

## **Fickle Commitment**

Fostering Political Engagement in 'the Flighty World of Online Activism'

Uldam, Julie

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**Fickle Commitment. Fostering political engagement  
in 'the flighty world of online activism'**

# Fickle Commitment. Fostering political engagement in 'the flighty world of online activism'

**Julie Uldam**

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*Fickle Commitment. Fostering political engagement in  
‘the flighty world of online activism’*

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## Abstract

In the wake of increasing disillusion with the potential of alternative online media for providing social movements with a virtual space for self-representation and visibility (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001) activists have been adopting online social media into their media practices. With their popular appeal and multimodal affordances social media such as YouTube and Facebook have reinvigorated hopes for the potential of the internet for providing social movements such as the Global Justice Movement, which is often misrepresented as a homogeneous and in a negative light in the mass media (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; Juris, 2008), with new possibilities for promoting self-representations to wider publics – beyond the echo chambers of alternative media (Cammaerts, 2007; Sunstein, 2001). In the mediation of institutional politics the increasing use of popular online spaces has brought about the term '*YouTube-ification of Politics*' (Turnsek and Jankowski, 2008). However, two challenges remain: the first relates to fragmentation – the internet's properties as a 'pull-medium' is argued to merely connect likeminded users (Cammaerts, 2007: 138). The second relates to 'lazy politics' – the internet's ephemeral properties are argued to facilitate brief participation in single-issue campaigns that fails to foster political engagement (Fenton, 2008a: 52). This thesis focuses on the latter. It addresses the possibilities of popular online spaces for fostering collective solidarity and political engagement in social movement organisations. It explores how these possibilities are played out in the online arena of popular sites employed by the two London-based social movement organisations: the World Development Movement (WDM) and War on Want.

Drawing on the cases of WDM and War on Want, the thesis addresses three dimensions of these practices, exploring (1) rationales for using popular online spaces to promote the SMO agenda; (2) the social movement organisations' online campaigns; and (3) members' identifications with the campaigns through discourse analysis and interviews with SMO directors, campaign, outreach and web officers as well as SMO members. It is by analysing how SMOs use different online spaces as locations for strategic framing and the formation of political identities that we can



begin to study how the internet may contribute to an agonistic public sphere where also voices of dissent are heard.

The thesis is based on Mouffe's understanding of politics and the political as grounded in discourse but also based on a view of political engagement as conflictual, affective and sometimes irrational (Cammaerts, 2007; Fenton, 2009; Mouffe, 2005). Even though this does not mean that SMOs do not apply rational considerations in planning their strategic agendas for public visibility and legitimacy, it does mean that the study of these considerations need to take into account this dual character of political discourse as both rational and affective (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). Therefore, we need to consider instrumental and affective issues to understand the relationship between strategic protest and the underlying dynamics of intragroup commitment (Griggs and Howarth, 2002; Snow et al., 1986) – the interconnections between strategy and identity, external resonance and internal commitment. In this way, the democratic potentialities of the internet can be seen as not only related to the ways in which SMOs communicate their agenda but also to potentialities for forging political identities and commitment (Fenton, 2008a).

## Abstract in Danish

### Online aktivisme: om at fostre engagement i en flygtig verden

I kølvandet på en stigende desillusion over alternative online mediers potentiale for at tilbyde sociale bevægelser bedre muligheder for at blive hørt i det offentlige rum (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001) har aktivismiljøet inkorporeret sociale medier som en del af deres mediepraksis. Med deres populære udbredelse og multimodale muligheder har sociale medier såsom YouTube og Facebook skabt nyt håb for internettets potentiale til at hjælpe aktivismiljøet, som i massemedierne ofte bliver fremstillet som en homogen gruppe og ofte i et negativt lys (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; Juris, 2008), til at formidle deres egne selv-repræsentationer til den bredere befolkning – ud over de alternative mediers ekkokamre (Cammaerts, 2007; Sunstein, 2001). I politisk kommunikation mere generelt har brugen af sociale medier ledt til 'YouTube-ification of Politics' (Turnsek and Jankowski, 2008). Men to udfordringer er stadig aktuelle: den ene er fragmentering – internettets egenskab som et *pull-medie* gælder også YouTube; og den anden er uengageret deltagelse i politisk protest – internettets mulighed for aktivisme som er glemt efter et enkelt museklik. Denne afhandling fokuserer på sidstnævnte. Den beskæftiger sig med sociale mediers muligheder for at fostre kollektiv solidaritet og engagement i græsrodsorganisationer. Den undersøger hvordan disse muligheder udspiller sig i praksis i en empirisk kontekst bestående af to case-studier af de London-baserede græsrodsorganisationer World Development Movement (WDM) og War on Want.

På baggrund af de to cases beskæftiger studiet sig med tre aspekter af brugen af online sociale medier i græsrodsorganisationer: (1) ledelsens rationale for brugen af sociale medier til at promovere organisationens agenda; (2) organisationens kampagner som de forekommer på tværs af online sociale medier; og (3) medlemmers identifikationer med kampagnerne. De tre aspekter undersøges gennem en diskursanalyse af online kampagnemateriale og interviews med ledelse og medlemmer fra græsrodsorganisationerne. Det er ved at analysere, hvordan græsrodsorganisationer bruger online sociale medier som platforme for strategisk kommunikation og

formation af politiske identiteter at vi kan begynde at undersøge hvordan internettet kan bidrage til en offentlig sfære, hvor politisk engagement kan fostres og styrkes.

Undersøgelsen tager udgangspunkt i Mouffes forståelse af politik som funderet i det diskursive men også baseret på konflikt og følelser (Cammaerts, 2007; Fenton, 2009; Mouffe, 2005). Det indebærer en forståelse af *citizenship* som en form for politisk identitet, der rækker ud over formelle borgerlige pligter (Mouffe, 1992; Laclau og Mouffe, 1985). I det lys er det vigtigt at tage højde for både instrumentelle og følelsesmæssige aspekter for at forstå forholdet mellem strategisk iscenesættelse af protest og de underliggende dynamikker der knytter sig til solidaritet og engagement (Griggs og Howarth, 2002; Snow et al., 1986) – forholdet mellem strategi og identitet, ekstern resonans og intern fællesskabsfølelse. Internettets demokratiske potentiale knytter sig således ikke kun til græsrodsorganisationers promovring af deres agenda men også til muligheden for at skabe politiske identiteter og engagement ud over et enkelt museklik (Fenton, 2008a).

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ATTAC = Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens

CSR = Corporate Social Responsibility

GJM = Global justice movement

HQ = Headquarters

ICT = Information and Communication Technologies

MAI = Multilateral Agreement on Investment

MEP = Member of European Parliament

NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement

NCVO= National Council for Voluntary Organisations

NGO= Non-governmental organisation

SMO = Social Movement Organisation

WDM = World Development Movement

WTO = World Trade Organisation

WWF = World Wildlife Fund

# 1 Introduction

Studies on the potential of the internet as a space for political expression tend to centre on two dominant perspectives. On the one hand, the argument is that the internet with its decentralised, non-hierarchical structure has provided potential agents of resistance, participatory culture and ethical engagement with a virtual space for self-representation and visibility; here the internet is seen as an opportunity structure, facilitating a 'post-foundational politics' that allows for diversity, conflict and multiple, tolerant identities (Fenton, 2009: 55; Cammaerts and Van Audenhove, 2005; della Porta, 2005). The other side to this discussion argues that the online domain is inextricably interlinked with the market logic of neo-liberal globalisation, fostering a system of commodification which privileges lazy politics, a form of politics that does not involve commitment to social change (Dahlberg, 2005; Fenton, 2007).

Instead of dismissing any of the two views, this thesis explores the online communication practices of SMOs: how they, in their struggles for visibility, attempt to make use of the opportunities and manage the challenges in what civil society groups call the 'technopolitics' and 'cyberactivism' of the internet (Kellner, 2003; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003). This thesis further focuses on popular social networking and file sharing sites. This focus is important, because "popular media ... are the public domain, the place where and the means by which the public is created" (Hartley, 1992, see also Dahlgren, 2005; Ellis, 2000; Livingstone, 2005). Indeed, last year in the run up to the U.S. Presidential Primaries, CNN coined the term 'YouTube-ification of Politics', pointing to the increasing significance of popular online spaces in the management of visibility in political communication, both institutional and non-institutional (Turnsek and Jankowski, 2008). Therefore, going beyond SMOs' websites and alternative sites such as Indymedia to research how they establish a presence in popular online spaces offers a useful focus for my study.

