belief, which is prevalent within CSC, needs to be contextualised within a larger trend in Britain that sees the internet as having new and emancipatory qualities for engaging younger generations (Loader, 2007; Trevorrow, 2007). However, as Livingstone, Couldry and Markham (2007) have argued with their research on young people in the UK, the likelihood of the younger generation's political engagement through online terrains is dependent upon offline factors. Hence, according to the scholars, the fact of simply providing internet access or developing more civic websites does not guarantee political engagement (2007:31). In this context, therefore it is important to question why people seem to believe that internet technologies – have emancipatory qualities for the involvement of younger generations, and why organisations such as CSC invest their few resources in developing their online platforms and messages.

According to my own understanding the origin of this belief needs to be found in the different ways in which people relate to online and offline media, and in particular in people's understanding that the different type of media create different forms of political belonging and emotional attachment. As we have seen in the context of CSC, whilst printed media - such as the *CubaSí* - are usually seen as the main constructor of membership and belonging within the campaign, online media are perceived overall as more flexible and as not directly related to collective feelings of political participation. Furthermore, as discussed in the above part of this chapter, many within CSC also believe that young people are affected by individualistic understandings and for this reason are not drawn to political groups and collective action. In this context, therefore, it is not surprising that people within the campaign believe that it is by relying on online platforms, on their flexible and fluid qualities that they can solve the conflict of generation. This is

because online platforms enable CSC to communicate with younger generations without stressing membership and association.

This process became particularly evident, in the summer 2007, when Dean and I were sent to work on CSC's stall in the Leftfield, at the Glastonbury Festival. Before we left for Glastonbury - acknowledging the fact that we were going to deal with a public that was composed mostly of younger people - the national office of CSC concentrated on developing strategies that would avoid any reference to membership. In doing this, they strongly relied on the new design of the Che-Guevara and Brigade's websites from which direct mentions of membership were explicitly deleted. Furthermore, CSC created a petition for Cuba that people could sign by providing the organisation with their email addresses and signature, without needing to join the campaign. The strategy of CSC was particularly relevant for the context of Glastonbury. Indeed, I found it interesting to notice that young people would sign the petition, provide their email addresses, and donate money without joining. All this despite the donations they made were worth more than the annual membership (that for students was only £5 a year), which included a welcome pack with free Cuban CD and four free issues of the *CubaSí*. Throughout our time at Glastonbury we managed to gain only two new members and collected more the £200.

If we wish to conceptually analyse the strategies of CSC, and understand the reasons why people seem to believe that internet technologies guarantee the creation of a new form of sociality which is flexible, individualist and networked we should look at the work of Castells (1996, 1997 and 2001). Castells argued that we need to understand the role of internet technologies by recognising how they impacted in creating a situation for which the *network* became a privileged and more flexible mode of social organisation. According to him, the logic of the network has permeated every level of society, from corporate strategies to state policies, to the complex realities of social movements. In contrast to Castells, Latour (1993) had already argued that there was nothing new in the network as form of social organisation and any claim to novelty must be found in our own western bias that obliges us to experience time and historical transformation as a revolution that starts over and over again (1993:70). A similar understanding can also be found in the work of Diani and Della Porta (1999) who explored the realities of social movements. Indeed, by looking at the organisation of environmental activists in Milan in the 1980s, Diani and Della Porta contended that the logic of networks was intrinsic to their social realities long before the advent of the information age (1999:117-134).

However, despite the criticism, many scholars – and especially the ones involved in social movements – have enriched Castells' work with a wide range of observations, which explore the bound relationship between internet technologies and the network as a new, more flexible, and privileged mode of social organisation. Examples of this can be found in the works present in Frank Webster's (2001) edited book, and specifically the ones looking at environmental movements (Dordoy and Mellor, 2001; Pickerill, 2001; Washbourne, 2001), who have all shown how internet technologies have facilitated and transformed existing political networks of communication and action.

If networks always existed as forms of social organisation, therefore, what seemed to be emerging from the work of scholars who followed Castells, is that the internet has transformed their social significance in fundamental ways. This point emerges particularly well in the work of Terranova (2004) who has argued that the very design of the internet - as a *network of networks* – has had a massive impact on social dynamics and understandings (2004: 41). Drawing from these works, my understanding is that by promoting the logic of networks, new information and communication technologies have become the terrain in which sociality can be imagined and experienced in more flexible ways. In this context, therefore, I believe that the network has become not a privileged mode of social organisation, but a new form of political imagination; a way in which people can re-frame their own understanding of their place in society in more flexible and fluid ways.

In analysing the new form of sociality that emerged through the internet, Castells argued that this type of sociality has little to do with the idea of 'virtual community' that permeated earlier understandings of social interaction in the online world (Rheingold, 1994). Drawing from Wellman (2001) Castells contends that the new sociality promoted by the internet is one in which the individual becomes the central actor; it is the sociality of *'networked-individualism'*. According to Castells, networked individualism is a social pattern not a collection of isolated individuals. Rather individuals build their networks online and offline on the basis of their interests, values and affinities. In this way networked individualism organises around communities of choice, that are flexible, fluid and ever changing (2001:131).

As emerged in the previous part of the chapter, many within CSC are convinced that younger generations have been affected by individualist discourses, and that for this reason they oppose political association and collective action. In this context, they also believe that internet technologies are the 'key' to solving the generation issue, because they appeal to young people by emphasising more flexible forms of political participation that are both individualist and networked.

Hence, it is only by looking at the impact of internet technologies, at the new political imaginations that they enabled, that scholars can better understand the implicit discourses embedded in this conflict of generation.

Castells argued that, with the extension of internet technologies, networked individualism is becoming the dominant form of sociality, and he concluded in his book the *Internet Galaxy* that the costs of this sociological transformation are still unclear (2001:133). In his recent work *Communication Power* (2009), he re-considers his argument on networked individualism and argues that global culture is affected by a tension between globalisation and identification, between individualism and communalism (Castells, 2009: 116-117). According to him these cultural trends intersect with one another, creating the coexistence of four cultural patterns: consumerism (signified by brands), networked individualism, cosmopolitalism (be it ideological, political or religious) and multiculturalism (2009:119).

Therefore, only recently, Castells re-considered the role of networked individualism in the global context by looking at the way it coexisted with other cultural patterns. However, it is important to understand, that Castells suggests that whilst the other forms of sociality such as consumerism or cosmopolitalism are constructed and legitimised through entertainment media and news media, networked individualism is a model that is promoted primarily by online technologies. In order to prove his point, the scholar draws on research that explores the link between digital technologies and self-disclosure. In this context, he argues that in the contemporary global context we are witnessing a transformation of information and communication means, where the mass-communication of the self has increasingly become an established phenomenon (2009:58-71).

In conclusion to this part, Castells' (2001, 2009) understanding of networked individualism is of central importance for this research, because it enables us to better understand the beliefs and strategies that are affecting the social world of CSC, and uncover the reasons why people believe that relying on the more fluid and flexible networks of internet technologies will make them more appealing to younger generations. In this framework therefore this research project draws heavily upon Castells' work, and owes much to his insights. However, as the next part of this chapter will show, in his discussion of the new sociality created by the internet or of the new global cultural patterns that have emerged due to the synthesis between capital and technology, Castells overlooks the complex relationship between imagination, internet networks and new forms of belonging.

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The Network as a Social Imaginary: Internet Networks, Imagination and New Forms of Belonging

The real problem behind Castells' work is that, as Stalder (2006) suggested, he does not provide a clear definition of network. For him the network is simply "a set of interconnected nodes. A node is a point at which a curve intersects itself" (2006:169). Stalder has argued that many have criticised Castells for this rather abstract understanding of network, to the point that some contended that the network as described by Castells was in fact an 'empty signifier' (2006:169). In some respect I agree with those criticisms. Castells stresses the 'agency' of internet technologies, their impact on social life and implies that due to the technological developments of the last fifteen years the network as an abstract model has permeated social experience and transformed it. However, this research contends that his abstract understanding of the network as model that has been imposed upon social experience, excludes a thorough exploration on how people react and negotiate with the values and images that are transmitted through technology.

To some extent this lack in Castells' theory is addressed with the publication of an edited book titled *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (2004) in which Castells brings together a collection of fascinating research on the impacts of the Network Society on different social and cultural contexts. In doing so the edited book looks at how ICT are reconfiguring local cultures and contexts, by changing the architecture and extension of social networks. Hence, the volume offers fundamental insights into the re-structuring of capitalism and local negotiations, as well as on the global inequalities embedded in the network society (2004:23). However, in investigating the global powers that define the Network Society, there is still the problem that Castells decides to focus on the network as a form of social organisation, rather than as a social and political construction. Therefore, he seems to overlook how the network can become a political imagination, which varies from context to context, from individual to individual. In this framework, drawing from Dutton (2005:859), I believe the book leaves the reader with some questions: does the extension and redesign of networks lead only to a particular configuration of society? Can people employ ICTs in order to imagine different forms of sociality?

My understanding is that there is much to be gained if we distance ourselves from the network as a form of organisation, and we instead consider the network as a form of imagination. This is because it would enable us to gain further insight on the new forms of social and political participation that have arisen since the advent of internet technologies. Following Castells I believe that internet technologies have become the material support for the imagination of new types of

social and political participation. However, in contrast to him I believe that 'global cultural patterns' cannot be classified in four different ways (Castells, 2009). Furthermore, I also believe that in understanding internet technologies as being the material support for the development of a type of sociality that is flexible and networked, we must bear in mind that the relationship between the social and the technical is often a dialectical one. Only by doing so we can better appreciate the fact that people constantly negotiate with the political imaginations proposed by the internet and adapt them to their own political projects.

This understanding emerges particularly well in the work of Green, Harvey, and Knox (2005). The scholars undertook ethnographic research on three different European Union funded projects for the development of the information and communication infrastructure in Manchester. The projects largely reflected European policies, which were based on the 'imperative to connect' and on the idea that information and communication networks were a solution to technical, economic, and political problems in the making of Europe (Green et al, 2005:806). According to the scholars these projects constituted an exercise in EU place-making and involved attempts to reconfigure spatial location using the logic of electronically mediated networks (2005:807). One of the most fascinating aspect of their work, for this research project, lies in the fact that they show that although European policy makers had an imagination of the network that reflected their political project, this imagination clashed with different understandings of networks that were advanced by local actors, who in the development of ICT sought to empower the local communities.

Drawing from the work of these scholars, therefore, I believe that the connection between internet technologies, imagination and sociality is far more complex then the model proposed by Castells. Perhaps Castells (2009) is right in suggesting that internet technologies are creating the basis for the diffusion of a type of sociality that is networked and individualistic, and that stresses self-disclosure and the mass-communication of the self. However, I do not believe that it applies to all contexts. Most importantly I do not believe – like he does – that it can be used to understand the context of political action and the ways in which political participation and belonging are being re-imagined by contemporary social movements.

According to Castells (2009:362-364) contemporary social movements can be classified in two types: the ones inspired by networked individualism (e.g. project oriented social movements such as environmental movements) and the ones inspired by communalism (movements based on communities that share a particular political identity, ideology, religion ethnicity etc.). There are also social

movements that result from the crossing of the two cultural patterns; movements within which networks of individuals become *insurgent communities*. In this context, especially by looking at environmental movements of the last decade, or at the many examples of *insurgent communities* that developed in the global arena, Castells contends that networked individualism has influenced the beliefs and strategies of these movements.

In contrast to Castells, I believe that the focus on networked individualism is detrimental if we want to gain a thorough understanding of the new, creative ways in which contemporary social movements are re-imagining political participation through the technological wires of the Internet, and understand how these new imaginations have influenced younger generations of activists. If we refer back to Rhodri's interview, for instance, my understanding is that the networked logic that Rhodri talks about is one that has little to do with individualist discourses. This is because, as emerges above, refusing to define enemies and friends, or to associate with a form of political organisation, does not mean that Rhodri does not believe in collective action. On the contrary he suggests that there is the need to define a 'common ground' and he also claims that 'political solidarity can come in various forms'. His idea of political participation – as we shall see in the next part of the chapter - needs to be understood by looking at the influence of the global justice movements of the late nineties, at their internet based strategies, and their autonomous imaginations.

Networked Affinities: Internet Technologies, Political Imaginations and the Influence of the Movements for Global Justice

The social importance of the Zapatista movement has become - as mentioned elsewhere in this thesis - a central topic of current academic debates engaged in the understanding of contemporary political action. This is because, from the very beginning, the Zapatista movement distinguished itself from other forms of political struggle for two main reasons. On the one hand, as we have seen, the movement was largely played upon a system of online networks of communication and action to the point that it is commonly defined as one of the first 'social netwars' (Ronfeldt, 1998) or as Castells suggested the first 'informational guerrilla' (Castells, 1997b). On the other hand, the Zapatista political philosophy, by being embedded with autonomous and anarchist discourses (Holloway, 2002; Cleaver, 1998; Graeber, 2002; Day, 2005; Khasnabish, 2008) presented itself as an alternative to other movements which were based on the emancipation of political minorities and on the idea of transforming society within the state. In contrast to other forms of social conflict, the Zapatistas argued that the importance of social struggle was not

to 'take power' or achieve recognition from the state as minorities. According to them, social struggle had to aim the social relationships within the system, and stop reproducing the unequal relationships of capitalism, and thus rejecting the very notion of state relations.

As I have explained elsewhere, the political imaginations of the Zapatistas have strongly influenced groups of activists and movements across the world through the creation of the People's Global Action Network and the emergence of the networked movements for global justice. In looking at the links and interconnections of political imaginations that gave rise to the networked realities of the movements for global justice, however, it is important that we do not presuppose a sense of unity and totality, as Hardt and Negri proposed with their concept of *multitude*. According to Hardt and Negri, at the end of the nineties, the world was witnessing the creation of a 'new form of proletariat' (2000b:53-66) – that derived from immaterial labour - and that organised itself in the form of *multitude*. Multitude, according to them worked through and against the Empire to create an alternative global society (2000b: XVII). It acted on the basis of what the singularities shared in common and ruled itself autonomously (2000b: 100). According to the two scholars, therefore, despite their heterogeneous qualities, the movements at the end of the nineties were coming together as a new class, which rose against the Empire in a classical Marxist model of class antagonism.

Many have argued that the Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude - and especially their emphasis on the Empire-Multitude dichotomy - fails to provide an accurate model to understand the complexities and differences embedded in the global justice movements, which have emerged at the end of the nineties. Indeed, as some suggested (Day, 2005; Graeber, 2002) Hardt and Negri's analysis fails to understand that the political imaginations of the global justice movements have little to do with socialist understandings of class struggle, and instead draw heavily from the political philosophy of anarchist theory. Another fundamental lack in Hardt and Negri's work is represented by the fact that the scholars did not recognise the importance of the Zapatista movement in the creation of new social movements (Featherstone, 2008; Khasnabish, 2008). Indeed, according to Hardt and Negri, the Zapatista army were not able to influence revolutionary transformation against the Empire because they remained attached to local issues and their struggle became un-communicable to the rest of the world (2000a:53).

As current debates on social movements show, this is far from being true. The political imaginations of the Zapatista army have influenced a variety of different movements across the world. They did so not by constructing a common ground of identification and action, but by showing that there were new political possibilities

available in the construction of political belonging and opposition. One of these political possibilities is represented by 'autonomy', and the idea that social struggle can happen beyond the state. Influence by the Zapatista teachings and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) understanding that the state is a form of relationship, contemporary movements for global justice act on the logic of autonomy. In a similar line to the classical anarchists of the 19th century, such as Kropotkin and Laundauer, these movements argue that state relationships 'capture' and 'control' minorities (Day,2005). Hence their aim is to enact forms of communitarianism and non-hierarchical relationships through direct action and participatory democracy. The way in which they organise themselves collectively and non-hierarchically, therefore, becomes not only a practice but as Graeber (2002) suggested a form of ideology, an ideology which is based on anarchism and autonomism[59].

The autonomous discourses of the movements for global justice have created the basis for a new reformulation of political identity. During the eighties, scholars, such as Laclau and Mouffe (1985), suggested that there was no longer a whole vision of society but only multiple and conflicting political identities (1985:34-39), and others - like Touraine - contended that society was not a system but a field of action, and that conflicts occurred over the control of the cultural, social and political means of self-production (1985:750-754). Identity was therefore a key word in any debate that related to social and political struggle. In the late nineties, according to Day (2005), the 'politics of demand' that was fostered by new social movements had gradually been replaced by an understanding that the emancipations of political identities are constantly in-strumentalised by power forces. Social movements were no longer interested in achieving recognition through the state for their marginal 'identities', because influenced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) they no longer believed that the state could be perceived as a neutral arbiter. On the contrary these movements saw state relationships as the very reason behind social inequality. Amongst the movements for global justice, therefore, political identity, is no longer a reason for struggle or the very ground for cohesion. It is being replaced by more hybrid and 'nomadic' understandings of

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[59] It is by looking at the political philosophies and anarchist currents present in the global justice movements that we need to understand the reasons why, so many social movement scholars have turned their attention to the Italian autonomous movement of the late seventies. This is because, similarly to contemporary forms of struggle, by constructing community based projects, such as the social centres, and organising itself independently from political parties and ideologies, the autonomous movement in Italy recognised the power of the singularities within it (e.g. feminist, anarchists, communists etc. etc.) and rejected hierarchical relationships, class distinctions and personality cults (Katsiaficas, 2006).

engagement and participation, which focus on politics of 'affinity' rather than politics of 'identity'

In order to better understand the characteristics of these new forms of belonging that have emerged in the political imaginations of the networked movements for global justice, Day (2005) relies on Agamben's (1993) definition of *coming community*. According to Agamben, the coming communities are composed by different singularities; they are neither universal nor common subjects, nor do they work for the construction of collective belonging (1993:17-23). They are brought together spontaneously by relations of affinity. The coming communities, therefore, have many dividing lines but are interconnected and united by values and shared ethico-political commitments (1993:43-47). They rely on a politics of affinity, which is based on an understanding of 'groundless solidarity' (solidarity that is not based on identity) and 'infinite responsibility' (Day, 2005).

Day's (2005) work is fundamental in highlighting the birth of new repertoires of political action, by providing critical insight on their ideologies and discourses, and most importantly their anarchist currents. However, I find that there is a major lack in Day's (2005) contribution to the understanding of contemporary social movements: throughout his book he does not refer to the role played by internet technologies in the construction and consolidation of affinity based political identities and imaginations. As we have seen, the Zapatista movement was largely played upon internet technologies. Furthermore, through the use of new information and communication technologies, the Zapatistas were able to create a global network of communication and action that supported their struggle (Cleaver, 1998). In contrast to Day (2005), who completely overlooks the issue, my understanding is that the extensive use of internet technologies has had an impact on activists' political imagination. According to my perspective, the everyday construction of communication networks between the Zapatista guerrilleros, activist communities in Europe, and other movements across the world, must have had an impact on people's imagination of collective action and belonging. This is because internet technologies and practices enabled people to see that networks of affinity and solidarity could be established beyond and across state borders. In this framework, therefore, the autonomous and affinity based discourses embedded in the global justice movements, I believe cannot be understood without referring to their everyday internet practices.

Therefore, on a similar line of reasoning of Castells' (2001) or Terranova (2004), my understanding is that internet technologies impacted on the political imagination of the global justice movements by fostering the logic of networked

sociality. However, as has been argued so far, scholars must appreciate that the relationship between internet technologies and political movements is a dialectical one of mutual transformation (Barry, 2001). Hence, if internet technologies impacted on the social movements of the last fifteen years in terms of promoting a type of networked sociality, it is also true that political movements invested the network-sociality promoted by the internet technologies with their own anarchist and autonomous understandings. They imagined the network according to their own political projects. In this framework, the network became not the expression of a networked-individualism, but the representation of un-hierarchical and affinity based relationships, which create themselves beyond state borders and are based on notions of 'autonomy' and 'solidarity' (Graeber, 2002:68).

It is by looking at this understanding of network, at its relationship to notions of 'affinity' and 'groundless solidarity' I believe, that we can better appreciate the conflict of generations that is affecting the social world of CSC and the way in which young activists are re-imagining political participation. As mentioned, young people's understanding of political participation is extremely different from the one of older generations, who perceive identity and the construction of a feeling of belonging as central in the experience of political opposition. According to people like Rhodri, the construction of identity ('defining enemies and friends') is no longer important; "it doesn't lead the world anywhere". For him, what is important is to define shared values, and to create social relationships which are based on responsibility and ethics. Therefore, Rhodri's understanding of political participation and belonging seems to be largely influenced by the discourses of the global justice movement, by their networked imaginations, and their internet strategies.

Is Gramsci Dead? Social Movements between Transformation and Continuity

In the above parts I have suggested that in understanding the way in which young activists within CSC are re-imagining political participation it is important to consider the influence of the movements for global justice, look at their internet-based strategies and their political imaginations. However, if we return to Rhodri's interview, we would notice a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, his understanding of political belonging shares many similarities with the political imaginations developed within the movements for global justice. On the other hand, Rhodri strongly believes in the role of the state in order to transform society for the better, and therefore detaches himself from the anti-hegemonic and anarchist discourses of these new forms of social struggle. Therefore, politically he respects what the Cuba Solidarity Campaign is doing, and believes in the

importance of constructing political action within the state. This apparent contradiction is extremely significant for contemporary debates on social movements. This is because it highlights the fact that we cannot frame movements in terms of 'old', 'new' and 'newest'. Movements are neither 'old' or 'new', they are worlds in continuous transformation, which constantly negotiate with the political possibilities, repertoires and imaginations brought about by a given epoch.

In analysing the history of academic debates on social movements, Calhoun (1995) argued that 'new social movements' scholars in order to mount the challenges to old social movements have exaggerated the extent to which they were based on a Marxist meta-narrative of class unity. In doing so, they overlooked the way in which the political movements of the 19th century and early 20th century often included struggles of identity (1995:178-184). According to Calhoun (1995), the main problem in the social movements' literature is that scholars keep on focusing on transition rather than on the interplay between different political repertoires. Paradoxically this same problem emerges also within recent work on social struggle, and especially in the work of Day (2005). According to Day, the rise of the movements for global justice based on anarchist political strategies and autonomous discourses implies that - in contemporary society - the 'logic of hegemony' has been exhausted (2005:203) and that 'Gramsci is dead'.

This understanding is far from being true for two main reasons. Firstly, the emphasis on the 'grassroots' quality of these movements and on their autonomy from the state can overlook the complex networks of interconnections and alliances that develop between contemporary political movements and dominant political institutions. Indeed, as some scholars have argued with reference to the 'trans-national movements organisation'[60], which emerged within the context of the movements for global justice, these are highly interlinked with dominant political institutions such as the Church, or local and national governments (McCarthy, 1997; Smith *et al.* 1997). This same understanding is also evident in the work of Starn amongst the *ronda campesinas* in northern Peru, in which he shows how the movements were on one side creating a 'cultural politics' based on an idea of autonomy and on the other side were being helped by the influence of the Church (Starn in Gledhill, 1994:190-194). Therefore, to emphasise autonomy as a dominant characteristic of contemporary forms of social struggle risks not only to essentialise social movements but also to provide essential notions of the state.

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[60] The term encompasses the different realities of the NGOs, trans-national political movements organisations, and religious trans-national organisation (as Catholic movements in defence of human rights), that emerged at the end of the nineties.

This is because this perspective does not recognise that, as different anthropologists have rightly argued, the margins of the states permeate different layers of society (Das and Poole, 2004).

Secondly, Day's (2005) approach seems to reproduce the main flaws of social movement theory so far, and overlooks the way in which people are ready to re-shape their understanding of social change in order to adapt to the new political possibilities offered by their given epoch. A similar understanding can be found also in the work of Castells (1997) who suggested that the Labour movement and trade unions across the world are unlikely to adapt to the transformations brought about by the Network society (1997:360). According to my perspective this is far from being true. Indeed, as emerges in the work of Davis (2005) on the fading membership of Trade Unions in the nineties in Britain, scholars must recognise 'movements' uncanny ability to renew themselves' (Davis, in Mayo 2005: 76). By focusing on the conflict of generations and its internet strategies, this chapter aims to highlight the ways in which movements are embedded in processes of renewal. This is because, it is only by looking at the conflict of generations that we can better understand the creative ways in which CSC organisers and full-time workers are re-imagining political identity and participation in new and fascinating ways.

This latter point is particularly evident if we take into consideration the way in which - within CSC - discourses of *political solidarity* have changed over the years. During the Thatcher years, as various informants explained to me, solidarity was seen as a fundamental signifier of the Labour movement in Britain. This was particularly true, when Thatcher made solidarity demonstrations and strikes illegal, in order to counter-act the wave of workers' discontent that was sweeping across the country. Solidarity in that context meant political opposition to the injustices of the conservative government, and coalition amongst workers. Furthermore, at the time, the concept of solidarity within CSC was also attached to the socialist beliefs of the Third International, and therefore to the international Labour movement.

The way in which political solidarity as a rhetorical discourse is currently being understood by the national office of CSC is different from the socialist logic of solidarity that was common in the eighties. Today, political solidarity has more to do with the type of networked logic proposed by Rhodri - with his understanding that it is important to "define a common ground" - rather than with socialist ideology. When talking about political solidarity, full-time workers and organisers of the national office emphasise the importance of developing a broad campaign that includes people from various political backgrounds. This became particularly evident one day, when I was stuffing envelopes with leaflets on the latest

campaign for CSC. As I was preparing the mail to be sent out, I noticed that one of the addressees was David Cameron. I asked Rob if the addressee had anything to do with the – at the time – newly elected leader of the British Conservative Party, and Rob replied that it was a homonym. However he also suggested that he would have had no problems if the leader of the Conservative Party became a member of CSC, as long as he wanted to show uncritical solidarity to Cuba.

What I found particularly interesting during fieldwork, and as the above example suggests, is that in constructing a new understanding of political solidarity – which is based on an idea of joining forces for a common interest no matter if the people involved in the struggle come from conflicting backgrounds - the national office dedicates its discursive practices to the *systematic and conscious deconstruction of the concept of political identity*. Indeed, if one was to look at the past issues of the *CubaSí*, the language used would often refer to left wing jargon or to concepts such as 'socialist revolution'. Today, however, as Wendy Knight of the North London local group pointed out, in a two page article on Che Guevara the word socialism never appears. It seems to me, therefore, that the way in which CSC is re-framing its understanding of political solidarity may suggest that Castells (1997) – like Day (2005) - underestimated movements' ability to renew themselves.

Despite people within CSC re-shaping their understanding of political identity in more flexible and networked ways, they still believe in the hegemonic project. From a variety of different conversations, especially with young people, it emerged that the overall perception was that the anti-state and direct action methods of the movements for global justice did not achieve any transformation with society. During fieldwork I was often confronted by activists who criticised the strategies of the global justice movements for being 'spectacular' and 'wishy washy' politics, and for not 'leading anywhere'. In particular, some of the activists I have talked to - within CSC and across other networked organisations - criticised contemporary social movements that are based on direct action strategies for withdrawing from society, and for not bringing about social change.

In contrast to these movements, many involved with CSC still believe in the importance of achieving social change from within the state. Their politics of solidarity with Cuba is grounded in the belief that the construction of governments, which put the people before corporate interest, can bring important transformations in the quality of life of different social groups. Hence, although my informants were aware that the emancipation of social minorities is often instrumentalised by power elites, they also contend that in the last thirty years, the

Labour movement and left-wing organisation in Britain have achieved different results acting from within the state (e.g. equal opportunities, minimum wage etc.). For them, these important results cannot be underestimated or replaced by a politics of social protest that refuses to interact with the state, and withdraws from society.

Therefore, Day's (2005) formulation that the 'hegemonic logic has been exhausted' and that 'Gramsci is dead' overlooks not only a wide range of contemporary forms of political action which are involved in a struggle for cultural hegemony, but also does not recognise the ways in which 'old' and 'new' repertoires of political opposition do not replace one another. Indeed, as we have seen, in the social world of CSC understandings of 'groundless solidarity' coexist in a tension with hegemonic beliefs. Overlooking the internal conflicts of social movements, and underestimating the way in which they struggle to renew themselves implies that scholars refuse to notice the transformative power of social change, and fail to understand the real meaning of political involvement.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that different notions of political identity and belonging are becoming – within CSC and other networked organisations – the very basis of a conflict between generations. Whilst older generations believe in party-based political identity, younger generations distance themselves from the membership politics of the Lbour movement, and show a more flexible and networked understanding of political participation. As organisations like CSC are witnessing the diminishing of membership numbers, they try to address the generation issue by relying on internet related understandings and beliefs. It has been argued that, if we wish to conceptually analyse the strategies of CSC, and understand the reasons why people seem to believe that internet technologies are the 'key' to solve the generation issue we must refer to the work of Castells (2001, 2009) and his idea of *networked individualism*.

As Castells has shown, internet technologies have become the material support for the diffusion of a new type of sociality, which is networked, flexible and individually based. It is by considering this sociality that we can better understand the internet based strategies of CSC. Indeed, as has been argued, many within CSC are convinced that younger generations have been affected by individualist discourses, and this is the reason why they are unwilling to politically associate or become involved with membership organisations. In this framework, CSC organisers believe that internet technologies are the 'key' to solve the generation issue, because they appeal to young people by emphasising more flexible forms of political participation that are both individualist and networked. Therefore, it is only

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by looking at the impact of internet technologies, at the new political imaginations that they enabled, that scholars can better understand the implicit discourses embedded in this conflict of generation and uncover the reasons why this is being played in large part within the Internet.

Castells (2001, 2009) argues that with the extension of internet technologies networked individualism has influences and transformed political action in many different ways. In contrast to him, I have argued that the emphasis on networked individualism obscures rather than illuminates the way in which people are re-imagining social and political participation through the technological wires of the internet. In understanding internet technologies as being the material support for the development of a type of sociality that is flexible and networked, we must bear in mind that the relationship between the social and the technical is often a dialectical one. I have tried to illustrate that there is much to be gained if we distance ourselves from the network as a form of organisation, and instead consider the network as a form of imagination. Only by doing so can we better appreciate how people constantly negotiate the political imaginations proposed by the internet, and adapt them to their own political projects.

In understanding the new political imaginations that emerged amongst younger generations within CSC and the way in which these clash with the politics of the Labour Movement, this chapter has argued that we must abandon Castells idea of networked individualism, and instead look at the influence of the global justice movements on contemporary political action, at their anarchist discourses and at their internet practices. In the social context of the global justice movement, I have shown, the network became not the expression as Castells suggested of networked individualism, but the representation of un-hierarchical and affinity based relationships, which create themselves beyond state borders and are based on notions of 'autonomy' and ' groundless solidarity'. My understanding is that in young people's formulation of political participation, these political imaginations are very influential. Indeed, it was shown with reference to Rhodri that he believes in collective action. What he does not believe in is the idea of "defining enemies or friends", of drawing lines and boundaries and associating with a particular political organisation. For him, political solidarity can come in many shapes and forms.

Therefore, the political imaginations of the global justice movements, which were constructed upon the networked sociality promoted by internet technologies, have proposed a new, anti-hegemonic and affinity based understanding of identity, which I believe has largely influenced younger generations of activists. Yet as I have shown, in the third part of this chapter, although people like Rhodri seem to embrace the understanding of groundless solidarity proposed by the networked

movements for global justice, they reject the political stance of these movements, their anarchist practices and discourses, and the belief that political struggle should happen beyond the state. This apparent contradiction is extremely significant for contemporary debates on social movements. This is because it highlights the fact that movements, are neither 'old' or 'new', they are worlds in continuous transformation, which constantly negotiate with the political possibilities, repertoires and imaginations brought about by a given epoch.