From the perspective of non-institutional politics, this thesis explores how uses of popular online spaces for political contestation contribute to shaping political identities and possibilities for forging commitment among activists. Against this

backdrop, this thesis focuses on three interrelated aspects at the SMO level: (1) the rationales behind the use of online media for the promotion of campaigns in SMOs; (2) the manifestations of the rationales as they appear in SMO campaigns across online spaces; and (3) SMO members' identifications with online campaigns.

My research begins from the assumption that our understandings of the world and possibilities for action in that world are conditioned by discourse, that is socially positioned fields of meaning that shape what is possible to say and do in the world. It is thus grounded in Laclau and Mouffe's ontological break with the realism/idealism dichotomy (see also Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008; Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). From this follows two main implications that underpin the focus and research design of this research. The first is that this research entails an approach to citizenship as a form of political identity that goes beyond involvement in the formal obligations of politics and allows for the co-existence of multiple political subjectivities and goes beyond formal obligations (Mouffe, 1992). In this view, citizenship is conditioned by the subject positions offered in a public sphere as well as possibilities for accepting or rejecting them. The other main implication that follows from this viewpoint is that, as a consequence of the constitutive role that discourse plays in the social world, many possible political 'realities' exist. In so far that what we perceive as reality or natural is conditioned by the discursive, therefore, "language has the capacity to make politics" (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005: 179). For example, representations of globalisation and the ways in which these discourses construe and condition political engagement are clustered around signifiers such as 'free trade', 'markets', 'modernisation' and 'liberalisation' (Fairclough, 2006; Scholte, 2000), and typically associated with a neo-liberal model of globalisation (Couldry, 2010). This articulation of globalisation has severe implications for politics at the social movement level, because it reifies this neo-liberal model while excluding, or suppressing, the political decisions that underpin it (Couldry, 2010).

My research is further based on Mouffe's understanding of politics and the political as grounded in discourse but also based on conflict and passions, which implies that

political engagement in new social movements is conflictual, affective and sometimes irrational (Cammaerts, 2007; Fenton, 2009; Mouffe, 2005). Even though this does not mean that SMOs do not apply rational considerations in planning their strategic agendas for public visibility and legitimacy, it does mean that the study of these considerations need to take into account this dual character of political discourse as both rational and affective (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). Instead of assuming, therefore, that all SMOs have explicit strategies for managing political identities, this thesis takes strategy as a construct grounded in SMO staff's rationales for encouraging members' commitment to their SMOs. Therefore, we need to consider instrumental and affective issues to understand the relationship between strategic protest and the underlying dynamics of intragroup commitment (Griggs and Howarth, 2002; Snow et al., 1986) – the interconnections between strategy and identity, external resonance and internal commitment. In this way, the democratic potentialities of the internet can be seen as not only related to the ways in which SMOs communicate their agenda but also to potentialities for forging political identities and commitment (Fenton, 2008a).

This thesis explores the translation of such potentialities into practices in an empirical setting grounded in two case studies of the London-based SMOs World Development Movement (WDM) and War on Want. Drawing on these two cases, this thesis adopts the three-dimensional approach outlined above, uncovering rationales for using popular online spaces to promote the SMO agenda, manifestations of these rationales as they appear in the SMOs' online campaigns and members' identifications with the campaigns through discourse analysis and interviews with SMO directors, campaign, outreach and web officers as well as SMO members. It is by analysing how SMOs use different online spaces as locations for strategic framing and the formation of political identities that we can begin to study how the internet may contribute to an agonistic public sphere where also voices of dissent are heard.

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework is of particular relevance to this study for four main reasons. First, their notion of over-determination, which implies a view of political identities as contingent and fluid, allows for an approach to political

identity formation and contestation as fluid constructs rather than static phenomena that pre-exist the discursive (Mouffe, 1992). Second, the concepts of antagonism and agonism, which refer to the conflictual aspects of politics and political identities, provide a theoretical approach to SMOs and their role as producers of friend/enemy distinctions (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: chapter 3). Third, the concepts of logics of equivalence and logics of difference, which variously refer to the construction of identities as equivalent and different, provide a conceptual and analytical construct for disentangling the dynamics of SMO alliances (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: chapter 3, see also Laclau, 1996). Finally, the concepts of subjectivity and subject positions, which refer to the discursive constitution of identity, provide a conceptual and analytical lens for exploring radical democratic citizenship as a discursive process of political identity construction, which involves the ways in which points of identification are accepted, negotiated, or rejected in an agonistic public sphere.

In the following, I first contextualise the study of GJM SMOs by introducing the GJM as a new social movement and outlining the opportunities and challenges that the internet poses in this context. These are primarily related to issues of fostering political engagement beyond the point-and-click activism that online spaces enable. On the basis of this, I introduce the focus of this thesis on the use of popular online spaces in GJM SMOs. I then introduce the conceptual framework of discourse theory and social movement framing theory that informs this thesis as well as how the study is operationalised on the basis of the two case SMOs: WDM and War on Want. Finally, I present a chapter outline, providing a sketchy overview of the following chapters of this thesis.

## 1.1 Contextualising global justice organisations and their online conditions

Historically, new media technologies have been greeted as groundbreaking vehicles for an inclusive public sphere, the internet being no exception (Calhoun, 2002: 147).



Optimistic rhetoric on the advantages of the internet as such a vehicle focuses on its opportunities for affording new possibilities for editorial control and thus opening new terrain for struggles for visibility for groups that tend to get negative coverage in or are excluded from the mainstream media (Kellner, 2003). In this respect, SMOs gain new possibilities for promoting self-representations that are undistorted by mass media filters. These possibilities can, of course, also be used for the promotion of a wide range of agendas, including causes promoted by radical left-wing groups as well as by the extreme right (e.g. Atton, 2006). This thesis takes as its focus the Global Justice Movement (GJM) which, although typically based on left-wing perspectives, is characterised by disparate orientations that conceive of solutions to problems related to processes of globalisation from different vantage points (Eschle, 2004). Here, more bleak perspectives include concerns about fragmentation and increased dispersion (Dahlberg, 2007). For SMOs, the challenge here is to manage their visibility so as to reach beyond “the cosy circle of likeminded sympathizers” (Cammaerts, 2007: 220).

### **1.1.1 The Global Justice Movement**

New social movements centred on a new domain of politics, what some have called life politics (Giddens, 1991) and sub-politics (Beck, 1994), focusing on lifestyle values and the personal narratives that express them as opposed to a focus on traditional structures and institutions. The GJM is generally considered as revising and broadening rather than displacing the focus of old social movements to also include issues pertaining to corporate power, consumption, environment and gender (connecting claims to redistribution and claims to recognition). These struggles of identity politics and lifestyle politics, often anchored in plural spheres of everyday practices, challenge social structures in different ways than more traditional conflicts of labour and capital (Beck et al, 1994; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Melucci, 1996), simultaneously invoking issues of cultural expression, and material production (Cohen, 1985).

In addition to comprising a wide range of issues under the 'global justice' label, the GJM includes networks, groups and SMOs that approach these issues from perspectives that represent different degrees of contention – some are more radical and may fall under the labels 'anti-capitalist' or 'anti-globalisation', while others are reformist or merely aid-centred (Eschle, 2004; Graeber, 2001). For SMOs in the GJM, communicating their own particular agendas is important to get members to commit to their SMOs and help promote their particular take on 'global justice' (Mueller, 2006).

#### **1.1.1.1 Online possibilities and challenges: promoting self-representations, promoting 'lazy politics'**

Possibilities for SMOs to construct their own self-representations enabled by the internet have been vested with hopes for increased civic participation, including hopes for engaging supporters and members (Papacharissi, 2002; Pickerill, 2009). On the other hand, the capacity of the internet to disseminate dispersed kinds of information, at the choice of the user, thereby potentially only providing one-sided bits of information or factoids, appears to have brought about fragmentation and increasing dispersion (Dahlgren, 2000). From this bleaker angle, the internet's properties as a 'pull-medium' is argued to merely connect likeminded users and fail to challenge presumptions or offer new perspectives; those that participate in online political debate, also do so offline, and only users with prior knowledge and interest will seek information about social movements and their causes (Cammaerts, 2007: 138-9). In this vein, the grassroots and non-profit sector has been argued to have been relegated to the remote margins of the internet, further dampening hopes of SMOs having a new tool for mobilising support (McChesney, 2007). To some extent, the proliferation of the use of social media for political communication – 'YouTube-ification of Politics' – have renewed hopes for the potential of the internet for reaching wider publics, preaching beyond the converted (Turnsek and Jankowski, 2008). Indeed, Graham (2008) argues that it is in non-political spaces such as online discussion forums and

blogs, MySpace, YouTube that individuals start 'to form the public' and become politically engaged. Reflecting this view, many SMOs venture beyond their websites and the already engaged crowd these attract and establish a presence in popular online spaces such as MySpace and YouTube, abandoning the online social movement media that have been variously described as alternative media (Atton, 2002), radical media (Downing, 2001), and citizens' media (Rodriguez, 2001) that were initially vested with hopes for providing platforms for the proliferation of undistorted counter-discourses. This feeling in the environment around online social movement media is described by an Indymedia programmer:

*People are generally not putting their videos on Indymedia anymore – those go onto YouTube. Photos are going into Flickr...Political groups don't advertise their presence on Indymedia anymore, they set up a MySpace group. (Yossarian, November 2008)<sup>1</sup>*

However, this use of social media for social movement purposes raises the question whether these platforms merely provide a public space for transient users to explore momentary whims rather than political engagement. Particularly in the context of the GJM, with its disparate actors and many single-issue campaigns, concerns about a privileging of 'clickable' participation and 'lazy politics' on fleeting and shifting issues are of significance (Fenton, 2007; Pickerill, 2003). Whether these popular online spaces can help reach broader publics or not, the question of commitment and meaningful political engagement still remains. In other words, what are the potentialities of popular online spaces for fostering collective solidarities and commitment to a political project?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://london.indymedia.org/articles/203>

### **1.1.1.2 Commitment and identity issues in SMOs**

In a new social movement environment such as the GJM, with the tendency for people to get involved with short-term, single-issue campaigns, identity issues are important to account for people's engagement in social movement activity (Dahlgren, 2005; Fenton, 2008b; Polletta and Jasper, 2001).

This renders the promotion of specific points of identification key to SMOs (Carroll and Ratner, 1996). This makes it increasingly important for SMOs to promote a distinct organisational profile and agenda with a 'multiorganisational field' as they compete for visibility and try to turn fleeting involvement into committed engagement (Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 294). And it is in this respect that presences in different online spaces, with their possibilities for bypassing mass media gatekeepers, gains particular salience, because they provide possibilities for promoting unfiltered self-representations and reaching potential supporters in spaces that form part of their quotidian practices. However, as argued above, the internet can be seen as facilitating precisely the ephemeral involvement that is associated with new social movements (Fenton, 2008b). Here, the instant agency of point-and-click activism offers easy, non-committal modes of civic participation (Chouliaraki, 2010; Schesser, 2006). Indeed, the role of face-to-face interactions and the nitty-gritty of everyday organisation of social movement activities are important in securing commitment among activists (Cammaerts and van Audenhove, 2005; della Porta, 2005; Diani and McAdam, 2003; Tarrow, 1994). Moreover, the possibility for users to connect with multiple issues and campaigns at the same time poses challenges to SMOs. If users can manage manifold, flexible identities with the click of a mouse, how then can SMOs translate their interface with users into long-term commitment (Fenton, 2008b)?

The internet thus provides possibilities and challenges for SMOs as they try to mobilise long-term support for their causes (Cammaerts, 2007). A key point here is that neither the promotion of self-representations nor political identity formations take place in an organisational vacuum – solely conditioned by SMO practices – but through multiple

and complex interrelations with existing and potential allies, opponents, institutional and non-institutional, as well as with and in online spaces.

Popular online spaces are ambiguous: to a large extent they are designed so as to facilitate informal practices, individualisation and personal narratives, but they are also increasingly marketed and redesigned to also facilitate political and civic purposes. As Castells (2001: 50) puts it: “The Internet is a particularly malleable technology, susceptible to being deeply modified by its social practice, and leading to a whole range of potential social outcomes”. While online spaces provide their own purposes and procedures for establishing certain communities of users, safeguarding certain values and orientations and privileging certain types of relationships and actions, the ways in which civic actors such as SMOs make use of different online spaces significantly shape contestatory practices beyond technological affordances (e.g. Couldry, 2004). Therefore, we need to explore empirically how SMOs manage the potentialities and constraints connected to popular online spaces in their attempts to foster meaningful political engagement.

## 1.2 Research focus

This study is anchored in Laclau and Mouffe’s political discourse theory as an overarching framework in the context of the GJM and its online communicative practices. It takes as its focus the ways in which SMOs make use of the possibilities for promoting their agendas and managing political identities that online spaces enable.

This study further approaches the analysis of SMOs’ strategic communication and political identity formation from the perspective of discourse theory as processes of meaning-making that regulate the constitution of discourses around what the SMO is, how it defines its cause and how it positions itself in a field of antagonists within the agonistic public sphere. In this way, categories from social movement framing theory work as an analytical toolbox that supports the operationalisation of the overall

discourse theoretical framework into analytical strategies. I will return to these in the section below on the operationalisation of the study.

While Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and social movement framing theory comprise the theoretical focus of the study, it is the online arena of popular sites employed by SMOs that constitutes the empirical context in which these practices are explored. Here, following Resnick (1997), the study centres on political uses of the internet.

Resnick distinguishes between three types of internet politics: "politics within the Net, politics which impact the Net, and political uses of the Net" (Resnick, quoted in Meikle, 2002: 4). The first category refers to the internal politics of online communities and group identity and entails email, listservs and discussion forums. The second refers to offline politics that affect the internet, including issues relating to access, ownership, control, regulation, censorship (ibid) and search engine bias (van Couvering, 2007). The third category refers to political uses of the graphical and multimodal capabilities of the World Wide Web that attempt to influence offline agenda (Meikle, 2002: 4). This project focuses on the third type of internet politics, social movements' uses of the different online spaces to promote their causes.

This distinction also points to the importance of distinguishing between the internet as a technology and the different types of media, applications and platforms this entails. For the purpose of this particular study it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, micro, middle and mass media and, on the other, independent and commercial spaces. Bennett (2003) distinguishes between personal micro media (e-mail, lists) and middle media (e.g. blogs, organisation sites, e-zines and social networking sites) in an online domain. As indicated above, this study focuses on middle media and the ways in which these are used by social movement organisations to publicise their causes.

Focusing on Resnick's third type of internet politics, then, the proposed study pays particular attention to the GJM's management of visibility in different online spaces.

GJM SMOs are often argued to contest what is 'normal' in terms of a neo-liberal globalisation by challenging accepted norms and meanings, bringing about new articulations of interests in their place in their attempt to frame it as just one of a number of possibilities (e.g. Nash, 2001). In doing so, the GJM in particular has been prone to use the internet in drawing attention to its causes (Clark and Themudo, 2005). However, GJM SMOs reflect disparate views on globalisation (Eschle, 2004). Taking the GJM as its focus allows the study to investigate how SMOs concerned with causes linked to globalisation issues use the possibilities provided by online spaces to discursively position their organisations in relation to other actors linked to the GJM.

### **1.2.1 Aim**

Instead of taking online spaces and their properties for granted, the theoretical discussion outlined in this study serves to guide an analytical examination of popular online spaces as technologies and practices of representation, probing the ways in which SMOs headquarters (HQ) staff understand and make use of possibilities for multimodality and new levels of editorial control, and how these uses feed into their members' identifications with the SMOs' agendas within a specific social movement field.

The project is both theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, it aims to (1) develop the idea of social movement framing as a theoretical and analytical approach to understanding processual and conflictual aspects of SMOs and their online media strategies. This includes activist negotiations of the subject positions made available in strategic frames. And (2) developing the idea of political identity as constructed against a constitutive outside consisting of both antagonists and intra-movement actors. This mutual constitution of simultaneously conjuring up similarities and constructing each other as significantly distinct is developed from the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework. In exploring these theoretical avenues, the study

aims to contribute to an on-going discussion on broadening the scope of political discourse theory to cultural approaches to social movement struggles.

Empirically the project aims to trace concrete practices and processes of non-institutional political campaigning at the organisational level in order to (1) study GJM SMOs' uses of popular online spaces as sites for struggles over visibility and representations of globalisation and trade issues; (2) study how these uses feed into formations of political collective identities among SMO members; and (3) on the basis of these practices, engage in a discussion as to the possibilities and constraints for the promotion of non-institutional politics to existing members and wider publics these online spaces make possible, going beyond current accounts that focus on SMO websites and alternative online media.

### **1.2.2 Research questions**

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework and social movement framing theory serve as the basis for a discussion of the following central research question:

*How do popular online spaces as a strategic scene of activism shape articulations of contestation and the formation of political identities in the context of Global Justice Movement organisations?*

This central research question is broad in scope and requires unpacking into more specific sub-questions to address the three-dimensional focus of this thesis. Therefore, three sub-questions serve to address the three perspectives of rationales, campaigns and identifications:

1. *What are the rationales that inform the SMO's campaigns, and how are these understood specifically in an online context?*
2. *How are SMOs articulated as agents of resistance and members of the Global Justice Movement in their campaigns in popular online spaces, and what possibilities for political identity formation does this entail?*



3. *How do SMO members articulate the role of popular online spaces in fostering political identification and commitment at an organisational level in the Global Justice Movement, and how does this feed into their own uses of popular online spaces?*

To address these questions, the thesis analyses GJM SMOs and their online campaigns in a case study design.