In looking at the movements for global justice, Day (2005) has claimed that the 'logic of hegemony' has been exhausted, and that 'Gramsci is dead'. As this thesis has argued this is far from being true. Gramsci is alive in the mind of the people of CSC, and of all those political groups in Britain who struggle from within the state to transform values and to propose alternative ways of imagining society. However, transformations are taking place, and as this chapter has shown today the hegemonic logic is coexisting with new political imaginations, such as networked affinity and groundless solidarity. This coexistence creates a great deal of tension and conflicts in the everyday lives of activists. Looking at these internal tensions and conflicts is of central importance to social analysis. This is because it enables scholars to uncover the movements' ability to renew themselves. The scholars (Day, 2005; Castells, 1997; Touraine, 1985; Laclau and Mouffe, 1990) who keep on emphasising the transition from one form of movement to another, fail to notice the interplay and conflicts that there are between different repertoires and political imaginations. Hence they fail to understand the real meaning of social movements in society; namely their internal, innovative and creative struggle to find new possibilities to bring about social change.

Chapter VI - Mediating Solidarity: the Cuban Experience, Representation and the Mediation of Social Relationships

Introduction

In all the preceding chapters I analysed people's everyday interaction with the imaginaries and values that are attached to media technologies, and explored the possibilities and conflicts created by the advent of new information and communication technologies. Therefore, the argument in the previous chapters focused almost entirely on the 'socio-technical' dimension of a political movement, given the fact that media technologies and practices defined the very focus of this thesis. This last chapter, however, is very different from the preceding ones. This is because instead of focusing on the socio-technical dimension of political action, it will explore the ways in which *mediation* can be detached from our understandings of 'the media' (Silverstone, 1999, 2005), and can be seen as permeating everyday life, in the way in which people imagine and act 'politics', and the way in which they construct social relationships. Therefore I will explore the intricate ways in which mediation affects social experience, and produces social relationships.

This chapter is the account of a mediated experience, one of the most important mediated experiences for the people involved with CSC: the work-brigade to Cuba. Jointly organised by ICAP (the Cuban Institute of Friends with the People) and CSC, the brigade took place within the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, 40 km from Havana. The camp was founded in 1969 with the support of an US solidarity organisation *Venceremos*, and today hosts more than 300 people who belong to the world-wide networks of solidarity to Cuba. As this chapter will show, the programme of the brigade is designed by ICAP with the support of solidarity groups across the world, and offers the possibility to stay 3 weeks in the camp, work in the fields, and attend a variety of political meetings and cultural events. During the year, ICAP organises different international brigades that come from all over the world. The one I am going to explore in this chapter is the "47th European Jose Martí Brigade", which comprised of 130 people, from 33 different countries.

I decided to travel to Cuba to participate in the work brigade, as part of my fieldwork, for two main reasons. On the one hand, I wanted to experience Cuba for myself; for I felt that I needed to be in Cuba in order to better understand why people in Britain decided to commit to showing solidarity to the island. On the other hand, by following the *brigadistas* to Cuba, my main intention was to compare the mediated image they had of the island – namely the one presented to them by the *CubaSí* magazine and the other media platforms of CSC – with their personal impressions. However, during my stay at the Julio Antonio Mella

International Camp I discovered that things were more complex than I first thought and that I had to re-define my understanding of *mediation.*

Indeed, my experience in Cuba made me realise that *mediation* is a social process which is embedded in political activities and discourses, and despite being played upon media platforms its understanding should not be limited to an analysis of media practices. In media studies, in recent years scholars have started to focus on the concept of *mediation* in order to understand media as social processes, rather then texts. Particularly influential in this regard is the work of Silverstone (1999, 2005) who argued that the technological developments of the last decades, and the increased power and influence of media institutions have drawn the concept of mediation to the centre of the sociological agenda. In his understanding of the media as social processes Silverstone contends that mediated communication is always, at any time political because it serves to mediate hierarchy as well as cultural meanings (2005:190). As we have seen, Couldry also focuses on media as social processes (2003, 2004, 2005) and with his analysis of media rituals he shows how dominant media serve to mediate and consolidate the power of particular political discourses.

Acknowledging the fact that in order to understand media practices and technologies, we need to understand mediation[61] as a social process, this chapter will explore mediation from an anthropological perspective, and uncover the bound relation between social relationships, representation, and political discourses. It will be shown that social relationships are *mediated* in a way that brings forward particular political discourses. Drawing from the work of Turner (2006) and Graeber (1997, 2007a), and by applying a symbolic reading to Marx's labour theory of value, this chapter will argue that social relationships have a representative value, and for this reason are constantly mediated. It is by looking at the very interconnection between values, images and social relationships – I contend – that we can better grasp the way in which mediation affects everyday life, beyond media environments, creating the basis for association or opposition. This reflection on mediation as a human process, I believe can be important for any analysis on the media.

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[61] Here it is important to understand that in media studies, especially following the work of Lundby (2008) on self-disclosure and digital story-telling, the concept of mediation has acquired a new importance. Scholars are discussing whether it is more appropriate to talk about mediation in flexible and general terms or if to consider how stories are 'mediatized', in the sense that they are constructed by following a specific media logic (Couldry, 2008). Although extremely insightful these debates are not the focus of discussion here.

Everyday life at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, in Cuba: A Programmed Routine

Cuba, 1ˢᵗ of September, 2007. An airplane full of 23 British brigadistas landed in the airport of Havana, after a 6 hour flight from London Gatwick. Local time 6.30 in the evening. Real time as felt in the body: just before midnight. Cuba, at last. After a year's fieldwork within the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, where Cuba was an imagined space - something people talked about and associated with, a political cause in which people believed - for the first time, Cuba was a reality; a reality that uncovered itself in front of my eyes outside of the airplane's window. It was a reality of thick greenery, abandoned tanks, and the black and white writing on a wall: 'Socialismo o Muerte: Venceremos!'. We stepped out of the plane in the damp evening air. It was almost dark. The sky full of dense grey clouds was cut randomly by thunder and lightning. Evening storms were soon to become the pattern that defined all our evenings at the camp, where we exchanged life histories, political views and a life experience which for many of us was going to change some of our beliefs and understandings.

We had all met on a hot and suffocating day in late July in the small office on top of the Red Rose Club. The communal room of CSC's office was set up for the 'brigade preparation day'. The chairs were facing a projector with a map of the island; a lonely old fan with a rankling sound accompanied Steve Wilkinson's presentation. He was telling us about the history of Cuba, about the Revolution, and the creation of the global solidarity movement. He was setting out a system of defined rules for how as 'brigadistas' we were meant to behave in the encounter with the Cubans. A set of simple rules, based on the unbiased respect for their ways of living, for their poverty and ideology. Three ex brigadistas had been invited to tell us their experience of the solidarity brigade and warn us against the hard work and terrible food we would encounter in our stay at the camp. That day we also defined the key roles of our brigade.

We elected the Jefe (Chief) Rebekkah, a 20 year old Economics student from Bristol, who was meant to represent us and take care of the relationships with the other brigades and the people of ICAP. We chose the people who would be in charge of the 'cultural evening' at the camp – Adam and Ricardo, two medical students from University College London (UCL) - and selected who was going to create the banner of the British brigade: Kate, a 30 year old socialist, Melissa, an Italo-British student who had just finished her A-levels, and me. With white-blue and red colours the banner was meant to be the symbolic representation of the group, and of the encounter between Cuba and Britain. We had to take it with us, and once we arrived at the camp hand it over to the ICAP representative as a

gesture of solidarity. It took us a couple of meetings to decide what we wanted to do. "How were we to represent Britain?" and "Did we really want to represent Britain?" were our key questions. At the end, we decided to draw a portrait of Tony Benn – icon of the British Left - beside the Cuban hero Jose Martí on a red and blue background.

The morning of the 1st of September, 2007 as we crowded Gatwick's Airport terminal one - with our sleepy faces, big bags and CSC T-shirts - we un-rolled the banner in front of the other participants. As people started to comment on the choices of colours or the little mistakes we had made, a man and a woman - who were standing in the queue waiting to be checked in - approached us. He was a member of CSC who had been on the Brigade the year before, and that day was flying back to Cuba to travel independently for a couple of weeks. Looking at our banner he was impressed and participative. He remembered the banner they prepared the year before. Everyone within CSC who participated in the brigade seemed to remember their banner. On our last day at the CSC office, for instance, as Dean and I were getting prepared for the brigade, Trish told us that in 1989 she had to re-do her banner, because her fellow *brigadistas* were un-happy with the fact that it had the 'Union Jack' painted upon it. The people within our brigade, however, liked our banner. Thus we rolled it back up and got ready to board the plane.

As we were leaving Gatwick airport, Cuba was for many of us still an image: the image constructed for us by CSC organisers; the same image that flashed in front of our eyes as Anna – a 26 year old British-Croatian – flipped the pages of the *CubaSí* magazine while we were preparing to land. When we walked down the unstable ladder of the airplane, however, Cuba was a reality: a reality of damp air and evening storms, broken windows, and a Cuban flag waving in the evening wind. Dean helped me with my bags, he seemed exhausted but content. I watched the other brigadistas proceeding with their big rucksacks and their passports at hand towards the entrance of the rundown airport. We had arrived in Cuba, at last.

The buses that brought us from the airport to the camp were old, Italian blue buses, with writings carved in the back of the seats, and the seat covers half torn apart. They were a donation to the 'Revolution' from the Italian Communist party. As we drove across the dark countryside, Sara and Roberto – the ICAP representatives in charge of the British Brigade – would randomly interrupt the murmur of the conversations to indicate places of interests or make occasional announcements. We passed Caimito, a small village with shabby buildings, 1950s cars, people on the streets, and the noise of voices, car horns and old trucks sliding

on the wet and discontinuous pavement. Once we left Caimito behind and we were driving across a dark countryside we didn't have to wait long to see a big sign which directed us towards the 'Julio Antonio Mella International Camp'.

Surrounded by orange groves and unfarmed land, that evening, the Julio Antonio Mella Camp shined in dim light. An old bus - similar to the one we had come with - was parked just in front of the main entrance. We took our bags and walked down a small alley surrounded by colourful Bougainvillea. As we approached the central area of the camp - with a round bar and a small stage - we could hear people speaking a variety of different languages; they were the members of the Italian and Spanish brigades. After being offered some orange juice and sandwiches, we were separated into two different groups, depending on our gender, and accompanied to our dormitories. I entered the room where I would spend the next three weeks, and an overall feeling of discomfort pervaded me. The tiny room with four bunk-beds, small windows, and a metal door which opened directly on the Cuban countryside was meant to host eight people. We were only four, because our brigade was smaller then usual. Yet individual space was limited, and we had to cram our belongings on dusty shelves and inside rusty lockers.

With its simplicity and discomfort the room reflected – as I was soon to discover – a fundamental fact of the brigade: life at the camp was hard. We were woken up every morning at 5.45 by a metallic rooster on a loudspeaker, which echoed across the silent dormitories and the sleepy countryside just after dawn. The metallic rooster would then be followed by a sequence of Cuban songs. The same songs each morning. Each morning the same sequence. After breakfast, we would gather in the main area of the camp, with our working shoes and clothes, covered in thick, red soil. We would stand there with our sleepy faces together with the people of our brigades. In the later days of life at the camp we all knew each-other and people of different brigades would associate and become friends. Yet the morning meeting was a moment in which national boundaries were re-defined. The Italians with the Italians. The British with the British. It was in the morning meetings that the chief of the camp, encouraging a sense of national competitiveness, would count the members of each brigade in order to see how many people had overslept. The brigade with the most number of people was thought to be the most committed. After counting the number of people present in each brigade, the chief would ascribe the daily duties: working in the fields of guava, in the orange groves or in the camp. We would then step on open and unstable tractors and be sent to work.

The working routine was difficult especially in the guava fields. The thick red soil would stick to the sweaty skin and the damp clothes. At ten o'clock in the morning, with the sun high in the sky and no shade, the collection of weed or the cutting of branches was a very difficult task for us Europeans, used to office jobs. This was especially true with reference to those of older generations[62]. Our lack of physical endurance was a matter of mockery from Francisco, the supervisor of the guava field, and the other people who collectively worked on that land. At lunchtime, when the sun was too difficult to bear, we would jump on the unstable tractors and head back to the camp.

Fig.2 Brigadistas heading to the field of Guava

After lunch, we usually attended conferences and talks in a crowded meeting room just next to the bar. With the background noise of the shaky ceiling fans and the support of small audio devices in which the representatives of each brigade would offer a simultaneous translation, these conferences would last up to three hours. Each day, different guests would address a new theme. One day the veterans of the revolution talked to us about their personal histories, then the representatives of the Central Trade Union Committee came to the camp to explain the organisation of trade unionism in Cuba, then again a group of young people

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[62] Amongst the different brigades there were people of different generations. The British brigade was exceptionally young, with most of the 23 brigadistas in their early twenties. As we shall see later with reference to the Italian brigade, the other brigades, however, were different.

from *Juventude Rebelde*[63] were invited to talk about their political commitment. Despite the different guests, all conferences seemed quite similar in agenda and content: they were all designed to show us the achievements of the 'Revolution', and to explain the standpoint of those who believed in the national commitment to socialism.

Between the afternoon conference and dinner we had time to spend on our own. The sunset would lighten up the back field of the camp, where the people of the different brigades would play football. As the sunset was covered by evening storms we would get ready for the evening activities. These would take place in the central area of the camp, next to the bar, and could vary from watching Cuban documentary films to attending salsa lessons. Around midnight the activities ended, and those who preferred to continue talking and drinking mojitos were asked to move to the area of the mango trees, which was located far away from the dormitories. Night after night, it was mostly the British brigade who stayed awake until 3 or 4 in the morning, drinking, discussing politics and life. According to many, this was a sign that the British brigade - which was mostly composed of people in their early twenties - did not care about politics. As the next couple of parts will show, things were more complex than that. During the nights in which we waited for dawn to arrive, amongst the fear of tarantulas and the sweet flavour of mojitos, politics was one of the main points of conversation. However, it was a very different type of politics from the one professed by ICAP or the Italian brigade. It was a politics that had nothing to do with political parties and collective demonstrations of political commitment, but had instead a very personal and individual feeling about it, which was based on values, and ethics.

Mediating Solidarity: The ICAP programme and the Mediation of Social Relationships

The above described routine – with some varieties - has been programmed and organised for more then forty years now, since the *Venceremos* brigade in the 1960s. An obviously significant aspect of this routine was that - despite waking up at 5.45 every morning to work - at the end of our three weeks of morning labour our work was worth not more than £100 to the farmers of Caimito. Then, the question rises spontaneously: why were we there? What was the role of our working on the international brigade? What was the value that our labour produced?[64] My understanding is that the 'gesture' of being there, working for

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[63] A newspaper of young members of the Cuban Communist Party.

[64] Here it must be noted that, although this part of the chapter focuses on the symbolic value that we produced, we cannot overlook the fact that for ICAP the international brigade provides also economic

Cuba, had an immense value; a value that cannot be understood in economic terms but should instead be analysed by considering its symbolic dimension. Indeed, what I noticed during my time in Cuba was that in an inversion of the capitalist system – within the brigade - labour was no longer a commodity but a gesture of friendship, which served to produce not a material good, but a social relationship, the one of *solidarity*.

In understanding the social significance of the work brigade, thus, we could apply the anthropological theories on gift and commodity and see brigadistas' 'workforce' as a gift (Mauss, [1925] 1990), a *gift* that reinforces certain relationships between people. I do not wish to adventure in such theory, despite agreeing that such an approach – if applied critically (Bloch and Parry, 1989; Hart, 2007) – can be extremely insightful. Instead, drawing form Graeber (2001) and Turner's (2006) work, I wish to analyse the significance of the work brigade by referring to Marx's labour theory of value. As it will be shown, such a theoretical approach is particularly suitable to this research project because it enables us to understand the complex interaction between the production of social relationships, representation, and political ideologies. Highlighting this interaction is of central importance to understanding that *mediation* is embedded in the construction of social relationships, and it is therefore an utterly human (as well as political) process, which is not confined to media technologies and practices.

Marx developed his labour theory of value drawing from the work of Ricardo and Smith. At the end of the eighteenth century, theories of value were especially important, since scholars tried to explain and address the growth of liberal markets. The theories of Adam Smith and David Ricardo were especially influential. Both scholars emphasised the connection between labour and value, and believed that the latter was generated by the former. In this regard particularly explicatory is Ricardo's formulation that value is created by labour, in the sense that is defined by the amounts of hours worked to produce a given object (Graeber, 2001; Turner, 2006; Morrison, 2006). In contrast to such understandings Marx developed a much more complex and over-embracing labour theory of value, which drew attention to the mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production. For Marx, value is not

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earning. The price of the brigade from Britain was £875.00 and included flight, stay at the camp, 3 nights at a Hotel in Pinar del Rio, meals three times a day, and all the tours organised by ICAP. It is hard to say, therefore, how much is the real economic earning of ICAP from the brigade, according to some ICAP's representatives it is minimal. Yet as they explained the value of us being there is of great importance for them.

generated by labour but is embedded within it; in other words value resides in the forces of production (1976:163-178).

The fiercest criticisms that have been made against Marx - and that this thesis has embraced especially when referring to the issue of class antagonism - has been his attachment to materialism, and forms of material production (Morrison, 2006; Rockmore, 2002). However, as many anthropologists have shown, the stress on Marx's historical materialism, and its limitations, fails to address some important aspects of Marxist theory. Indeed, as Bloch has argued, in *Capital*, Marx himself protested against interpretations of historical materialism which restricted the scope of his analysis (1984:85). In actual fact as Turner (2006) and Graeber (2001) have highlighted there is much to be gained from a symbolic reading of Marx's theory of value. Indeed, as both scholars have noticed, with his theory Marx seeks not only to reveal the internal structure of capitalism as a system of political economy but to show how it generates forms of false consciousness (Turner, 2006; Graeber, 2001). In this light, thus Marx in *Capital* was not only interested in materialism, but also in the ways in which representations and meanings were constructed.

For Marx, value resides in labour, in the forces of production. However, value is also defined by the transformation of the productive activity into a category of meaning. According to Marx, therefore value is defined by a dual dimension, which brings together both the forces of 'material production' and the forces of 'representation'. As Turner explains:

> "Value is the theoretical category through which Marx connects function and structure, action and meaning, production and exchange, and the social organisation of the division of labour with the semiotic representation of that activity through specialised symbolic media (in this case money)." (Turner, 2006:8)"

With its material and ideal elements, Marx's labour theory of value works well in the analysis of capitalist society, and enables us to understand the bound relation between production and representations (commodity/money), or in other words action and meaning. Indeed, as Marx has shown, human beings produce their symbols (money/commodity), and after ascribing an extraordinary power to them (fetishism), they organise their actions to achieve these symbols (Marx, [1867] 1976). Marx's theory of value, therefore, is of central importance in the understanding of the connection between productive activity, social organisation and ideology.

However, as many anthropologists have noticed, because of its emphasis on material production and capitalist relationships, such a theory is not applicable to social contexts and relationships that escape the 'capitalist' logic. Here I am referring to those cultures and social contexts where - as in the case of the work brigade in Cuba - the production of material goods plays a secondary role to the production of social relationships (Turner, 2006:11). In order to overcome such a limitation, Turner drew from a passage of the *German Ideology* in which Marx and Engels discussed the 'production of social relationships' as a way to produce human wealth/value (Turner, 2006:12). Therefore, he applied their understanding to the production of social relationships amongst the Kayapo in Brazil. The result was the creation of a theoretical approach which demonstrated not only that social relationships are often 'produced', but that they have great representative power.

Turner's approach is of crucial importance to this research project, because it enables us to see the symbolic dimension of social relationships, and their intrinsic value. People produce (or consolidate) social relationships, because these social relationships can be abstracted and become the representation of some form of collective meaning.[65] It is by looking at the production of social relationships and at their representative value that we can better understand the importance of the work brigade organised by ICAP. Indeed, as mentioned, the value of the work-brigade was not a material one but a symbolic one, which served to construct and consolidate a particular relationship: the one of *international solidarity*. It was for this reason that the programme of the brigade also involved a series of ready-made encounters with the locals. These 'encounters' were staged and constructed with particular care. During the 47th European Jose Martí Brigade, we visited schools, hospitals, universities and local meetings. We raced a solidarity marathon with the people of Caimito and participated in the 'fiestas' of the Committee de Defensa de la Revolucion (CDR).[66] All these events were very officious, and were

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[65] Particularly insightful in this regard is the work of Graeber (2007c) on representation and hierarchy. By applying the anthropological theory of 'joking relationships' and 'relationships of avoidance' to an historical analysis of the history of manners (Elias, 1982) in western society, Graeber uncovers the symbolic aspect embedded in relationships that stress familiarity or formality. By doing so he insightfully shows how social relationships become the physical representation of hierarchical values (Graeber, 2007c). In this context social relationships, can be seen as a form of language in the sense that they become the signifiers of specific political discourses.

[66] The CDR were created in 1960, and their motto was 'En Cada barrio Revolución – In each Neighbourhood Revolution!'. Born as committees in charge of defending the revolution, they are a massive organisation, today, and organise the life of neighbourhoods across Cuba. Each neighbourhood has different committees, one for each block. These committees have a dual aspect. On the one hand they take care of general collective issues, such as building maintenance or the cleaning of streets and

always covered by the Cuban national media (especially the national radio, the national television broadcast and *Granma* newspaper).

Towards the end of our time at the camp, we were taken to Pinar del Rio, a city near the Sierra de los Organos for a three day excursion break. As soon as our buses arrived at the entrance of the city, we were joined by police cars and motorcycles who escorted us to the main square. A crowd of children in red and yellow uniforms were waiting for us together with the city's Mayor and TV cameras. As soon as we got off the bus, the children came running towards us and offered flowers to each *brigadista* as a gesture of 'friendship' and 'solidarity'. This ritual was followed by a series of interventions made by the Mayor of the city, ICAP representatives, and *brigadistas* on the importance of 'friendship', 'exchange' and 'solidarity'. As can be seen, our being there, exchanging and receiving flowers from local students, became the symbolic representation of an ideal of 'solidarity between the people'.

Here it is important to understand that the ideal of solidarity that we promoted with our presence cannot be analysed without referring to the political discourses of the Cuban Government. Indeed, as was explained to me by Roberto – ICAP's representative in charge of the British Brigade – for the Cuban revolution the notion of solidarity is of extreme importance. On the one hand the discourses of the Revolutionary government around solidarity focus on the importance of supporting countries in need. In this optic, the Cuban Government is involved in acts of solidarity across the world, such as sending 25.000 Cuban doctors to developing countries in need. On the other, solidarity is also a matter of 'taking', of receiving support for their socialist cause. In this context, the international brigades are a way of receiving political support and consolidating certain beliefs. By being there, showing our solidarity to the Cuban government, in our encounters with the Cubans and their media, we became a tool, or better a *medium*, through which dominant discourses in favour of the 'Revolution' were constantly reinforced and legitimised both within Cuba and within the international solidarity movement.

The production of international solidarity, which the brigade makes possible, has a crucial significance for the people working within ICAP, and for those - within Cuba - who support the government and the Revolution. This last point emerged in an interview with Sara, an Afro-Cuban representative of ICAP who was in charge of the British brigade. Like all the other ICAP employees working at the camp, Sara had to leave her two children and family behind to stay and live with us for a month. Despite showing a certain degree of criticism, she believed in the

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public spaces etc. On the other hand they are linked to the police and aim to denounce individuals who promote 'counter-revolutionary' lifestyles or acts.

'Revolution' and in the fact that what Cuba was doing was worth protecting and defending. In her semi-structured interview she explained how important the 'international solidarity' movement was to them.

Fig. 3 Image painted on the female dormitories, with a writing on a wall that states 'With the Cubans we all stand'

Sara told me that, during the special period,[67] the global solidarity movement played a fundamental role, because they would not have survived without the shipping of aid material. Currently, she explained, there are other things at stake. As mentioned in chapter four, despite the technological developments of the last decades, today the 'wall of silence' between Cuba and the rest of the world seems to be stronger then ever. In the majority of cases, Cuba is not a matter of focus for global broadcasting companies and newspapers. Cuba is not news; it is an old, outdated issue. When issues on Cuba are covered, these merely focus either on Fidel Castro or on negative representations of the socialist government. In this context, according to Sara, the organisation of the international brigade is of fundamental importance for ICAP, because it allows people from other countries to see and experience the 'real' Cuba. Or at least ICAP's particular understanding of Cuba, and support them.

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[67] The special period or *periodo especial*, is the name given to the big economic depression and energy crisis that affected Cuba, following the fall of the Soviet Bloc. At the time famine reached its peak and many primary necessities were missing. Things started to change in 1994, when Cuba opened its doors to foreign tourism.

For this reason with its routine of work, conferences, and staged encounters with the locals, the brigade tried to present us with a polished image of Cuba, an image for which the achievements of the socialist government were emphasised, and dissent and criticism were obscured. This was *their* image, and *their* particular understanding of the Revolution, which carried a series of embedded political discourses on socialism, and the socialist ideology. In presenting us with their image, ICAP representatives were in fact trying to *mediate* our experience, and our encounter with the locals in such a way that it guaranteed the production of international solidarity. In this framework ICAP representatives acted as *mediators*. To understand the meaning of mediation, here, we should look at the work of Latour (2005) and his understanding that *intermediaries* and *mediators* are means to produce the social. According to Latour the *intermediary* transports meaning without transformation (defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs), *mediators* cannot be counted as just one, their input is never a good predictor of their output. In this context, mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry (2005: 39). ICAP representatives translated the Cuban reality for us; they did so because they wanted to produce a social relationship that had a strong representative value for them, because it reinforced particular political discourses.

Uncovering the representative value of social relationship and noticing the way in which ICAP constantly mediated our experience, made me realise that *mediation* is a really human (and political) process that affects every layer of social reality, within and beyond media organisations. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this understanding has triggered the rise of many important debates in the discipline of media studies, especially following the work of Silverstone (1999, 2005). This point also emerges within anthropology, and specifically within the work of Mazzarella (2004). Mazzarella discusses the ways in which, in the new culture of globalisation, anthropologists should pay greater attention not only to the media, but to all those processes of mediation, which constitute our social life. According to Mazzarella there is a 'contradictory relation to mediation', which is defined by an attitude, shared equally by academics and non-academics, to recognise that we live in a mediated world and yet to disavow it (2004:345).

The Mediation of Collective Experience between Identification and Opposition: the Italian and British Brigades in Comparison

In the construction of international solidarity, ICAP representatives tried to provide us with a *mediated* image of Cuba; an image that emphasised the strengths of the Revolutionary Government and overlooked its contradictions.

However, in a similar way to what happens with media texts (e.g. such as TV shows, news or films), ICAP presented us with an understanding of reality that did not coincide with our own experience of it. In fact, many of us had experienced *a* Cuba which contrasted with the mediated image presented by ICAP. During the brigade itself, we had some afternoons 'off' and we were left wandering on our own around the streets of Havana. Here, we would often interact with people; we would be confronted with the inequalities brought about by the tourist industry and would have to come to terms with realities that we did not quite understand, such as the presence of *jineteros/as*.[68] There were also the afternoons in which we chose not to attend the conference, and ran away from the camp to Caimito in search of fruit and vegetables or simply in search of an afternoon free from debates on Cuba. Also within Caimito, relatively close to the camp, we would find people who would invite us into their houses to tell us about the injustices of the 'regime', such as the lack of internet connection or the possibility of travelling freely.

After the brigade was over, a group of brigadistas from different brigades decided to stay and travel around the island for some time, and I followed them. This was an interesting and valuable period in which we gained a better understanding of the country; an understanding that strongly detached itself from the one of ICAP. When I returned to Havana - after a week in which I had been in Trinidad and Cienfuegos with people from the Italian and the Swiss brigade - I randomly met Sara in the narrow streets of Havana Vieja. Like me, Sara was an exception in the brigade, for she was Catalan but she was part of the Irish brigade, given the fact that she was living in Dublin. As we drank a mojito in the magical night of Plaza Vieja, she told me about her trip around the island with another group of fellow brigadistas. She listed a series of situations that she had seen, and we started to exchange impressions and understandings on Cuba. As our conversation built up, we both realised how different our understandings of Cuba were from the ones we had been injected with at the camp. At a certain point, Sara lit a cigarette looked up and told me: "I can't believe they lied to us". I wanted to reply that they did not. They just presented us their image of Cuba, an image that was mediated by their particular beliefs, and that was aimed at constructing and reinforcing certain relationships. Yet I remained silent and left the conversation

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[68] As travelers, it is easy in Cuba to encounter people who illicitly offer services such as accommodation, restaurants, and excursions. These people, commonly known as "*jineteros*" ("jockeys" in English), are normally quite decent and friendly people, but their persistence can become annoying. What complicates the situation even further is that these *jineteros* often aren't transparent about their business and disguise their motives by showing interest in becoming your friend. As a "friend" they can make money from you by finding you accommodation or restaurants and secretly taking commissions.

suspended in the early hours of that Cuban night overtaken by the uproar of the sea clashing against the Malecón.[69]

Sara did not identify with the mediated image presented by ICAP. When she had the chance to experience Cuba in her own terms, she felt betrayed by what the brigade had taught her. However, not everyone who decided to travel across Cuba was disappointed. In contrast to Sara, for example, Aurora – a member of the Spanish brigade in her early twenties – had a very different experience. When I met her in a *casa particular*,[70] a couple of weeks after the end of the brigade, she told me that her journey across the island confirmed many of her beliefs in the benefits of the socialist government, and did not challenge the image of Cuba constructed by ICAP. By looking at these opposite experiences, and at the many different ways in which people related to the mediated image of the brigade, I started to realise that *mediation* always entails identification or opposition. It is by associating or opposing a particular image of reality, I believe that social groups are created and reinforced. This latter point becomes more evident if we consider the different political discourses that influenced the Italian and the British brigades, and how differently the two groups reacted to ICAP's mediated image.

During my time at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, I found myself at the border between the Italian and the British[71] brigades, and I started to observe the way in which the members of both groups reacted differently to the image of Cuba – as mediated by ICAP. The Italian and the British brigades were the largest national groups within the camp; they both had more then twenty members each. The number of members was, however, one of the few similarities between the two

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[69] The Malecón is the stone-built embankment on the seaside of Havana.

[70] Casa particular (Spanish for "private house"; plural *casas particulares*) is a private accommodation, very similar to Bed and Breakfasts, with one or two rooms for guests. The average price per night is 25 CUC (Cuban dollars covertibles, 1 CUC equals approximately 24 national pesos, which is the other currency in Cuba). The casas particulares have registries that they have to keep updated with all their guests, and the Cuban authorities keep an eye on tourists by tracking the casas particulares in which they are staying. Therefore, there is a certain degree of control around the casa particular and the families are always scrutinised by the CDR. However, in my stays I found many who had critical attitudes towards the 'regime' and discussed the problems they faced. Despite being controlled, thus, the casa particulares were a space of contact between tourists and Cubans.

[71] From the very beginning my position was extremely interesting. Despite me being Italian I was a member of the British brigade. Hence the Italians called me the 'English', but said that they wanted to adopt me, and the British despite developing strong bonds of friendship and complicity with me, kept referring to me as the Italian. My position was difficult because although I shared a cultural heritage and the same language with the Italians, with the British brigadistas I could exchange references of everyday life. This dual position allowed me to penetrate both brigades, by having a role that was literally at the same time participant and observer.

groups, because overall they were very different. The Italian brigade was organised by the Association of Italy-Cuba Friendship, a grassroots organisation that was born in 1961, and that - similarly to CSC - is comprised, today, of 5000 members.[72] The Italian group was composed in a large part of people in their fifties; yet there was a small minority of people in their thirties, two in their twenties and four members who were nineteen years old. The average age of their group was, however, high; especially because it was increased by one member Domenico, an 81 year old 'aficionado' who participated in the brigade on a number of different occasions. Most of the members of the Italian brigade were also members of the Italian Communist party (Rifondazione Comunista) and some of them were also senior representatives in the party's hierarchy. As I was collecting their personal histories, I discovered that most of them came from a working class background, and that they had started to become involved in political activities as teenagers.