### **1.2.3 The World Development Movement and War on Want**

This thesis uses the cases of UK-based SMOs War on Want and WDM as examples of SMOs contesting globalisation so as to analyse the interplay between online media strategies and the formation of political identities among SMO members. War on Want and WDM were mainly chosen for methodological issues. The two SMOs have a transnational agenda and *orientation*, addressing issues brought about by globalisation processes. They *operate* on a transnational scale, working with partners in southern regions and continents and employing media that potentially transcend geographical boundaries. Thus, both SMOs have several online presences, and both are a part of the UK GJM. WDM was set up as a limited company to bypass the UK charity regulations and encourages member participation with a nationwide member group structure. War on Want is a registered charity with roots in the labour movement and two student society groups. The two SMOs share many similar characteristics, but are also significantly distinct in some aspects. This affords an opportunity to study how SMOs and their members from the same local and topical social movement field engage in certain practices in their uses of online media, and how these are perceived by staff and members.

#### **1.2.4 Conceptualising the study: discourse theory and social movement framing theory**

This study on SMOs within the GJM and their uses of the internet in their struggles for visibility is mainly located within the areas of cultural theory and politics. It focuses on the ways in which SMOs use different online spaces as locations for strategic framing and the formation of political identities, the possibilities for challenging accepted norms and meanings, bringing about new articulations of interests and reaching beyond the political hard-core that multiple online presences potentially enable in a context of political (Cammaerts, 2007).

I approach this by exploring the possibilities of popular online platforms as opening up new spaces of visibility, articulation and organisation that illustrate the potential for facilitating a radical democratic response to the challenges of neo-liberal globalisation issues and non-institutional political struggle.

In social movement theory the framing perspective is concerned with the discursive constructs that social movement actors use so as to orient and give meaning to their causes by defining the problems they seek to solve, as well as the alternative strategies they propose to overcome them (Gamson, 1992; Snow et.al., 1986). Online possibilities for bypassing traditional media gatekeepers entail significant implications for SMOs' attempts at framing their causes (Gamson, 1992; Hunt et al., 1994). In this way, retaining editorial control over external communication (Scott and Street, 2000) enables new possibilities for social movements and SMOs to frame their own self-representations (Benford and Snow, 2000; Nash, 2008).

Despite its value in capturing the discursive practices of control over content, the framing perspective tends to focus on social movements' self-presentations as pre-existing entities that simply position themselves vis-à-vis external actors. This involves an approach to social movement communication as static and strategic and as underpinned by presuppositions of intentionality, thus backgrounding the discursive processes through which framing is negotiated and movement identities are

constituted, in the first place. What Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse reminds us, however, is that these negotiations of who and what is a part of the movement, the meaning of a political identity, and struggles to define boundaries through identity play a key role in shaping movement and SMO frames (Steinberg, 1998). Here, the ways in which some social movement identities become dominant over others are central, begging the question of how activists at an intra-organisational level perceive and relate to outbound SMO contestation, rather than taking online texts as representative of the organisation as a whole.

It is, in particular, Laclau and Mouffe's processual and conflictual perspective that serves as a theoretical and analytical lens for exploring these struggles in ways that avoid the static perspective on SMO framing. Whereas the processual perspective draws attention to the impossibility of discourse to provide a final closure upon identities, emphasising the quality of discourse as "a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed" (Laclau 1988: 254), the conflictual aspect pays attention to the importance of the identification of enemies for the construction of counter-hegemonic political identities.

From this perspective, what is at stake is not whether processes of globalisation are organised around neo-liberal principles and policies, but rather, the ways in which discursive articulations of these processes come to condition possibilities for re-articulations and an alternative social imaginary (Mouffe, 1998). In this vein, this thesis aims to unravel discourses on globalisation rather than engage with globalisation processes as structures grounded in a realist conception. Instead of approaching neo-liberal globalisation as a political reality that different actors attempt to frame from different perspectives, this thesis approaches these attempts as hegemonic struggles over the (partial) fixation of meaning in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory entails a notion of discourse as structuring "a field of intelligibility and is thus the condition of possibility of the emergence of any object" (Laclau, 1990: 64). In other words, political agents inhabit a world of meaningful discourses outside of which they cannot conceive of or think of a political or social world (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). In this way,

the dialectics of continuity and partial fixity in discourse theory complements the static tendencies of framing theory (for a discussion of the ontological and epistemological commensurability of framing and discourse theory see also the methodology section in the outline of the study's research design in Chapter 4).

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework and its concept of radical democracy, conceived within an agonistic relationship between adversaries, is thus useful in considering the role of the internet and popular online spaces in potentially facilitating SMOs' management of visibility (Mouffe, 1998). It is particularly useful when considering online spaces as platforms for social movement framing, which, externally, often involves defining problems in terms of an antagonistic relation to dominant views on issues such as globalisation, world trade and the environment, while internally striving for consensus, often to some degree of collective identity (Dahlgren, 2005: 157). Arguing for a conceptualisation of a potential online public sphere as based on the notion of radical democracy, Dahlberg (2007: 837) posits that:

*Effective challenges to discursive boundaries (i.e. inter-discursive contestation) open up space for excluded voices, fostering greater intra-discursive contestation or deliberation. In the process, consensus and hegemony are continually questioned.*

In this way, the possibility for social movements to frame understandings and interpretations of the world and to challenge discursive boundaries through inter-discursive contestation, drawing attention to taken-for-granted social issues, is potentially facilitated by multiple and multimodal spaces of inter-discursive contestation (Dahlberg, 2007). At the same time, these spaces of inter-discursive contestation as parallel discursive venues feed into the formation and negotiation of political identities, as SMO staff and members articulate discursive boundaries and possibilities for frame alignment through intra-discursive contestation (Fraser, 1992; Mouffe, 1992).

Further, the potential of SMOs in mobilising popular sentiment arguably pertains to an understanding of new social movement issues as agonistic, and as involving more or less strategic uses of emotion through text, image and audio combinations in order to gain visibility and legitimacy and to win adherents and mobilise support (Mouffe, 1992; Nash, 2008). Forging emotional investment in this way is important for SMOs, precisely because new social movement issues transcend traditional conflicts between labour and capital (Beck, 1994; Giddens, 1991), seeking to change attitudes, values and behaviours among wider publics rather than solely focusing on influencing legislators or governments directly (Cammaerts 2007: 218). In this way political engagement is often connected to feelings of passion and political life as affective (Wahl-Jørgensen, 2006). This is not to background the role of reason and rationality in conceptions of political contention, but to question the dichotomous relationship between reason and emotion that informs some theories on the public sphere and political engagement (Wahl-Jørgensen, 2006). Rather, this study is premised on the possibility that emotion and reason can interact to produce meaningful political engagement and solidarity (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen, 2000) and pays attention to the possibilities and constraints that online politics provide for affective relationships to create and sustain collective identities and solidarity.

### **1.2.5 Operationalising the study: research methodology**

This project approaches GJM SMOs' management of visibility in an online domain through the study of two cases. The study employs two complementary, qualitative research methods: discourse analysis of the SMOs' different online presences and semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The study explores the link between the rationales behind SMO campaigns, on the one hand, and activist identifications with these, on the other, so as to pay attention to the complexities and nuances of the dialectic influence of strategic articulations on political engagement. This entails going beyond the discourse at the SMO level and,

further, examining these processes from different perspectives. As mentioned above, the study adopts a three-dimensional perspective. It addresses these perspectives on the basis of two methodological approaches: (1) the rationales for using online media for contestation (interviews with SMO HQ staff); (2) manifestations of the rationales as they appear across online spaces (multimodal discourse analysis of online campaigns); and (3) identifications with these appearances (interviews with SMO group members). The perspective on rationales is intended to convey the perceptions and motivations that underpin the implicit and explicit strategies of SMO leaders. The perspective on online campaigns is intended to convey how HQ staff's rationales manifest themselves in practice, but also whether discrepancies appear. However, these two perspectives do not address the ideational diversity that may exist among SMO members and the ways in which this comes to bear on their political identities and sense of commitment. For this purpose, the perspective on members' identifications is intended to convey how members accept, negotiate and reject the points of identification offered in the online campaigns. It also serves to show how they feed into members' promotions of the campaigns at the local group level as members appropriate and mould the points of identification made available in the HQ campaigns. Probing the interplay between rationales and their manifestations in HQ campaigns at the SMO meso level and member responses to the subject positions made available in HQ campaigns at the SMO micro level also responds to the static tendencies of social movement framing studies and serves to bridge the distinction between frames and processes of framing (Benford, 1997; Johnston and Klandermans, 1995).