The British brigade, on the contrary was very different. As mentioned, it was primarily composed by people in their early twenties and a small group in their 30s.[73] In contrast to the Italian brigade it was vastly heterogeneous in its political affiliations and beliefs. In actual fact, apart from Tom - a 20 year old philosophy student who was a member of the Scottish Socialist Party – few others would define themselves as 'socialists', and all the rest were not members of parties or political organisations. Furthermore, most of the people in their early twenties had joined CSC because they wanted to participate in the work brigade, and travel to Cuba 'in a different way', and not for political reasons. Amongst the people who had joined the brigade to have a different experience of Cuba was a group of five friends: Dan – the nephew of CSC's office manager who studied at University College London (UCL); Rebbekah - Dan's best friend who is a well travelled Economics student from Bristol; Adam, Ricardo and Helen – who were all medical students from UCL. They had decided to travel around Cuba for two weeks before joining the brigade, and we met them at the airport on the day of our arrival.

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[72] Although the Association of Italy-Cuba Friendship has approximately the same number of members as CSC this is not indicative of its political influence. When I was in Cuba it emerged, especially from the interviews with ICAP representatives, that CSC is the most effective organisation of solidarity to Cuba in Europe. This, according to many, is due to the fact that CSC has the support of the British Trade Unions, which are considered to be largely influential. The same thing cannot be said about the Italian organisation or the Italian Trade Unions.

[73] The eldest member of the British brigade, Thomas, was a fifty years old football coach and long term member of CSC. After what has been argued in the preceding chapter, the fact that the British brigade had a very low age average should be surprising. However, although young generations involvement with CSC is very limited, the brigades to Cuba are often a successful tool to recruit young members.

When the brigade started, they already had a first hand experience of the contradictions of the socialist government.

The divide between the two brigades was not only evident in their different compositions, but also in the way in which people reacted to the constructed routine at the camp and to the image of Cuba as presented by ICAP. The Italian brigade used to take part in all conferences and events and by asking questions, and recording what had been said, actively participated in the production of international solidarity. In the evenings, they would gather in the main area of the camp, next to the bar, and would discuss politics or sing political songs with old guitars brought from Italy. Occasionally they would also have 'brigade meetings', where they discussed the problems that had arisen and collectively organised excursions and programmes. They were a bound group, and used to spend much time together, although the younger people integrated with other brigades as well.

The British brigade was fragmented, chaotic and extremely critical of the working routine at the camp and of the image of Cuba as it was mediated by ICAP. Members were divided into different small groups and scattered individuals. In the mornings, many would turn up for work without attending the morning meeting. In the fields and orange groves they would often take long breaks in the shade, drinking water, chatting and joking. In the afternoons, only a few from the British brigade would participate in conferences and events, and the others would usually run away from the camp on excursions to the local village. When they were asked to join in public meetings and events, they would silently show all their discontent and leave the conference hall - at the end - with outrage for the 'ideological propaganda' that they had been fed with. Their evenings were often defined by a good quantity of alcohol, a good dose of sarcasm and the commitment to stay up until late in the areas of the mango trees.

The opposition between the two brigades, the different ways in which they approached life at the camp was especially evident on the night of the *Cultural Evening*. This was an evening in which all brigades had a ten-minute slot in which to put up a symbolic performance that represented their "culture". The Italian brigade performed three songs of the Resistance[74] movement in Italy, one of which was the famous 'Bella Ciao'. With pathos and participation, some of the members told me how important it was for them to be in Cuba and perform such a song. In their eyes Cuba had made it; Cubans had won the struggle for a socialist government. On the contrary, they believed that Italy had failed. Despite the Italian Communist Party had been the largest and most influential in Europe for

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[74] *La Resistenza* is known as the political and military opposition to the Fascist Government that took place in Italy, from the beginning of the Second World War.

many years, the rise of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and the frightening right-turn that had affected the country was a reason of worry and distress for the Italian brigadistas. As I have been told, thus, Singing *Bella Ciao* in Cuba, in front of different brigades had for many of them a very strong emotional meaning.

In contrast to the more serious and revolutionary notes of the Italian Brigade, the performance of the British Brigade became the subject of jokes and mockery. Our ten minutes slot was divided into four acts: we sang 'Jerusalem', 'Auld Lang Syne', read a poem by Dylan Thomas, and then some of the boys danced madly on stage to the sound of club music, as they performed a 'night out in a London club'. Sam - a 20 year old History student - announced to the public that the reason why half of the British brigade was so evidently drunk had to be found in the fact that they wanted to reproduce the British passion for alcohol. Despite many of people at the camp and ICAP representatives being critical of our choices, following our performance the atmosphere was lighthearted and happy and we ended up dancing with the people of the other brigades till the late hours of the night.

Within the Italian brigade people often expressed their frustration against the lack of political commitment of the British group. Giovanni, a 20 year old Sociology Student at the University of Trento, for instance strongly believed in the fact that it was up to him and his friends – especially because they were young – to struggle for a better position of the Left[75] in Italy. More than once - together with his friend Marco – he mentioned that he did not understand why the British brigade had such a critical attitude towards conferences and events, and towards politics in general. Amongst other people of the Italian group, furthermore, there was the shared belief that the British brigade's attitude towards politics had to be read in the larger framework of cultural difference rather than through the generation gap. Indeed, according to them, people like Adam, Dan or Ricardo were the very example of the effect of Thatcherism and the individualist ideology in Britain.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, similar understandings were also shared among people within CSC. Indeed, many believed that members of younger generations 'did not care about politics' because they were impregnated with individualist values and ideologies. As discussed in the previous chapter this is not always true, and in Britain there are many young activists - like Rhodri - who believe in collective action. However, by looking at the interconnection between Rhodri's beliefs and the discourses of the global justice movements, I have argued that despite believing in political opposition many young activists reject the

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[75] Here, it is important to notice that Giovanni's political imagination related particularly well to the idea of party politics, hierarchical structures and membership organizations.

understandings of political identity promoted by parties or membership organisations such as CSC.

Here, it is important to understand that the experiences of the British brigadistas cannot really be compared with the ones of activists like Rhodri, since most of them were not politically active. Nevertheless, during the brigade, I found it interesting to notice that there were clear analogies between Rhodri's understanding of politics and the ones of people like Dan, Adam or Rebekkah. In the nights spent in the area of the mango trees, listening to conversations about life, beliefs and political systems, I started to realise that most of them refused any type of political affiliation because they did not want to be identified with particular political organisations. Furthermore, they showed a critical attitude towards almost any type of political discourse. One evening for instance, a discussion on 'fair trade' reached the conclusion that it was a highly hypocritical practice. As in the case of fair trade, in most of our conversations, political ideas and images were constantly deconstructed and destroyed in a clever yet relativistic and pessimistic way. The fascinating thing, however, was that despite most of them showing a critical attitude towards everything that was 'political' their understanding of the world was permeated by political values such as equality, civic respect and democratic participation, which are all rooted in a British liberal-left tradition. For most of them politics was a matter of values, not ideologies; it was a deeply individual and personal practice.

My Cuban experience, amongst the people of the British brigade, has largely enriched my insight in the generation conflict within CSC, and has enabled me to better understand the data that I had gathered. During fieldwork, I often asked senior informants whether they had children and whether their children were politically active. Colin – who was one of the founders of the British Cuba Resource Centre – replied that his son was not politically active but that he had strong political values. A similar response has been given to me by many other members of CSC or the Trade Unions. At first, I really did not understand what they meant. It was only after the brigade to Cuba, and discussing about politics and ethics with people like Dan, Adam or Helen that I started to understand why my informants suggested that their children were not politically active, but had strong political values.

Here, it is difficult to decide whether values, or ethics, can be understood as a political project. As mentioned in the previous chapter, according to Agamben (1993) in the *Coming Communities*, a common ethics *can* become the basis for collective struggle. Furthermore, as Foucault has suggested, at times 'the problem is not trying to dissolve relations of power [...] but to give one's self the rule of

law...the *ethos*, the practice of self, that will allow these games of power to be played with a minimum domination' (1987:129). Ethics can be understood as a political imagination, and therefore can become a political project. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapter, ethics is central to many forms of contemporary political movements that base themselves on the logic of groundless solidarity and infinite responsibility (Holloway, 2002; Day, 2005; Khasnabish, 2008). However, too often ethics and values do not transform into political projects, because by having an individual focus, their collective field of action is extremely limited. This understanding applies very well to the analysis of the British Brigade. Amongst most of its members ethics was an important political understanding. However, although people were committed to a particular ethics and shaped their individual actions in accordance to it, it rarely transformed itself into a collective political project.

What emerges from the above discussion, therefore, is that the British and the Italian brigades were defined by two very different and opposing political imaginations: one that emphasised ideology and identity, and another that emphasised ethics and individuality. These different imaginations made them react in opposite ways to the mediated image proposed by ICAP. The clash between these two different political imaginations transformed itself into a conflict as soon as we arrived at Pinar del Rio, for our three day break. As it happened in the camp, once we arrived in Pinar del Rio the Italian brigade was very participative and active in the events that ICAP had organised for us. During the day, they would attend the arranged visits to schools and hospitals, and in the evening they participated with joy and dedication to the *fiestas* of the CDRs. Refusing to attend many staged encounters with the locals, or showing hostility and criticism when they did attend, the British brigade spent their afternoon and evenings around the hotel.

One evening, as we were sitting at the bar, we noticed a member of the Italian brigade - who was also an important figure in the Italian communist party (Rifondazione Comunista) - enjoying a drink with a Cuban girl who was probably in her early twenties. Sandro was in his late sixties and was well known within the camp for his 'caring attitude' towards the opposite sex. On the following day rumours emerged not only that Sandro had enjoyed a night with his escort, but that others - within the Italian brigade - had entertained themselves with Cuban prostitutes. Domenico, the 81 year old, was said to be also involved. The reaction of the British brigade to these rumours was one of deep outrage. People could not

believe that within a 'solidarity' movement such things could happen, and that ICAP would ignore it.

When we returned to the camp, the idea of making a formal complaint dissolved into nothing, but conversations between the Italian and the British brigade would often touch upon the issue. As days went by, new anecdotes emerged, especially in relation to Domenico, who – as mentioned before in the chapter – was a frequent member of the brigade. Some within the Italian Brigade, and especially the ones of younger generations, criticised their fellow *brigadistas* for exploiting their position as European tourists to achieve sexual pleasure. However, during our conversations they never seemed to suggest that the Italian *brigadistas'* sexual behaviour posed questions about the nature of their political commitment to Cuba and the solidarity movement.

As we were heading towards the end of our time at the camp the events of Pinar del Rio began to fade away from the conversations of the people in the Italian brigade, and were replaced once again by constant criticisms against the British brigadistas, for their lack of political knowledge and commitment. On the last day of the brigade we were all called into the main room for the last conference. The conference stressed the importance of the global solidarity movement to Cuba. ICAP representatives called on all brigadistas to return to our countries, tell people about our experience, and break the 'wall of silence' that surrounds issues that relate to the island and its government. At the end of the conference, the head of the camp thanked Domenico and another Dutch member for their long-term commitment and support and this led to applause and standing ovation. As the first drop of rain started to pour down from the sky, in the anticipation of the afternoon in which the British brigade was leaving the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, Adam came up to me and said "I can't believe it. They did a standing ovation to Domenico. Is that their idea of politics? What about values?"

The Power of Mediated Experiences: Cuba, Solidarity and 'Projectual Imagination'

The understanding that mediation affects every layer of social experience, creating the basis for identification and or opposition is of central importance to this research project. This is because - if we move beyond the conflicts between the Italian and the British brigades - by looking at mediation we can grasp some important clues on the deeply emotional level of collective experience, and its power in the construction of collective feelings of belonging. The work brigade was crucial for CSC; the power of such an experience lies in the fact that by being mediated by ICAP it is a shared one, and it has been shared since the very

beginning of the organisation. Travelling to Cuba and participating in the brigade can be seen as a 'ritual'[76] and a 'rite of passage' for new members. If - as we have seen in chapter three - ritual involves the simultaneous construction of identity and ideology, the work brigade acts as a ritual because it establishes a collective feeling of belonging whilst reinforcing the power of specific beliefs.

Belonging is associated with knowledge, and knowledge seems to be granted mostly from the lived experience itself, which is a collective and mediated one. Once you have been to Cuba, your role seems to change within the organisation. Mine certainly did. When I returned to CSC after the work brigade, Tasha, Rob and Roger dedicated a full lunch hour to my accounts, my impressions and perspectives. For the first time ever I was the one to talk, explain, suggest. We discussed the problems that had arisen, the way in which the British brigade opposed the mediated image of Cuba as proposed by ICAP, I also told them about the scandal of the Italian brigade and our outrage towards their behaviour. They listened, participated, told me about their own experiences.

A few days after my return it was the *CubaSí* mail-out day, and throughout the day conversations kept leading back to Cuba. People would ask Dean and me about the brigade, the food, the work and life at the camp. As the day went by, I discovered that Frank and Rob both participated in the Summer brigade in 2000. Frank remembered how young people used to get drunk in the evenings and hang around the bar. He criticised them for not working hard enough and with an expression of disappointment added 'perhaps that was their idea of solidarity'. Dean and I looked at each other and smiled with complicity. It was only during the mail out day that I realised what the brigade really meant. Indeed, the brigade is an important collective experience for CSC, and for me it was a bonding experience with them.

Once I came back from Cuba I also transformed the way in which I read the *CubaSí*. As I was carrying out research on past issues, I found myself having a new interest in the brigade report page. This was an important turning point in my understanding of alternative media, because it made me realise how their practices enable people to transform individual experiences into collective ones. That *CubaSí* served to mediate experience and ascribe a shared meaning to it was one of my first findings, but it was only after the brigade that I could better understand what this really meant at the personal level for the people involved. This, I believe is a

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[76] The interconnection between pilgrimage and ritual practices has been widely explored by Couldry (2000), who looked at media pilgrimages and provided a thorough analysis of media spaces, rituals and fandom cultures.

powerful example of how ethnographic practice feeds theory providing a deeper level of insight.

The brigade to Cuba, as mentioned, does not only enable the construction of a feeling of belonging but it also creates and reinforces certain collective beliefs. As mentioned above, the brigade was structured in such a way that allowed brigadistas to see the Cuban Government's achievements in terms of public health and education. Most importantly, during the time at the camp the brigadistas were placed in regular everyday contact with people who really believe in the Cuban Revolution, and in Cuba's right to self determination. During my time in Cuba I had the chance to engage in conversations with people like Pedro, Sara, or Roberto who patiently explained the reasons behind their political support for Fidel Castro's Government. They were all extremely educated people who showed a great deal of critical thinking, therefore, the discussions with them were often extremely rich. One important point that emerged from our conversations was that many seemed to believe that there was no other alternative for Cuba rather than socialism. This is because, as they explained, there are different types of capitalism: capitalism of type A, type B and type C. Europe enjoys the capitalism of type A, but not many other countries do. In this context as Pedro once suggested, "If Cuba was to apply a capitalist system, it would be the type of capitalism that they have in Honduras and Haiti, not the one that you have in Europe. Do you know what's going on there?"

In comparison to many other Latin American countries, where social injustice has been fuelled by the neoliberal structural adjustments programmes promoted by the International Monetary Fund (Stiglitz, 2000), people recognise the benefits of a socialist government which provides them with free education, healthcare, housing and food - all this despite the economic blockade imposed upon them more than 46 years ago. For someone like me who had been living in the North East of Brazil for more than a year their argument was easy to understand. In fact, as I arrived in Caimito in early September I was surprised by how 'rich' the region looked in comparison to the North East of Brazil or Brazilian rural areas. When I left the brigade and I started to travel around Cuba, I had the pleasure to deal with a number of people that were supportive of the Cuban government despite recognising its problems. Since I spoke their language fluently, I managed to become friends with a variety of different people and engage in political discussion with them.

During my travels I had the luck to meet Elena, an owner of a *casa particular* in central Havana. Despite being in her late sixties, Elena was still a charming and

youthful woman who lived alone in an old colonial building in Havana Vieja. She made her living with the income of the casa particular. In the living room of the casa, which opened on to a small patio, she had a map of the world attached to the wall and asked all guests who visited the house to insert a coloured pin on their country of origin. Similar to the farmers in Caimito and *all* the other Cuban people that I met, Elena was really well educated; we would discuss an incredible variety of issues from international politics to the geographical structure of Italy. She knew all the regions by heart, and asked me complicated questions on the Italian political system that I was not able to answer. Elena told me about the economic and social difficulties that she faced on a daily basis, and she was critical of the government for its tight controls on the population and its inability to tackle the problems of social difference that had come into place with the tourist industry. Elena, however, remembered Cuba before 1959, and she strongly believed in the Revolution and in its achievements. One day she said:

> **E:** "You know people are too comfortable. What they want is to travel, to go around and buy new mobile phones and laptops. They'd like to go to Europe for a year, and then come back, and find the same privileges that they had: their house, their good doctors, their free education. They don't realise how much all of this costs to us as a nation, they take everything for granted. They should go and speak to my mother, if only she were alive."

Elena really believed in the Revolution yet she had a contradictory attitude towards many political and social issues in Cuba, in particular against some of the authoritarian initiatives of the government. The contradiction embedded in her attitude towards the government, I found, was shared among many that I had the pleasure to talk to. At the end of my short[77] stay in Cuba, not having enough time to focus and analyse the Cuban system and culture, the main understanding I reached of the island was that it was a big contradiction. On my flight back to the UK I wrote in my journal:

> "Cuba seems to be a unique and giant contradiction. It is a place where convertible dollars and national pesos coexist within an economic system that one can't really understand how it manages to survive. A place where the values of the most miserable capitalism brought about by the tourist industry

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[77] This was no longer then five weeks. Three weeks at the camp and two weeks travelling around Cuba on my own or with other *brigadistas*.

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flirt with the ones of an austere socialism. Cuba is strange; you meet people who really believe in values that you always wished to believe in. You meet families torn apart: an old woman who looks up at you saying that there is no place like Cuba, but then you discover that she lives in Orlando. Her son, father of grown up children who playing with his Ipod talks to you about the absence of freedom. Cuba, I don't know what to say. A huge, enormous, and incomprehensible contradiction."

That Cuba is a contradictory system is evident also for the organisers and members of CSC. After my return, we would always talk about the problematic aspects of the Cuban government or the inconsistencies of the system for the people who lived there. It is for this reason that Tasha for instance told me that like any other political system Cuba was not easily classifiable in terms of black and white, but there were many areas of grey. It was also recognising the inherent contradiction of the Cuban system that Rob suggested that one cannot be objective about Cuba, solidarity for him was a subjective decision: you either decide to support them or to criticise them.

As I was in Cuba, however, I kept on asking myself why? Why would people who grew up in England, from a working class background during the Thatcher years, identify so strongly with Cuba? Part of the reason, I kept telling myself, was that they saw themselves as socialists. Yet this was a superficial explanation. On one side, as this thesis has shown, only a small minority of people within CSC identified with socialist beliefs. Furthermore, those who saw themselves as socialists provided me with so many different understandings of what they understood as socialism that this could not be the common basis for a collective identification with Cuba. What was it then? What did Cuba have that Britain did not?

One possible answer to these questions that I reached when I was in Cuba, brings us back to the chapter on ideology and imagination, and is the role of *projectual imagination* in the making of political ideologies. During my time in Cuba I noticed that all the people that were very supportive of Fidel Castro's government and believed in the continuation of the Revolution even after Fidel's death, responded to criticisms and contradictions in a similar way. Most of them relied on the concept of *'perfeccionar'* (to improve, to make perfect). In Marxist fashion, they claimed that Cuba was not yet a socialist country, but that socialism was in the process of being made. In this context, emphasis was placed upon concepts such as 'enhancement' or 'transformation'.

It was by looking at the concept of 'perfeccionar' that I started to frame the understanding that much of the ideological processes in Cuba were based on the idea of *projectual imagination*, where the project was a collective project. In this context, therefore, people who believed in the Revolution felt themselves not only to be participants, but also responsible for the realisation of that collective project. Within the neo-liberal and individualist ideologies dominant in Britain, which stress the importance of individual projects, private property, and economic values, collective participation is often limited. In this context, the people within CSC seem to compensate for this lack and by relying on the notion of solidarity imagine themselves as participating in the construction of a different political collective project - a collective project, which is an alternative to neoliberal capitalism. In this framework, they mediate their personal relationships in specific ways and by doing so they construct political discourses of resistance.

Conclusion

This chapter was the account of a mediated experience, the most important mediated experience for CSC: the work brigade. By describing the everyday reality at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, I have argued that the 'gesture' of being there, working for Cuba, had an immense value; a value that cannot be understood in economic terms but should instead be analysed by considering its symbolic dimension. Indeed, as has been argued, the work brigade served to produce not a material good, but a social relationship, that of *solidarity*. With its programme of work and staged encounters with the locals, the work brigade was the space where international solidarity was produced.

In order to understand the value embedded in the production of social relationships, I have shown, it is of central importance to draw from Turner (2006), and apply a symbolic reading of Marx's Labour Theory of Value. For Marx, value is defined by a dual dimension, which brings together both the forces of 'material production' and the forces of 'representation'. Applying his perspective to the understanding of the production of social relationships enables us to understand that relationships have representative value, in the sense that they serve to legitimise particular political discourses. Such a theoretical approach is of central importance because it enables us to analyse the complex interaction between social relationships, images and political discourses.

By being there showing our solidarity to the Cuban government, in our encounters with the Cubans and their media, we became a tool, or better a *medium*, through which dominant discourses in favour of the 'Revolution' were constantly reinforced and legitimised both within Cuba and within the international solidarity movement. It is by looking at the representative value of social

relationships, that we can shed some light on how and why they are often *mediated* in ways that brings forward particular political discourses. As discussed, with its routine of work, conferences, and staged encounters with the locals ICAP representatives tried to present us with a polished image of Cuba, an image for which the achievements of the socialist government were emphasised, and dissent and criticism were obscured. This was *their* image, and *their* particular understanding of Cuba, which carried a series of embedded political discourses on socialism, and the socialist ideology.

Therefore, I contended, uncovering the representative value of social relationships and noticing the way in which ICAP representatives constantly mediated our experience, is of central importance in order to realise that *mediation* is a really human (and political) process that affects every layer of social reality, within and beyond media organisations. If mediation affects the every layer of social reality, the ways in which people react to mediated images and meanings can differ from individual to individual, and from group to group. As shown, the Italian and the British groups related very differently to the working brigade as a mediated experience. Whilst the Italians were constantly involved in producing and reinforcing the image of solidarity proposed by ICAP, the British brigade constantly showed its criticism and discontent in front of what was understood as 'ideological propaganda'. The different reactions of the Italian and the British brigades to the mediated image of ICAP were mostly triggered by two different understandings of political participation: one that stressed ideology and party politics, and one that stressed ethics and flexibility. Analysing the different ways in which people react to mediated meanings and understandings can provide us with important details on processes of identification and opposition that affect social groups, as well as a better understanding of their political imaginations.

Moving beyond the conflicts between the Italian and British brigades, the understanding that mediation affects every layer of social experience, creating the basis for identification and or opposition, is of central importance to this research project. This is because, by looking at the mediation of experience we can grasp some important clues on the deeply emotional level of collective experience, and its power in the construction of collective feelings of belonging. As argued, travelling to Cuba and participating to the brigade can be seen as a 'ritual' for the people involved with CSC and for all new members. The brigade creates a feeling of belonging to the group; it is a shared and 'extra-ordinary' experience that binds members and organisers together. At the same time, however, the brigade serves to construct and consolidate specific political understandings of the country and its government. It is on the basis of these beliefs that people build their solidarity to

Cuba, and by mediating their personal relationships in specific ways, they construct political discourses of resistance.

In conclusion, by analysing the brigade as a mediated experience this chapter aimed to highlight the fact that social relationships have a representative power and that for this reason they are mediated in such a way that enables the consolidation of specific political ideologies. I have argued that *mediation* can be detached from our understandings of 'the media' and can be seen as permeating everyday life, in the way in which people imagine and act 'politics', and the way in which they construct social relationships. In this manner I have applied Silverstone's (2005) understanding that mediation as a social practice should be a focus of media analysis. This is because it enables scholars to shed some light on the social relationships that are 'produced' through media texts and practices, and analyse 'the media' for what they really are: complex and human processes for the production of human relationships.

Drawing from the lively and fascinating context of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, this research project explored the value and imaginaries people attach to media technologies, and uncovered the way in which these relate to understanding of political action and belonging. Furthermore, my project has considered how activists' relation to media technologies and practices has changed following the advent of the internet. By combining the theories and methodologies of anthropology and media studies, this thesis aimed at providing a cross-disciplinary reflection on alternative media and collective identity; on internet technologies and new forms of political imaginations; and on the possibilities and challenges people encounter in the everyday construction of mediated political action. Such reflections are of central importance in an historical time when the synthesis of capital and technology has created the basis for a re-structuring of capitalism and social experience.

By summarising the main themes presented in the various parts of this thesis, this concluding chapter will provide some final reflections on the dialectical relation between the social and the technical, on imagination and resistance, and on ethnography and unpredictability.

Ethnographic Cartographies: Networked Social Movements, Imagined Spaces and Alternative Media Practices

Much of what has been discussed and argued in this thesis has emerged from the day to day life in the small office of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and from my everyday interaction with people like Trish, Tasha, Rob, and Dean whose political commitment is not only a job but a life choice. The dusty office on Seven Sisters Road with its hectic life and cardboard boxes was the first coordinate of this research. However, the everyday reality of CSC is a complex one that extends through a variety of multi-sited and networked spaces of fieldwork. In fact as shown, the Cuba Solidarity Campaign is embedded in a social world of great interest that is constructed through the making and unmaking of networks between international campaigning organisations, the trade unions, the *Morning Star* and other political factions in Britain. In other words, the Cuba Solidarity Campaign – alongside many other organisations – is one of the many actors in the making of a networked political movement. By tracing the networks established between campaigning organisations and Trade Unions, therefore, I have argued that we can shed some light on the social world in which CSC is embedded.

The network as a methodological concept and analytical tool has been fundamental for my research. However, as I have explained, networks can be complex tools to use for social research. This is because, although networks and connections are of central importance in the analysis of social worlds, equally important for ethnographic enquiry is the absence of networks, or in other words, the presence of *disconnections* (Green, 2002) between actors. Looking at the absence of networks between CSC and 'other' organisations such as *Rock Around the Blockade* or *Hands Off Venezuela* is central to better understand the social world of CSC. Indeed, it enables us to explore its politics of inclusion and exclusion, and to shed light on the way in which activists create boundaries in order to protect their political identities.

Another problem that emerged when applying the network as a methodological and analytical tool is represented by the fact that different networks often have different meanings for the people involved. Indeed, as I have shown, within CSC there are certain political networks that have a great value for activists, and others that are considered as un-important. It was in the light of this experience and drawing from the work of anthropologists (Green, 2002; Green *et al.* 2005; Knox, *et al.* 2006; Riles, 2001; Strathern, 1996; White 1992), that I reached the conclusion that *networks* are cultural constructs that are socially produced.

One important implication for understanding networks as being culturally and socially constructed is that if we want to understand the meaning of networks, we must analyse the shared values, beliefs and experiences that bring people together in networked forms of political action. Inspired by these understandings, I found it necessary to create a concept that would enable me to analyse networks by looking at the larger picture; one that considered the boundaries and disconnections, as well as the shared experiences and ideological constructions that made networks meaningful. Therefore, I have coined the term *ethnographic cartography*. By relying on the idea of 'map', my goal was to argue that networking processes are linked to practices and narratives of place-making (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b; Green et al, 2005).

Here it is important to point out that my understanding of ethnographic cartography draws heavily from the work of Bruno Latour, who contended that the social is "not a special domain, a specific realm, or particular sort of thing, but only a very peculiar movement of re-association and re-assembling" (2005:7). In this framework, I understand the map of a social world as being created by alliances and associations, which are constantly constructed and destroyed within complex social networks of power. An ethnographic cartography is intended here more as a

movement, as something that it is constantly in the process of being constructed rather than as a structured reality.

The concept of ethnographic cartography enables us to understand that networking processes create different 'spaces' of ethnographic enquiry which interact with one another in the construction of everyday social experience. The 'ethnographic cartography' of a social world does not only develop upon the 'concrete' spaces where political and economic networks are made and unmade, such as the main hall at Congress House. A social world is also constructed by the imagined spaces of identity narratives and shared experiences, which create the basis for commonality amongst networked organisations. By introducing the concept of ethnographic cartography my intention was, therefore, to propose an approach that simultaneously traced the political networks between organisations, and explored the shared biographical experiences and ideological constructions that made these networks possible.

As shown, Cuba and Latin America are for the social world of CSC, like the image of the working class, important imagined spaces where individual understandings and experiences become shared images for political identification and action. In order to understand these imagined spaces I have argued that we must analyse the historic-political context in which the majority of people involved with the organisation have become politically active and consider their identity narratives. Within the social world of CSC, identity narratives, although fragmented and complex, often overlapped or followed similar paths, creating the ground for shared experiences and understandings.

Many from within CSC come from working class backgrounds, have fought against the Thatcher government and have seen the rise of New Labour with expectation and hope. Having witnessed with disbelief the decision to go to war in Iraq in Tony Blair's government, and his neoliberal policies, many of the people involved with CSC have been affected in recent years by a profound sense of disillusionment with British politics. In this context people's identifications with Cuba and Latin American politics acquired a great social significance, because they shed some light on the reality of social movements in Britain today, and on the creative ways in which people imagine different possibilities.

Chapter Two has shown that, in mapping the ethnographic cartography of a social world, scholars should take into account a further level of ethnographic enquiry. This is a level that connects concrete spaces with imagined ones; it is a level in which imagination meets lived experience through the discursive construction of meaning. In other words, this is a level that is defined by all those

practices of production, transmission and identification with collective messages. Immersed in the internet connected and media dominated context of contemporary Britain, the social world of the people involved with CSC is a very technological one and the construction of collective meanings takes place - in large part - within media technologies. Hence, I have argued, it is misleading to analyse the ethnographic reality of contemporary social movements by overlooking these techno-social spaces.

I have shown that the techno-social spaces of CSC have a strong collective importance for the people involved, and members and organisers often show a great personal and emotional attachment to their media productions. This is particularly true with reference to their printed media such as the *CubaSí* magazine or the *Morning Star*. Indeed these media forms have followed the people involved in their development as a political movement. They are often perceived as material memories, which document the passage of time as well as their achievements and struggles. In understanding the personal and emotional dimension of alternative media, I have argued that it is of central importance to turn our attention to the way in which they become *spaces of imagination* for the construction of collective feelings of belonging and the political identity of the group. Many within CSC believe that the consumption and production of particular forms of media relates to one's political affinity and identity. In this framework, alternative media enable the construction of political belonging and feelings of participation and emotional attachment to the group.

However, this research project understands *identity* not as an unproblematic concept, but as a relational concept that is made possible through complex social processes of negotiation within the group (Escobar, 2004; Pratt, 2004; Amit and Rapport, 2002). This understanding is of central importance in the analysis of the relationship between political movements and media practices. Indeed, it is by recognising the tension between individual and the collective imaginations that we can better appreciate the central role played by media practices. This is because it is within these mediated spaces that these processes of negotiation and construction are often taking place.

If alternative media, as this thesis suggests, are the spaces within which collective imaginations are constantly negotiated, it seems reasonable to believe that the ethnographic cartography of a political movement would be incomplete without an analysis of these sites of research. As mentioned, however, in the anthropology of social movements these media practices and spaces have rarely been taken into consideration. By looking at alternative media, this research project aimed at directing anthropologists' attention towards these complex spaces

of research. This argument is particularly important considering the fact that we live in a time in which different media platforms define the everyday context of political movements, and are multiplying at incredible pace.

As explained, the multiplication of alternative media platforms certainly triggered the emergence of new research in media studies. In the last decade, media scholars have started to turn their attention to the media produced by social and political minorities. Scholars started to engage in fierce debates on how to best define and characterise them. Some believed that it was important to distinguish between the media produced by political groups and the others produced by social minorities (Downing, 2001; Waltz, 2005). Others contended that in the understanding of alternative media researchers had to focus on process rather then content, and look at the way in which these media productions were often made possible through participatory practices and processes of horizontal communication (Atton, 2002). Many argued that it was impossible to group together the media produced by grassroots groups or individuals under a singular concept such as alternative media (Rodriguez, 2000; Langlois, et al, 2005; Howley 2005; McChesney and Nichols, 2005).