Because this entails analysing online self-representations as they appear in text and multimodal formats as well as rationales for and identifications with online campaigns as they are expressed in interviews, it entails challenges connected to variations across data. Therefore, the analytical framework adopts a two-fold approach, distinguishing between outbound framing (campaign appearances) and intra-organisational framing. The former focuses on campaigns. The latter focuses on rationales and identifications in interview data. Both draw on an analytical framework that draws on concepts from

political discourse theory supported by categories from social movement framing theory. However, analysing the campaigns in online sites requires a consideration of the multimodal environment of the internet and its ephemeral qualities. Therefore, in order to capture the multimodality and technologisation of the online campaigns, the analytical framework here incorporates elements from Chouliaraki's (2006a) analytics of mediation, paying attention to the aesthetic qualities of online campaigns and the notion of technologisation of action (Chouliaraki, 2010). This idea of the technologisation of action is important as online modes of action potentially recast the click of a mouse as the political purpose rather than commitment to a political project (Fenton, 2008a).

### 1.3 Chapter outline: thesis structure

Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** serves as a contextual backdrop to the study by introducing some of the main examples of protests directed towards issues connected to neo-liberal globalisation, including issues construed as anti-corporate, anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation, such as the Zapatista movement in Mexico (Best and Kellner, 1999), the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle 1999 (Kahn and Kellner, 2004), protests against Nike and McDonalds (Crossley, 2003), the Make Poverty History campaign (Nash, 2008) and the Gleneagles G8 protests in 2005 (McCurdy, 2009). Further, the chapter introduces an account of some of the main characteristics of the social movement field that comprises the GJM. It highlights some of the central events that feed into the combination of claims to redistribution and claims to recognition that comprise the GJM's overarching agenda. It also takes a closer look at the two SMOs that this thesis takes as its focus and the local context in which they are based. This overview also outlines the internal structures and decision making processes adopted by the two SMOs as well as their responses to the external structures of governance regulating their social movement field. These are mainly regulations set by the British Charity Commission.

This is followed by a purposive literature review in **Chapter 3**, which outlines the study's theoretical framework. The chapter begins by introducing Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory as a social ontology. Then it goes on to discuss social movement framing theory as discursive contestation. On the basis of these two ontological perspectives on meaning-making and political contestation, the chapter introduces the conceptualisations of political identity put forward in the two perspectives. Then it reviews the concept of the public sphere, and how different accounts of the internet's role in potentially facilitating an invigorated public sphere draw on different presuppositions of democracy, rationality, and citizenship. Here, the chapter specifically discusses the notion of an agonistic public sphere as a space where points of identification are offered and accepted, negotiated or rejected. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that integrates insights from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework and social movement framing theory and carries them over to the realm of online spaces, or online middle media. In this way, the chapter shows how the conceptual framework tries to bridge cultural and political studies for the conceptualisation of the ways in which SMOs use popular online spaces to promote their causes, tying together the central ideas of discourse theory and framing in order to later operationalise these into analytical units. Throughout the chapter, the theoretical debates are considered in relation to the GJM.

**Chapter 4** introduces the research design and methods of the study by first presenting the comparative case study design and methods and explaining the rationale behind multi-sited ethnography. Then follows a description of the data collected (interviews, online campaign material, participant observation) and how this data was analysed as well as practical issues of fieldwork such as researcher position, and time constraints.

The chapter also reflects on the claims to knowledge that the study can make in terms of generalisability and the focus on perceptions and practices. It also addresses the epistemological implications of combining the framing perspective's static bias and presuppositions of pre-determined structures with Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology



which disregards pre-determined structures beyond the discursive (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 108).

Lastly, the chapter explains Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory as the bases for an analytical framework, supported by categories from social movement framing theory (e.g. Snow et al., 1986) and the analytics of mediation (Chouliaraki, 2006a). This is followed by an outline of the analytical framework which is structured around a tripartite focal point: (1) rationales for using online media for contestation; (2) manifestations of the rationales as they appear across online spaces; and (3) identifications with these appearances as they are expressed by SMO members.

Having introduced the multiple case study and its methodological approaches, **Chapter 5** is driven by research sub-question one and asks: *What are the rationales that inform the SMOs' campaigns, and how are these understood specifically in an online context?* This empirical chapter analyses the rationales behind the use of online spaces for the promotion of War on Want and WDM's trade campaigns. The chapter draws on interviews with SMO directors, and campaign and outreach officers. The analysis focuses on HQ staff's understandings of their SMOs as agents of resistance within a specific social movement field. It does so with a view to explore the ways in which HQ interviewees translate these understandings into rationales for the SMOs' outbound strategic communication in terms of promoting and gaining leverage for their agenda, fostering enduring commitment among existing members, and mobilising broader publics.

**Chapter 6** addresses research sub-question two which asks: *How are SMOs articulated as agents of resistance and members of the Global Justice Movement in their campaigns in popular online spaces, and what possibilities for political identity formation does this entail?* The chapter analyses the ways in which the interrelated concerns of visibility, alliances, and commitment raised by respondents in Chapter 5 are manifested in the appearances of the SMOs' campaigns in different online spaces. In this way, the analysis serves to open up possibilities for examining the dialectics of,

on the one hand, management of visibility and strategy and, on the other, political identity formation and commitment. Exploring these dialectics in the context of popular online spaces warrants unpacking how the campaigns – using various multimodal modes of representation available in online media – appeal to sensibilities of passion and rationality, resistance and an alternative imaginary, the particular and the universal. The chapter draws on the analytical framework outlined in Chapter 4 to analyse WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns as they appear across different online spaces.

**Chapter 7** addresses research sub-question three and asks: *How do SMO members articulate the role of popular online spaces in fostering political identification and commitment at an organisational level in the Global Justice Movement, and how does this feed into their own uses of popular online spaces?* To answer this question, the chapter draws on in-depth interviews with group members from WDM and War on Want as well as participant observation in order to explore issues of radical democratic citizenship as a form of political identification and issues of SMO commitment. The chapter probes these issues from three perspectives: (1) members' identifications in relation to the SMO and its uses of online spaces, (2) members' identifications in relation to the movement and (3) members' own online self-representations. What is described in this chapter is the perceived experience of SMO articulations of trade and globalisation in different online spaces seen through the eyes of their members.

The concluding **Chapter 8** begins by reflecting on the strengths and limitations of the research design of the thesis. Then it presents the key findings. It starts with the main empirical findings from the three empirical chapters and discusses congruities and discrepancies between the perspectives. This is followed by their implications for three theoretical aspects of this thesis: a revision of the concepts of adversaries and chains of equivalences from political discourse theory, the potentialities of combining political discourse theory and social movement framing theory, and the development of an analytical framework that also captures multimodal aspects of political campaigns.

Finally, the chapter discusses these findings and their wider implications and on the basis of this opens up some avenues for future research.

## 2 Setting the scene: global justice – the movement and the case organisations

This chapter serves as a contextual backdrop to the study by introducing some of the main examples of protests directed towards issues connected to neo-liberal globalisation, including issues construed as anti-corporate, anti-capitalist, and anti-globalisation, such as the Zapatista movement in Mexico (Best and Kellner, 2001), the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle 1999 (Kahn and Kellner, 2004), the Make Poverty History campaign (Nash, 2008) and the Gleneagles G8 protests in 2005 (McCurdy, 2009). The first part of the chapter traces some of the main arguments and events in the trajectory of new social movements more broadly, and then, more specifically, the UK context that this thesis takes as its focus.

The second part of the chapter draws the contours of the SMOs War on Want and WDM and their struggles as examples of attempts to disrupt dominant discourses on globalisation. In this way, it begins to approach the questions of how we can see the online strategic framing processes at play in War on Want and WDM in terms of their wider implications for democratic practices in extra-parliamentarian politics by introducing some of the main highlights of the two organisations' historical backgrounds. Also, a cursory overview of their organisational make-up, legal and financial structures provides further insights into the conditions that the organisations navigate, and serves to contextualise a study of their online campaign practices and the possibilities for political engagement that these facilitate. This section draws on policy documents, material produced by the organisations themselves and interviews.

### 2.1 Contesting neo-liberal globalisation

Before turning to the specifics at the organisational level, this section first maps out some of the main characteristics that condition the organisational field in which civil society organisations attempt to challenge and disrupt neoliberal patterns of dominance in relation to globalisation, including a closer look at the two organisations

that this thesis takes as its focus and the local context in which they are based. It begins with a cursory account of the shift from traditional social movements and class related issues and claims to redistribution to the polycentric, networked structure that is argued to characterise new social movements, life politics and claims to recognition.