Without disregarding the different insights, I have argued that the continuous dwelling on definitions obscures rather than illuminates the social significance of these media practices for the people involved. Indeed, if binary categorizations of reality – such as alternative and mainstream media – can become important conceptual tools, anthropology shows that everyday realities are characterised by the constant interaction, interconnectedness and the blurring of these binary definitions. In this framework, to describe alternative media by applying a set of categories (e.g. hierarchical relations vs participation, top-down vs horizontal communication, ideological contents vs counter-hegemonic contents etc.) may make us overlook the often contradictory nature of these media forms, and the constant overlap between the 'alternative' and 'mainstream' in everyday practice.

Within CSC people are willing to compromise horizontal communication processes, such as participation, in order to professionalise their media practices. Their belief is that, with a more professional and mainstream appearance, their messages can get across more easily. Furthermore, the case of the *CubaSí* magazine is somewhat paradoxical. This is because, whilst the magazine can be perceived as an alternative media in Britain, because it promotes discourses against the cultural hegemony of neo-liberalism, in Cuba the magazine has a mainstream role. Despite these overlaps and contradictions, what emerged from my findings was that in people's *imaginaries* the division between alternative and mainstream was very well defined. As explained, people locate their media

practices in radical opposition to mainstream media, and in this regard they perceive them as political projects.

In conclusion to these parts, the concept of *ethnographic cartography* enables scholars to map some of the multiple and interconnecting levels of social experience, and consider the central role media practices and technologies play in the making of a social world. I have discussed how alternative media construct a socio-technical dimension where collective imaginations can be negotiated and legitimised, and where feelings of emotional attachment to the group can be experienced. Therefore, in the understanding of the ethnographic reality of a political movement it would be extremely misleading to overlook these fascinating and important sites of research.

Referring to the concept of ethnographic cartography is of central importance for a further reason. This is because the image enables us to understand that there are parallels to be traced between the ethnographer and the cartographer; because with their subjective perspectives they both contribute to practices of making the social world they try to represent (Harley, 1989: 3-6). Cartographies, like ethnographies, are not objective representations that can be understood as separated from the observer/researcher's social discourse and subjective understandings (Clifford, 1986). Therefore, this thesis has provided my own subjective interpretation of the 'cartography' of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and other networked organisations; an interpretation that I have acquired through participant observation, and one which was primarily concerned with exploring the socio-technical dimension of this social world.

Ideology, Imagination and Media Rituals: the Social Significance of Mediated Resistance

The first two chapters argued that alternative media need to be understood as spaces of imagination, which are part of the ethnographic cartography of a political movement. The demonstration that alternative media are the spaces within which a political group, such as CSC, constructs its own collective imagination and consolidates a feeling of membership leaves many questions unaddressed. Indeed, we are forced to ask ourselves: How does this work? How are these social processes of imagination and belonging guaranteed by media practices? Most importantly, if the boundary between mainstream media practices and alternative ones is constantly crossed, what is the difference between them?

Chapter three has tried to answer these questions by further investigating the connection between alternative media production, ideology and collective feelings

of belonging. It has shown that within CSC alternative media practices involve the overlap of different social processes. They are simultaneously the spaces of power and resistance, of ideology and identity. In order to understand these complexities, the chapter has shown, it is important to develop a cross-disciplinary approach which sheds light on the human processes involved in mediated resistance. Therefore, focusing principally on theory, the argument in chapter three was divided into three sections. In the first section I engaged in an historical exploration of the concept of ideology and hegemony, and discussed the ways in which they have been understood with reference to media. Departing from Marx and Engels' (1970) theory of ideology, and exploring the insights of Gramsci (1985) and Althusser (1971), I have argued that ideology is inferred in society through consent and that the media need to be understood as 'ideological apparatuses'. This understanding is of central importance for this research project.

However, as argued, concentrating on the media as 'ideological state apparatuses' for the construction of subjects and the transmission of dominant values, can lead scholars to the conclusion that - as it emerges from the works of Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) - in capitalist societies there is little space for cultural resistance. This is far from being true, as Foucault (1987) pointed out, just like the network of power relations forms a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localised in them, so too the multitude of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. Power is everywhere but so is resistance. In order to understand this interplay between power and resistance, I have argued that it is important to turn to the work of the British Cultural Studies scholars who appropriated and re-elaborated Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony'. By doing so, they developed a coherent theoretical framework which discusses the relationship between media and ideology, but also incorporates a reflection on marginal and oppositional cultures.

According to these scholars whilst 'ideology' is radically limiting 'hegemony' embraces a 'totality' (Williams, 2006:134), and thus is a more appropriate theoretical tool. Drawing from the works of the Comaroffs (1991), I have argued that we cannot replace the concept of 'ideology' with the one of 'hegemony', but we must understand the two concepts as interdependent. Indeed, as explained, on the one hand I understand ideology as defining those processes of meaning construction, within a particular political group, which serve to legitimise relations of domination. On the other, I understand hegemony as a cultural and social struggle for visibility and consent of a particular group ideology, which takes place within the larger society. In this framework, it has been argued, alternative media

practices are at the same time ideological and counter-hegemonic, since they involve processes of domination and resistance.

However, it has been argued that analysing the social processes enabled by media only by focusing on issues of domination and resistance tends to overlook the emotional dimension embedded in media practices. Indeed, if it is true that media involve processes of ideology construction, and thus serve to legitimise specific power relations with the group; it is also true that media practices serve to construct and guarantee a feeling of cohesion and belonging to the collective. In order to analyse and understand this dual dimension embedded in media, I contended, we must draw from Couldry's work (2003) and understand media as *ritual.* Indeed, as shown, media need to be understood as rituals because they order symbolic meaning in such a way that makes social norms at the same time obligatory and desirable (Turner, 1967; Barthes, 2000).

The understanding of media, and *all* media, as ritual is particularly important to demystify the idea that oppositional cultures and alternative media are not ideological. On the contrary, alternative media have a strong ideological component, a component which helps to legitimise the authority within the group. Therefore, my argument counteracted those understandings that see oppositional cultures as non ideological (Thompson, 1990; Barthes, 2000), and demonstrated that the production of alternative media within political groups cannot and should not be analysed without looking at the power relations internal to the group. However, while we must understand that *all* forms of media (and rituals), involve an ideological and emotional dimension, we also must recognise that the choice of its practitioners to stress one dimension (legitimising power relationships-ideology) or another (creating a feeling of collectivity-identity), defines the different nature of these media practices. In this framework, we need to approach the difference between alternative and mainstream media by looking at the different political projects that they embed, and the different social processes that they trigger.

Within CSC, as explained, media practices are often reflexive practices, and members and contributors strongly believe that the ideology of these media forms is a 'good ideology': one that people can construct through negotiation; one that people can identify with. The ideological image of Cuba – as mentioned– is often constructed through tensions and negotiations and defines the very ground of their political action. Furthermore, their media practices reflect a specific political project. By bringing forward the example of Cuba, people within CSC are committed to showing that there is an alternative to the neo-liberal system. Through their media messages, their intention is not to propose that Britain should

undergo a socialist revolution, but to highlight how state intervention – and a limitation to corporate power - can lead to important civic transformations. Most importantly, by placing the policies of the Cuban and the British Government in antithesis people within CSC are constantly trying to argue for the importance of putting social welfare first.

On the contrary, it seems to me that the political project of mainstream media is quite different. As argued mainstream media are essentially business groups, increasingly concentrated and globally interconnected, highly diversified and geared towards segmented markets (Castells, 1997:314), which are however geared primarily by profit-related concerns. Therefore, their political projects need to be contextualised by looking at the powerful discourses of capitalism, neo-liberalism, or the globalisation of capital. One fundamental aspect that we need to consider when adopting a ritual approach is that, as Couldry (2003) suggested, dominant media rituals serve to construct 'the myth of the mediated centre' (2003:47). This is because they present themselves as *if* they were the centre of global society.

One important conclusion that I have reached in this thesis is that by looking at dominant media *as rituals*, as complex social processes of power and cohesion, we can better understand how social change happens within society. In contrast to those who contend that transformation and change within ideology and ritual are minimal and not creative at all, this research project strongly believes that although repetitive in nature, the process of meaning construction that rituals enable is a process in which imagination and creativity play a fundamental part. Ritual must involve transformation and imagination because, social groups (no matter how big they are) are forced to constantly re-frame their ideologies in order to adapt to historical transformations and survive the encounter within different 'cultures'. Power (and ideology in general) needs constantly to renew itself, in order to survive. The recognition that power constantly needs to renew itself, as Boltanski and Chiappello (2005) have emphasised, enables us to recognise the various degrees of uncertainty and instability that affect it. The projectual dimension of power is a weak dimension, because it is defined by the unpredictability of success.

In the analysis of dominant media rituals, therefore, we must understand that there is a dimension of them which is vulnerable to transformation and resistance. It is in the recognition that values can be changed and modified, in the understanding that dominant ideologies have their openings of authority (Tarrow, 1994), that we can better appreciate the role of alternative media practices. This thesis reveals that people use alternative media practices as tools for opposing the

cultural hegemony of capitalism and neoliberalism. Within the social world of CSC, activists dedicate much of their time to challenging dominant ideologies, and trying to transform the neoliberal values and understandings proposed by mainstream media. This struggle, as mentioned, is extremely unbalanced and is often a cause of great frustration.

Despite the actors engaging in the struggle over meaning having to face a feeling of frustration and powerlessness, they strongly believe in their counter-hegemonic practices. This is because, in the last twenty years the people involved in the social world of CSC have achieved many important results, and some of their values that were marginal in the Eighties, are becoming increasingly more dominant (e.g. equal opportunities, anti-racism, minimum wage). Their biographical experiences, I believe, show that social critique *can* bring about social change. In understanding the role of social critique in transforming society, however, we must bear in mind that, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) suggested, the relationship between capitalism and critique is an ambiguous one, because critique both reinforces and transforms capitalism. In this framework, we could either choose to adopt an optimistic or a pessimistic approach.

On the pessimistic side we could contend that critique or social protest helps refine the strategies of justification of dominant powers, and in doing so it hides issue of social injustice even further. On the optimistic side, however, we could suggest that by asking capitalism to justify itself in terms of a common good, critique can lead to a positive improvement in terms of justice (2005: 37-43). Either if we see it in an optimistic light or in a pessimistic light, what becomes evident from Chiapello and Bolatnski's work is that critique and social protest often bring about social change, in a never ending struggle for hegemony. It is only by understanding critique and social protest as a force for social change that we can better appreciate the social significance of alternative media practices and the meanings they have for the people involved.

Internet Technologies and New Political Imaginations: Political Action between Transformation and Continuity

Social critique *can* bring about social change, and transform the dominant values of a society through a complex dialectics of power and resistance. It is in this framework, I have argued, that we can understand the social significance of mediated resistance, and better appreciate the reasons why people believe that alternative media practices are central to their political action. However, this thesis also highlights that the struggle over meaning in which oppositional cultures are involved, is often an unequal, unbalanced and deeply frustrating process leading to

a questioning of whether the advent of internet technologies has empowered the actors involved in these struggles.

Some answers to this question are offered by chapter four, which explores how new technologies have deeply affected people's understanding of political action and media activism Departing from an analysis of the *Barclays* campaign, I argued that within CSC, practices of political action today, are largely focused and shaped by people's will to construct effective media messages. This 'focus on media' has become in recent years a political project for CSC, and has re-shaped their understanding of solidarity in different ways. Whilst in the past, 'solidarity' with Cuba was often expressed through the shipping of material aid, today people seem to link their understanding of political solidarity primarily to processes that focus on achieving media coverage. This 'focus on media' that seems to have affected the social world of CSC can be understood by looking at Altheide and Snow's (1979) concept of *media logic*. According to the scholars, at the end of the Seventies, social institutions and organisations in Britain took the initiative and actively re-organised themselves to fit media needs. The 'media logic', however, has affected different social institutions not only because media organisations are powerful and influential (Altheide and Snow, 1979), but also because being in the media has become – especially in Britain – a persuasive *value* (Couldry, 2003). In this framework, therefore, it is not surprising that the media logic has affected also the social contexts of campaigning organisations.

With reference to Manning's work (1998) I described how, during the nineties, the communication experts of the New Labour pressured Trade Unions to become more effective in their communication strategies, and to develop a new language for the 'Labour movement'. Manning's work, I have argued, is of central importance to better understand the increased pervasiveness of media logic in the social world of CSC, and it enables us to better explore how on the basis of media logic these organisations had started to transform their practices of political action. However, in considering the changing campaigning strategies of trade unionists before the age of the internet really took hold, Manning does not address the discursive power of the World Wide Web, and its effect on activists understanding of political action.

I have illustrated how CSC launched its first website believing in the possibilities brought about by new technologies. These beliefs were grounded in the ethnographic and historical context of CSC. The social world of CSC first became engaged with internet technologies through the creation and extension of the internet service Poptel. Poptel was linked to the Manchester Host, and was

created by discourses which saw internet technologies as fundamental tools in the strengthening of the International Trade Union Movement, and in the facilitation of networks of communication and action between different organisations (Agar *et al*, 2002). The belief in the possibilities brought about by internet technologies needs to be understood in this context - in the ethnographic reality of CSC. However, this thesis has argued, that the belief that new technologies were central tools in the construction of political action, was motivated by the wider historical and global situation: namely the rise of the movement for the liberation of Chiapas, and the creation of the People's Global Action Network. Indeed, it was within the Zapatista struggle that internet technologies have become a new, fundamental, repertoire of political action.

As shown, within CSC, new technologies have enhanced people's confidence in their own networking and media strategies, and have therefore 'empowered' their media action in significant ways. It is in this framework that we must explore why activists seem to prioritise this form of political opposition over other forms, such as sending aid material or organising national demonstrations. The understanding that media logic and internet technologies have re-defined the terrain for political action challenges the argument presented in the previous chapters of this thesis that media are *spaces of imagination.* Indeed, by transforming activists' imaginaries, technologies appear to be 'agents' rather than 'spaces' that are used and shaped by activists' everyday actions and understandings. This apparent contradiction, I have argued, is what defines the very basis of the relationship between the social and the technical, which is one of mutual transformation.

Latour argued that we cannot understand the social as a 'realm' or a 'thing' but more as a networked movement between human and non-human agents, which both become *actants* in the making of social facts. By highlighting the limitations of Latour's Actor-Network Theory (2005), and instead drawing from his earlier work in *Laboratory Life* (1986), this chapter has shown that if we are to perceive technologies as *actants,* we must bear in mind that they have become such due to human agency. This is because, as I have shown with reference to the creation of the World Wide Web, technologies are embedded with human discourses and beliefs. These discourses become 'naturalised' within the technology itself (e.g. World Wide Web = openness/freedom), and therefore they strongly influence and transform social processes and relations (e.g. understandings of political opposition).

New technologies always bring about social transformations. This is because they transform the way in which people communicate, organise their daily routines, re-define their practices and choices. Yet, as this thesis suggests, often it is not the

technology itself that brings about social transformations, but it is the human discourses and imaginations, which are embedded in the technology, that have a profound effect on the everyday layers of social experience. This understanding enables us to map not only the core beliefs and possibilities that come with new technologies, but also the anxieties, frustrations and ambivalences that are attached to them. In this framework, therefore, it is important to understand that if internet technologies are transforming social experience, they are doing so not in a homogenising or disruptive way, but through complex and multiple processes of human negotiation. Highlighting these conflicts and negotiations, I believe, is of central importance in order to shed light on the social complexities involved in the techno-historical transformations of the last decades, and uncover the dual, contradictory character embedded in new information technologies.

I have argued that, far from perceiving the Internet as an unproblematic and empowering force for social change, activists' relationship to new technologies is defined by everyday frustrations, anxieties and questions on what media action really means. This ambivalence is not surprising. Indeed, ambivalence is always present within ideological constructions, especially when they influence everyday practices and dynamics. Real life experiences always clash with ideal understandings. As this thesis has shown internet related anxieties and frustrations are challenging people's understanding of the effectiveness of their online media action and transforming their relationship towards printed media. Furthermore, as I have discussed with reference to 'information overload' and the 'lack of control over the messages produced', internet related anxieties are transforming alternative media practices in many different ways. In this framework, if we want to return to the question of whether mediated resistance has been empowered by the advent of new technologies, we must find the answer somewhere in between. It needs to be found at the interface between possibility and ambivalence; at the border between transformation and continuity.