### **2.1.1 New social movements**

Social movement activity in late modernity has been argued to be less defined in terms of ideology and formal political processes, but more as single-issues (ecology, fair trade, etc.), or issues that relate to what Giddens (1991: 214), Beck (1998) and Bauman (1999) have called life -, sub- and identity -politics, articulating the political as a dimension of the social (Mouffe, 2000), rendering the boundaries between politics, cultural values and identity processes more fluid (Beck, 1994). Further, political engagement is argued to be more fluid and less dependent on traditional organisations (Dahlgren, 2005). These observations have brought about the label “new” social movements (e.g. della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). Particularly in the areas of alter-globalisation, ecology, feminism and peace, new social movements organisation play a key role in mobilising citizen engagement and creating a sense of agency, also across national borders (Juris, 2008).

In contrast to ‘old’ social movements and an overarching objective of claims to redistribution of material resources (della Porta and Diani, 2006; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), new social movements are often theorised as more concerned with identity and lifestyle issues as “something to be built, articulated and invented rather than explained exclusively by reference to a social structure” (Starn, 1992: 92).

However, this is a contested notion (see e.g. Downey and Broton, 2007; Edwards, 2004; Eschle and Stammers, 2004), as ‘new’ social movements are also in some cases about capital and labour, possible cases in point being alter-globalisation and GJMs protesting against corporations’ exploitation of employees (Edwards, 2004: 117), for example, by impeding their rights to unionise or by exposing them to harsh working

conditions in sweat shops, or feminists who want good and affordable childcare (Downey and Brooten, 2007: 539). New social movements centred on women's rights, ethnic or sexual minorities, as well as peace, ecology, or justice themes have histories going back to the twentieth century (Eschle, 2004; Johnston and Klandermans, 1995; Johnston and Noakes, 2005).

New social movements can be seen as concerned with 'the everyday' which simultaneously invokes politics, cultural expression, and material production (Cohen, 1985). In this vein, Buelcher (1995) proposes a distinction between old political and new cultural movements, while at the same time noting the significance of not treating these as mutually exclusive dichotomies (ibid). Thus, new social movements can be conceived of as political (Touraine, 1981) as well as formed around issues that relate to what has been termed identity- or life-politics, concerned with "political issues which flow from processes of selfactualisation in post-traditional contexts, where globalising influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of selfrealisation influence global strategies" (Giddens, 1991: 214, see also Cammaerts, 2003). Such culturally informed perspectives on the relationship between social movements and social change allow a view of social movements as not just aiming to seize power in order to achieve their goals, but also to provoke reactions from formal social and political organisations such as traditional interests groups such as labour organisations and political parties (Cammaerts, 2003).

What is important to note here, is that – in terms of their structural as well as social issues of contention – 'new' social movements based in a UK context often see themselves as operating in solidarity with movements in southern regions, addressing issues that are important to them rather than a "self-organisation of the exploited and the oppressed against that exploitation and oppression" (O'Nions, interview, April 2009). This is elaborated by Red Pepper co-editor and WDM campaign officer, James O'Nions:

*...most of the kind of activism and indeed movements we are talking about now, they are more like solidarity movements with others who are exploited and oppressed in other countries, certainly in terms of what might describe WDM. (O'Nions interview, April 2009)*

### **2.1.2 The global justice movement**

Centred on issues such as ethical consumption, fair trade, ecology and women's rights, the shift from a focus on a Marxist paradigm to struggles connecting issues of capital and labour to issues of lifestyle which characterise new social movements is echoed in the alter-globalisation movement. However, the notion of a GJM is a contested one, and lies at the heart of a wide range of SMOs' self-representations; many have attempted to reorientate the movement by moving away from using labels such as 'Anti-Globalisation' and 'Anti-Capitalist' to labels evoking notions of what the movement is for (Eschle, 2004; Garrett, 2006).<sup>2</sup> Thus labels such as the 'Global Justice Movement', the 'Global Democracy Movement' or 'Alter-Globalisation Movement' emerge, proposing alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation in terms of the increasing power and exploitative practices of corporations, the growing influence of international financial institutions, and policies of trade liberalisation (Graeber, 2001: 63; Eschle, 2004).

On a very general level globalisation can be seen as

*...a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions...generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power. (Held et al., 1999: 16)*

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<sup>2</sup> This label not only emerges as an intramovement tendency, but is also produced from relationships between members, allies, bystanders and mass media counter-framing (Hunt et.al., 1994)

Rather than reductive notions of globalisation, the somewhat abstract formulation above allows for an understanding of the changes and processes often referred to as globalisation that is 'transnational' rather than global, as including (interrelated) material as well as social aspects, and unequal and excluding power relations. Nevertheless, although acknowledging the multidimensional, complex and uneven aspects of globalisation processes, what exactly these changes and processes include remains highly contentious (Scholte, 2000). Also, the idea of globalisation of the media, including online media, has been contested (Fairclough, 2006). In his seminal book *'The myth of media globalization'*, Hafez (2007) argues that as satellite and digital media's potential for enabling global connectivity increases, mechanisms of local appropriation and domestication – commercial, linguistic, cultural and policy issues – remain.

Within a social constructivist framework, this articulation of globalisation as a set of processes of neo-liberalism contributes to a naturalisation of this particular model of globalisation, as, for example, deregulation of markets and trade restrictions have come to hold widespread unquestioned acceptance as 'commonsense' (Fairclough, 2006; Scholte, 2000: 39). In this way, unquestioned dominant discourses of globalisation that presuppose a neo-liberal model reify this neo-liberal model while excluding, or suppressing, the political decisions that underpin this model as well as alternative approaches. From the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (1985) and radical democracy, the issue here is not so much whether processes of globalisation are truly global or provide an exhaustive account of what the changes often characterised as 'globalisation' entail; what is at stake here is, rather, representations of globalisation and the ways in which these discourses construe and condition processes connected to globalisation (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Fairclough,



2006).<sup>3</sup> This argument is developed in Chapter 5, specifically in relation to the aspects that War on Want and WDM contest in the context of their trade campaigns.

The edges of the GJM are blurred and undefined. Nonetheless, the movement can be considered as an attempt to provide an ideological framework to structure and connect a number of current struggles which are often transnational in scope (Held and McGrew, 2003). In this way, the GJM is complex rather than tied to a single set of issues or strategies (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007). In this way, the movement is not anti-globalisation in any straightforward sense, consisting of a variety of networks, groups, SMOs, and affiliates that all construct competing movement identities (Eschle, 2004). Disparate organisations and interests thus define villains and opponents systemically and functionally from a wide range of perspectives and based on different degrees of antagonism. Thus, this eclectic social movement field, can be argued to both comprise social movement actors concerned with assigning blame to ‘those who occupy the commanding heights of neoliberal globalizing capitalism’ (Fraser, 2007: 82). At the same time, it also comprises reformist actors. For example, the Make Poverty History campaign in many ways worked within dominant neo-liberal discourses, while challenging on narrower grounds rather than challenging the entire neo-liberal paradigm. In this way working with the structures of global governance, creating alliances with institutional and corporate actors rather than protesting against a systemic enemy, the campaign was positioned as a ‘non-partisan’ and ‘anti-poverty campaign’ using ‘smart power’. In some instances, this antagonised the campaign’s more radical movement base, and many coalition SMOs left the campaign coalition (Hodkinson, 2005). Yet both approaches connect their causes to the GJM. Especially in a UK context, the ‘global justice’ label is preferred over ‘anti-’ and ‘alter-’ prefixes. As WDM Campaign Officer and War on Want board member James O’Nions puts it in his

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<sup>3</sup> See also Chapter 4 for a discussion of the social construction of globalisation in relation to the ontology of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory vis-à-vis Fairclough’s understanding of the dialectics of structure and discourse

comment on the label 'Alter-Globalisation' as a way of signalling the call for an alternative approach to globalisation rather than opposing these processes altogether:

*I guess we have called it the Global Justice Movement. I think that most people...it tends to be the press that uses anti-globalisation. Although alter-globalisation expresses it quite well it is not really a word that we use in English ...alter as a prefix in English, it is not one that is used very often, certainly not within that kind of construct. It is not something that is very easy to explain to people. Other people I know refer to that same movement as the anti-capitalist movement, although that was probably most in the wake of Seattle. That is to deny a certain breadth in terms of the different kinds of organisations and outlooks which are in it. (O'Nions, interview, April 2009)*

It has been argued that an overall move towards framing the GJM as opposing neo-liberal globalisation issues rather than globalisation *per se* has been interpreted as strategic attempts at gaining influence through alliances with institutional actors (Eschle, 2004). In this way, SMOs have been found to often have 'dual faces', adopting a 'dual strategy' which involves "a discursive politics of identity and influence that targets civil and political society and an organized, strategically rational politics of inclusion and reform that is aimed at political and economic institutions" (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 550). However, this seems to be a contested shift within the movement, with some SMOs and groups apparently preferring to keep the 'anti-' label and extra institutional orientations (e.g. Nash, 2008).

### **2.1.3 Social movements in the UK**

New social movements are situated within and conditioned by specific, often local, social, cultural, political and economic factors (Tarrow, 1998). War on Want and the WDM's organisational field may be located within a history of political contention in the UK, and more particularly the GJM. The following overview highlights some of the

central events that feed into the combination of demands in terms of redistribution and claims to recognition that comprise the overarching agenda of the GJM.

In the UK, SMOs as well as more loosely networked activism have a long history of political struggle with a wide range of movements and organisations contesting different aspects of dominant structures. While attempting a comprehensive review of all these movements is beyond the scope of this thesis (see Tilly 2004, for a concise review of social movements from 1768-2004), studying contemporary SMOs connected to the GJM in the UK should be informed by an appreciation of the trajectory of their historical roots in class based struggles and new social movements concerned with identity politics.

In the UK class-based struggles connected to the labour movement began to take shape and gain momentum in the eighteenth century. Trade unions first began forming as skills-specialised 'craft unions' in the 1820s, and by the 1880s workers from less skilled occupations previously excluded from craft unions began to organise and form unions, including the Dockers' Union, National Union of Dock Labourers, Gasworkers' Union and National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (McCarthy et.al., 1996; Tilly, 2004). Also the Trade Union Congress (TUC), until then only for craft unions, began to accept new unions. The TUC went on to facilitate the creation of additional organisations, including what later became the Labour Party.

In terms of contention linked to identity politics, the women's movement began taking shape in the UK in the mid-eighteenth century. Only a few sociologists have studied the women's movement in Britain as a social movement (Nash, 2001), but comprehensive accounts of the emergence of the women's movement from 1866 and second-wave feminism in Britain are provided by, for example, Pugh (2000) and Norris and Lovenduski (1996).

Fenton (2008a) argues that the rise of new social movements within the UK since the late 1960s can be seen as a reaction to a decrease in party and class alliances. This brought about a tendency for political participation to partly shift from involvement in

political parties and so-called old social movements to engagement in civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), specific campaigns, or forms of direct action (Cammaerts, 2007). As argued earlier, new social movements can be seen as simultaneously concerned with politics, cultural expression and material production (Fenton, 2008a). In Britain these have mainly been centred on students, women, environmentalism and peace movements (Byrne, 1997; Kriesi and Koopmans, 1992). Also, they are more fluid and informal networks of action than traditional class and party politics and transnational in scope. The transnational orientation is also characteristic of more recent social movements in Britain, including the GJM that began to take shape in connection with the 1999 G8 summit in Seattle (Desai and Said, 2001). The 1999 Seattle demonstrations can be seen as the tipping point for the GJM (McCurdy, 2009). The late 1990s saw a surge in protests against transnational neo-liberal and corporate capitalism. The 18 June 1999 'Carnival Against Capital!' demonstration on 18 June 1999 organised hundreds of thousands of protesters (including labour, environmentalist, feminist, anti-capitalist, animal rights and anarchist groups) in many different countries, including the UK. This was followed by what came to be known as the 'Battle for Seattle' against the WTO summit in December 1999 (Juris, 2008; Graeber, 2001). Thus, a transnational protest movement began to take shape in resistance to neo-liberal institutions and their related globalisation policies, while advocating for a multi-issue agenda including issues such as the protection of human rights, environmentalism, peace and action against third world poverty (Kahn and Kellner, 2004). In this way, the GJM is multiscalar and multifaceted, covering a wide range of issues and debate continues about whether we should understand protests clustered around these as a movement, a *movement of movements*, as a network, a multitude, and an *electronic network* (e.g. Castells, 2001; Klein, 2007; Mueller, 2006; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; see McCurdy 2009 for an account of developments in modes of action in the GJM, including GJM networks in Britain).

Although transnational in scope and orientation, the SMOs and activists that comprise the UK-based part of the GJM also tend to have a strong local point of departure. They are based in, but spread beyond, localities, and are also connected to transnational systems and issues, representing what della Porta and Tarrow (2005: 237) refer to as 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Askanius, 2010; della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Fenton, 2008a). In a UK context this tendency is exemplified by the significant campaigning coalition Make Poverty History in 2005 (Nash, 2008). Make Poverty History was the UK branch of a transnational alliance of NGOs, advocacy groups and SMOs, ranging from the large organisations such as Oxfam and Save the Children to smaller, often more radical organisations such as WDM. The national branches of the campaign had different names in different countries: ONE in the USA, 'Plus d'Excuses!' in France, and 'Maak Het Waar' in the Netherlands (Nash, 2008). The purpose of the campaign was to put pressure on the leaders of the richest countries to follow through their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals. This transnational orientation concerned with people and issues in the south was attempted by mobilising national citizens to take action within a frame of national politics by lobbying their local politicians and participating in local demonstrations (Nash, 2008). So we can see the Make Poverty History campaign as an example of transnational structure, organisation and orientation while rooted in local particulars. This transnational orientation corresponds with emergence in recent years of transnational activism and the transnational organisation of civil society actors, which, in many ways, has sprung from or been inspired by the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas-México (Cammaerts, 2007).

This transnational orientation rooted in local particulars is also reflected in War on Want and WDM's agendas beyond their involvement in the Make Poverty History campaign. For example, WDM's trade campaign on international trade rules is centred around the European Union's (EU) trade deals with developing countries and calls for members and supporters to lobby their local MEPs (Members of the European Parliament). In a similar vein, War on Want's campaigning on working conditions in factories in developing countries takes as its focus UK-based companies such as the

supermarket chain Tesco's role in putting their suppliers under pressure to produce goods as cheaply as possible to increase their own profit.

In terms of size, there are approximately 870,000 civil society organisations in the UK today, including trade unions and political parties (NCVO, 2009). Campaign based civil society organisations such as Amnesty International UK and Friends of the Earth EWNI<sup>4</sup> have 130 and 140 members of staff respectively, while War on Want and WDM have around 30 each, placing the latter two at the smaller end of the scale in terms of size. Organisations with charitable status account for 171,000 of these. Charities range from small community organisations to a significant number of large organisations (NCVO, 2009). In this way, UK civil society organisations act within a complicated organisational landscape. But it is also a highly complicated legal and regulatory landscape.

## 2.2 Introducing War on Want and the World Development Movement

*War on Want's campaign material is not balanced or objective and I suspect that it is not meant to be. Its content is a matter for the trustees and, from time to time, for the Charity Commissioners.*

*(Chris Patten, quoted in The Hansard, 1989: column 686)*

This section introduces War on Want and WDM's organisational roots and structural development. In this respect War on Want's roots in workers' unions and WDM's initial links to church communities are significant. Also, the internal structures and decision making processes adopted by the two organisations are pivotal to understanding in particular the political identity processes at play in the organisations.

Another key aspect here is War on Want's and WDM's responses to – attempts at manoeuvring within the boundaries of and renegotiating – the external structures of

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<sup>4</sup> Friends of the Earth England, Wales and North Ireland

governance regulating their organisational field. Here, mainly regulations set by the British Charity Commission, particularly regarding the promotion of policy changes, are central.<sup>5</sup> For example, the Charity Commission states that:

*...political campaigning, or political activity...must be undertaken by a charity only in the context of supporting the delivery of its charitable purposes. (CC9, 2008: section D5)*

For SMOs organised around issues linked to neo-liberal globalisation processes 'political campaigning, or political activity' is central to their *raison d'être*. Here, the Charity Commission specifies precisely that

*A charity may choose to focus most, or all, of its resources on political activity for a period. The key issue for charity trustees is the need to ensure that this activity is not, and does not become, the reason for the charity's existence. (CC9, 2008: section D6)*

In many ways, the globalisation project promoted within a contemporary neo-liberal paradigm can be construed as inherently political. For example, one of War on Want's taglines is 'Poverty is political', thus structures of governance potentially restricting SMOs' activities in this respect can therefore have major implications for the ways in which they frame their agenda. Intrinsically related to this is the possibility to campaign with a view to secure or contest policy changes. However, a charity cannot exist for a political purpose. For example, it cannot be directed at securing or opposing a change in the law, policy or decisions (CC9, 2008: D5). Such activity is only permitted on the basis that it assists the charity's objectives, and does not dominate activities. This includes:

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<sup>5</sup> The Charity Commission is an independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, overseeing charities' registration and accountability.