One important conclusion that I have reached by analysing activists' relationship with new technologies is that the internet has become the channel of new political imaginations, and these political imaginations are deeply affecting social contexts and experiences, by becoming the ground of conflict and negotiation. This latter point is further explored in chapter five of this thesis, which uncovers the relationship between imagination, internet networks and new forms of political belonging. The chapter has shown that the social world of CSC is affected by a conflict of generations. This conflict is defined by different

understandings of political identity and belonging. Indeed, on the one hand older generations believe in party-based political identity. On the other, younger generations distance themselves from the membership politics of the Labour movement, and show a more flexible and networked understanding of political participation.

During fieldwork it emerged that organisations like CSC believe that internet technologies are the 'key' to solving the conflict of generation. This is because CSC organisers are convinced that younger generations in Britain have been influenced by the individualist discourses of Thatcherism, and for this reason they have lost their faith in political association and collective action. In this framework, CSC national office workers believe that internet technologies are the 'key' to solve the generation issue, because they appeal to young people by emphasising more flexible forms of political participation that are both individualist and networked.

If we wish to conceptually analyse these strategies and discourses, I have argued we must refer to the work of Castells (2001, 2009) and his understanding of *networked individualism*. Castells argued that internet technologies have become the material support for the diffusion of a new type of sociality, which is networked, flexible and individually based. According to Castells, networked individualism is a social pattern not a collection of isolated individuals. Rather, individuals build their networks online and offline on the basis of their interests, values and affinities. In this way networked individualism organises around communities of choice, that are flexible, fluid and ever changing (2001:131). Drawing from Castells, therefore, I contended that it is only by looking at the impact of internet technologies, at the new political imaginations that they enable, that scholars can better understand the implicit discourses embedded in the conflict of generation and uncover the reasons why this is being played in large part on the internet.

However, has been argued, that the focus on *networked individualism* is detrimental in gaining a thorough understanding of the ways in which younger generations are re-imagining political participation through the technological wires of the internet. This is because - in his discussion on the new sociality created by the internet - Castells overlooks the complex relationship between imagination, internet networks and new forms of belonging. Indeed, as I have argued, Castells stresses the 'agency' of internet technologies, their impact on social life and implies that due to the technological developments of the last fifteen years the network as an abstract model has permeated social experience and transformed it. His abstract understanding of the network as model that has been imposed upon social

experience excludes a thorough exploration on how people react and negotiate with the values and images that are transmitted through technology.

Drawing from the work of Green, Harvey and Knox (2005), I have argued that it is important that scholars distance themselves from the analysis of network merely as a form of social organisation, and instead consider the network for the way in which is imagined. In this framework, although believing like Castells (2001) that internet technologies are the material support for the development of a type of sociality that is flexible and networked, I also think that people constantly negotiate with the imaginations proposed by the internet, and adapt them to their own political projects. As I have argued with reference to Rhodri's interview, the networked logic that he refers to is one that has little to do with individualist discourses. This is because refusing to define enemies and friends, or to associate with a form of political organisation, does not mean that Rhodri does not believe in collective action. On the contrary, he suggests that there is a need to define a 'common ground' and he also claims that 'political solidarity can come in various forms'. His idea of political participation, therefore, needs to be understood by looking at the influence of the global justice movements of the late nineties, at their internet strategies, and their networked imaginations.

Within the global justice movements, people are no longer interested in achieving recognition through the state for their marginal 'identities', because influenced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) they no longer believe that the state can be perceived as a neutral arbiter for political minorities (Holloway, 2002; Day, 2005). On the contrary these movements see state relationships as the very reason behind social inequality. Amongst the movements for global justice, therefore, political identity is no longer a reason of struggle or the very ground for cohesion. It is being replaced by more hybrid and 'nomadic' understandings of engagement and participation, which focus on politics of 'affinity' rather than politics of 'identity'. According to Agamben, these movements have many dividing lines but are interconnected and united by values and shared ethico-political commitments (1993:43-47). They rely on a politics that is based on an understanding of 'groundless solidarity' and 'infinite responsibility' (Day, 2005).

In contrast to Day (2005), who completely overlooks the issue, my understanding is that the autonomous and affinity based discourses embedded in the global justice movements cannot be analysed without referring to their everyday internet practices. This is because internet technologies and practices enable people to see that networks of affinity and solidarity can be established beyond and across state borders. Therefore, on the same line of Castells' (2001), and Terranova's arguments (2004), I believe that the internet impacted on the

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political imagination of the global justice movements by fostering the logic of networked sociality. However, as argued, I also believe that these political movements imagined the network according to their own political projects. In this framework, the network became not the expression of a networked-individualism, but the representation of un-hierarchical and affinity based relationships, which create themselves beyond state borders and are based on notions of 'autonomy' and 'solidarity' (Graeber, 2002:68).

Therefore, I have argued that it is by referring to the idea of network and political participation, which was promoted by the global justice movements that we need to understand the way in which younger generations within CSC understand political identity in more flexible and networked terms. Furthermore, I have shown that it is on the basis of these discourses of identity, which stress flexibility and affinity, that CSC is re-constructing its understanding of political solidarity. Indeed, I have explained that in the past the understanding of solidarity was attached to socialist beliefs and in particular to the Third International. However, I have argued that, today, the way in which political solidarity as a rhetorical discourse is being understood by the national office of CSC has more to do with the type of networked logic proposed by Rhodri - with his understanding that it is important to "define a common ground" - rather than with socialist ideology.

Despite people within CSC re-shaping their understanding of political identity in more flexible and networked ways, many involved with the organisation still believe in the importance of achieving social change from within the state. This is not to say that people are not aware of the fact that the emancipation of social minorities is often instrumentalised by power elites. However, they also contend that in the last thirty years, the Labour movement and left-wing organisations in Britain have achieved different results acting from within the state (e.g. equal opportunities, minimum wage etc.). For them, these important results cannot be underestimated or replaced by a politics of social protest that refuses to interact with the state, and withdraws from society.

Castells suggested that the Labour movement is probably not going to be able to adapt to the transformations brought about by the Network Society, and to its new forms of networked sociality (1997:360). Day (2005) argued that the 'hegemonic logic has been exhausted' and that 'Gramsci is dead'. According to my interpretation, these understandings overlook the fact that 'old' and 'new' repertoires of political opposition do not replace one another. Indeed, as we have seen, in the social world of CSC understandings of 'groundless solidarity' coexist in

a tension with hegemonic beliefs. This coexistence creates conflicts in the everyday lives of activists. Looking at these internal tensions and conflicts is of central importance to social analysis. This is because it enables scholars to uncover the movements' ability to renew themselves. The scholars, who keep on emphasising the transition from one form of movement to another, fail to understand the real meaning of social movements in society; namely their internal, innovative and creative struggle to find new possibilities to bring about social change.

In conclusion, therefore, internet technologies have become the channels within which new political imaginations and possibilities are embedded and transmitted. Yet, to understand the way in which these new political imaginations are re-defining the terrain for political action, this thesis contends, it is important to explore the complex dialectics between transformation and continuity - between the technical and the social – rather than emphasising disruption and novelty. Social movements are often neither 'old' nor 'new', but are worlds in constant transformation. It is only by looking at continuity that scholars can understand the complex and imaginative negotiations that enable activists to re-imagine social change in order to adapt to the techno-historical transformations of the last fifteen years.

Mediation, Representation and Social Relationships: for an Anthropological Approach to the Media

This thesis explored activists' relationship to media action, and has shown how the techno-historical transformations of the last fifteen years are deeply transforming this relationship in many important yet contradictory ways. Throughout the chapters, my main focus was on media as practices (Couldry, 2004) and as social processes (Ginsburg, 2002, 2005). The last chapter of this thesis, however, instead of focusing on the socio-technical dimension of political action, on the imaginaries and practices that connect people with information and communication technologies, explored the intricate ways in which mediation affects social experience in the production of social relationships. In this framework, it analysed how *mediation* can be detached from our understandings of 'the media' (Silverstone: 1999, 2005) and can be seen as permeating everyday life, in the way in which people imagine and act 'politics', and the way in which they construct social relationships.

The chapter offered a detailed account of my experience of the '47th José Martí International Brigade to Cuba', which was organised by CSC in cooperation with ICAP. As I have mentioned, I decided to participate in the work brigade, for two

main reasons. On the one hand, I wanted to experience Cuba for myself; because I believed that I needed to be in Cuba in order to better understand why people in Britain decide to commit to showing solidarity to the island. On the other hand, by following the *brigadistas*, my main intention was to compare the mediated image they had of the island - namely the one presented to them by the *CubaSí* magazine and the other media platforms of CSC - with their personal impressions. However, during my stay at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp I discovered that things were more complex than I had thought, and that I had to re-define my understanding of *mediation.*

As I have explained the life at the camp was organised in a rigid routine, which included working in the field, attending conferences on the socialist government's achievements and showing our solidarity to the locals through staged encounters such as the 'friendship marathon'. I have argued that the 'gesture' of us being there, working for Cuba, had an immense value; a value that cannot be understood in economic terms but should instead be analysed by considering its symbolic dimension. With its programmed routine and staged encounters, the work brigade served to produce not a material good, but a social relationship, the one of international *solidarity*.

In anthropology, there are different theoretical approaches that enable us to map the production of social relationships through practices of exchange. However, although these theories can be very insightful to uncover the way in which our labour in Cuba was perceived more as a 'gift' then a 'commodity', I have decided to ground my theoretical analysis in the work of Terry Turner (2006) and Graeber (2001, 2007), and apply a symbolic reading of Marx's Labour Theory of Value. This choice was motivated by the belief that a symbolic reading of Marx enables us not only to uncover the way in which social relationships are produced, but also to understand that they have a strong representative value. Marx argued that value is defined by a dual dimension, which brings together both the forces of 'material production' and the forces of 'representation' (e.g. commodity, money etc.). His insight was that value was created simultaneously by human production (action), and the abstraction of meaning (image).

Although insightful, Marx's analysis of value is not applicable to social contexts and relationships that escape the 'capitalist' logic. Indeed, as anthropologists have shown in many different cultural contexts the production of material goods plays a secondary role to the production of social relationships. In order to address this problem, Turner (2006) applied Marx's theory of value to the production of social relationships amongst the Kayapo in Brazil. Turner's approach, I have argued, is of crucial importance to this research project, because it enables us to see the

symbolic dimension of social relationships, and their intrinsic value. People produce (or consolidate) social relationships, because these can be abstracted and become the representation of some form of collective meaning. In this context social relationships can be seen as a form of language in the sense that they become the signifiers of specific political discourses.

I have argued that it is by looking at the production of social relationships and at their representative value, that we can better understand the importance of the work brigade organised by ICAP. Being there, showing our solidarity to the Cuban government, in our encounters with the Cubans and their media, we became a tool, through which dominant discourses in favour of the 'Revolution' were constantly reinforced and legitimised both within Cuba and within the international solidarity movement. Thus - through their planned routine and staged encounters – ICAP's representative *mediated* our experience in ways that brought forward particular political discourses. Indeed, as I have discussed, on all occasions ICAP representatives tried to present us with a polished image of Cuba, an image for which the achievements of the socialist government were emphasised, and dissent and criticism were obscured. This was *their* image, and *their* particular understanding of the nation, which carried a series of embedded political discourses on socialism, and the socialist ideology.

My experience in Cuba made me realise that *mediation* is a really human (and political) process that affects every layer of social reality, within and beyond media organisations. One important aspect that emerged from my discussion is that, although mediation affects every layer of social realty, the ways in which people react to mediated images and meanings, can differ from individual to individual, from group to group. By looking at the Italian and the British groups I have explored how they related differently to the working brigade as a mediated experience. On the one hand the Italians were constantly involved in producing and reinforcing the image of solidarity proposed by ICAP. On the other the British brigade constantly showed their criticism and discontent in front of what was understood as 'propaganda'. The different reactions of the Italian and the British brigades to the mediated image of Cuba were mostly triggered by two different understandings of political participation: one that stressed ideology and party politics, and one that stressed ethics and flexibility. Analysing the different ways in which people react to mediated meanings, therefore, provides us with important details on processes of identification and opposition that affect social groups, as well as an understanding of their political imaginations.

The recognition that mediation creates the basis for identification and opposition is of central importance to this research project. This is because –

moving beyond issues of conflict - we can grasp some important clues on the deeply emotional level of collective experience, and its power in the construction of collective feelings of belonging. Travelling to Cuba and participating in the brigade can be seen as a 'ritual' for the people involved with CSC and for all new members. This is because, as a ritual experience, the brigade is a shared and 'extra-ordinary' experience that binds members and organisers together. At the same time, however, the brigade serves to construct and consolidate specific political understandings of the country and its government. Collective experience is what brings people together in the construction of collective political action. It is on the basis of this experience that people build their solidarity to Cuba, and by mediating their personal relationships in specific ways, they construct political discourses of resistance.

In recent years media scholars have started to focus on the concept of *mediation* in order to understand media as social processes, rather then texts (Silverstone 1999, 2005; Couldry, 2000, 2003, 2005, Lundby, 2008). Acknowledging the fact that in order to understand media practices and technologies, we need to understand mediation as a social process, I have explored mediation from an anthropological perspective, and uncovered the bound relation between social relationships, representation, and political discourses. This approach sheds some light on the human dimension of media as social processes: it enables us to see that at the basis of media practices, there is often the need to mediate and produce human relationships.

In conclusion to this thesis, Bauman (2005) has argued that we live in a world that has been affected by a liquidity of a sort, an acceleration and complication of human experience that has detached people from their sense of humanity. In many respects, his argument is a sound one: the advent of internet technologies and the continuous strengthening and making of online capitalism is transforming the meaning of objects, practices and social experience. Many individuals, within Britain and western Europe (especially the ones who live in a metropolis like London) are haunted by the fear of failing to catch up with fast moving events; they are often frightened about being left behind, and are affected by a sense of fragility, uncertainty and inability to cope (2005:15-37).

This thesis has argued that all these aspects that Bauman (2005) describes have deeply affected the social world of CSC. However, the way in which people negotiate and react to contemporary transformations can be extremely complex and creative. This is because, if we perceive online capitalism as a 'project, in Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) terms - as a type of imagination that produces

and reinforces specific relationships and political discourses - we must bear in mind that its realisation will always encounter some sort of resistance. This is because, as Strathern (2002:310) has noticed, plans and projects, to become effective, need to go through processes of negotiation and compatibility, and therefore plans never replicate how people activate society on the ground. In this context, the richness of anthropology lies in the fact that through ethnography it highlights the unplanned, the unpredictable, and the disconnections (Strathern, 2002:309). Knowing how to deal with unpredictability is of central importance for scholars in this particular epoch, because it enables them to understand that if the techno-historical developments of the last decades are transforming social experience, they are doing so in multiple and often contradictory ways.

As this thesis has shown, liquidity does not replace materiality; old social movements are not replaced by the new. Everything is subjected to social interaction, communication and negotiation between people. Following Strathern (2002), I believe that from these interactions, that are open-ended and complex, comes much of the creativity and energy of social life. Anthropology looks at these open-ended interactions and the way in which the old and new come together to create something different. To re-use Graeber's formulation, which partly triggered the idea behind this project, anthropology is here to remind us that human possibilities are almost in every way greater than we ordinarily believe (Graeber, 2007b:1).

List of Abbreviations

BL – Banana Link

CND – Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

CSC - Cuba Solidarity Campaign

CWU – Communication Workers Union

FBU – Fire Brigade Union

GMB – General Municipal Boilermakers (General Union)

HoV – Hands of Venezuela

ICAP – Instituto Cubano de Amistad con Los Pueblos, Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People

JFC – Justice for Colombia

MS – Morning Star Newspaper

NL CSC – North London CSC Local Group

NSC – Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign

NUT – National Union of Teachers

PCS – Public and Commercial Service Union

PSC – Palestine Solidarity Campaign

RATB – Rock around the Blocade

UNISON – Merger of different Unions, today the Public Service Union

UNITE – Merger of different unions in the finance, engineering and transport sectors

VIC – Venezuela Information Centre

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