*...activity by a charity which is aimed at securing, or opposing, any change in the law or in the policy or decisions of central government, local authorities or other public bodies, whether in this country or abroad. (CC9, 2008: section C4)*

Despite these restrictions on political campaigning by charities, the fact that the Charity Commission allows for political campaigning that “supports the delivery of its charitable purposes” (CC9, 2008: section D5) represents a relaxation of regulations first introduced in 1995. Prior to that, restrictions on political activity and campaigning were far more rigorous (Luetchford and Burns, 2003: 109). Also allowing for the promotion of human rights as a charitable purpose in 2002 represents a moderation of the Charity Commission’s regulatory framework (RS16, 2007).

Another central aspect in relation to War on Want and WDM’s origins and historical trajectories is their alliances with other actors within their organisational field. This is, of course, intrinsically linked to the structures of governance that potentially restrict their organisational fields. It is therefore important to understand the ways in which they discursively position themselves today so as to align their causes with specific actors. War on Want and WDM have adopted different ways of manoeuvring within the governing framework that regulates charities in England and Wales. War on Want is a registered charity and has at different points in its history explicitly as well as implicitly challenged the Charity Commission’s regulations. WDM is registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee with a trust funding its charitable activities. The following section addresses the ways in which the two organisations’ relate to the Charity Commission’s regulations in order to set the scene for an analysis of the ways in which the organisations’ formal structures condition and foster possibilities for strategic framing and alliances.



### **2.2.1 War on Want**

With roots in Britain's labour movement, War on Want has been campaigning on issues clustering around developing world issues, human rights, trade unions and, more recently, in relation to globalisation processes. Founded in 1952, the organisation first sprung up from the Association for World Peace as a campaign to counter world poverty. As the campaign 'War on Want – a plan for world development', it was based on then future Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson's letter to the Manchester Guardian calling for money spent on arms to be spent instead on world development (Luetchford and Burns, 2003: 16-18). As the campaign began to take shape as an organisation during the 1950s, it was thus centred on relieving world poverty as a political campaign with roots in the labour movement, meeting monthly in the House of Commons (Luetchford and Burns, 2003: 26). In this way, it distinguished itself from organisations such as Oxfam and the Red Cross which may have similar goals, but which call for different solutions, such as disaster relief.

While promoting a construal of poverty as political is potentially problematic, because the British Charity Commission's regulatory framework imposes certain restrictions on political campaigning, War on Want's current director (2009), John Hilary, construes precisely this obstacle as important to the SMO's contribution to challenges against neo-liberal globalisation. This is captured in Hilary's comment on being a registered charity, working within the structures of local and transnational governance: "You are not gonna push boundaries in charity if you're not in charity" (Hilary, interview, June 2009).

#### **2.2.1.1 War on Want's structural development**

Developing from a campaign to an organisation, War on Want was founded in 1959 and registered as a charity in 1962. The organisation continued its political approach to ending world poverty in the 1960s, but encountered financial difficulties. In 1970 a new general secretary, Dr Victor Powell from the Manchester Business School, was

hired to stabilise War on Want's financial situation. In doing so, Powell moved from the voluntarism that had characterised the organisation so far, bringing on board professional staff and rationalising the organisation's press and printing departments (War on Want Annual Report, 2008: 2; Luetchford and Burns, 2003: 68; for a discussion on radical print shops in London in the 1970s see Baines, 2009). Further, local War on Want groups were restructured into a regional model. Now with a financially sound organisation, in 1973 Peter Burns was recruited to return the organisation back to a radical orientation. This entailed a focus on multinational corporations' relations with the developing world, including the exposure of the baby foods industry's promotion of infant milk, which had failed to provide ample information about hygiene and clean water. However, the organisation's radical orientation caused the Charity Commission to pay attention to it at several points. One instance was in the 1970s, when the organisation decided to sell their print unit, following criticism from the Charity Commission that some of the unit's clients did not have charitable aims. The late 1970s saw further initiatives by the Charity Commission which could have restricted War on Want's campaigning activities by stressing that charities should focus on 'bandaging the wounds of society' rather than preventing their occurrence (Luetchford and Burns, 2003: 107). War on Want protested, arguing that poverty and politics were intrinsically interlinked. But, ultimately, this incident led to the establishment of the non-charitable War on Want Campaigns Ltd. which was to campaign on highly political issues. Nevertheless, throughout its history, War on Want has been renowned for its attempts at challenging the regulations that prevented charities engaging in political activity.

Another central issue in War on Want's history of campaigning is the focus on human rights in Palestine. This was first initiated in the 1980s with British trade unions in an attempt to help Palestinian trade unions with health care issues (Luetchford and Burns, 2003: 146). In some ways, War on Want's campaigns on Israel's occupation in Palestinian territories has come to distinguish War on Want vis-à-vis other radical SMOs in its organisational field (Steve, interview, March 2009). For example, War on Want staff have reportedly received abusive calls from Zionists. Also, the organisation

has been the subject of formal complaints, including one from Conservative MP Lee Scott (Third Sector Online, 30 August 2007). Scott complained to the Charity Commission that War on Want campaigns declaring that the Israeli government's policies caused Palestinian poverty were too political. However, the complaints were not upheld (Luetchford and Burns, 2003).

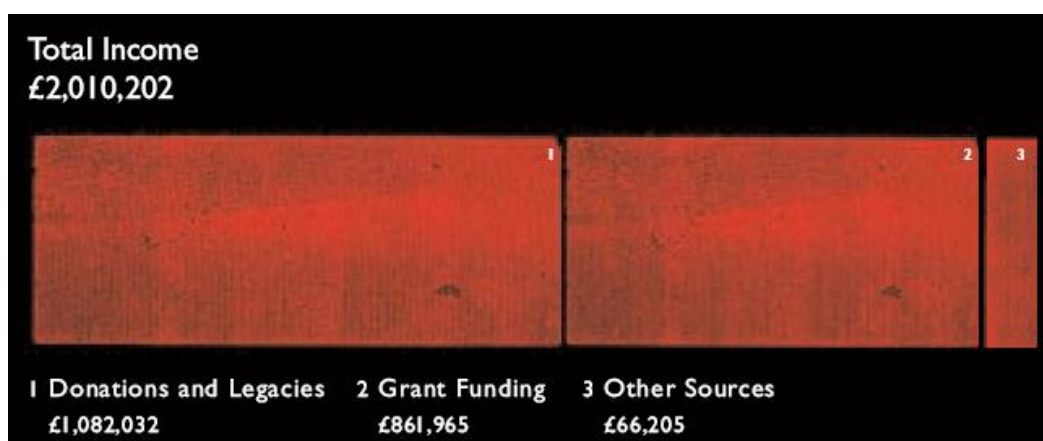
It is also important to note that at several occasions since it was established in the 1950s War on Want has struggled with financial crises, with different rescue plans instigated to resuscitate it. A particularly noteworthy case in point is the 1990 inquiry by the Charity Commission into the organisation's potential insolvency. As a way of rescuing War on Want from the call from the Charity Commission to wind it up, founder and chairman of Ethiopiaid, Alec Reed, offered to take on the organisation's debts in return for full control of its activities. However, this 'rescue package' included advertisements featuring "...'begging-bowl' imagery that had been anathema to War on Want since its foundation" and was rejected (Luetchford and Burns, 2003: 167), thus providing another example of the organisation's attempts at resisting a poverty aid frame and maintaining a politically grounded frame.

The financial crisis with which the 1990s saw War on Want struggling, left the organisation nearly extinct. Following this, the organisation was cut to the bone with no affiliated groups and a significantly reduced group of paid staff. Since recovering from its near collapse, War on Want has explicitly been linking their core campaigning issues such as worker's rights, corporate accountability and unfair trading rules to globalisation (see e.g. War on Want, 2008). In many ways, the organisation had been addressing issues related to globalisation processes throughout its existence, but campaigns such as the promotion of corporate accountability in the early 2000s explicitly promoted a construal of multinational companies' exploitation of people and the environment in poorer countries as linked to globalisation structures. Also, coalitions centred on specific campaigns such as the Make Poverty History campaign in 2005 and the Trade Justice Movement formed at the end of 2000 have globalisation as a focal point.

War on Want's current campaigns are organised around five thematic strands. These are 'supermarkets & sweatshops', 'corporations & conflicts', 'trade justice', 'fighting occupation in Palestine', 'tax dodging' and 'financial crisis – time for a new system' (War on Want Annual Report, 2009).

### **2.2.1.2 Structure and decision making process, internal governance and management**

As mentioned, War on Want is a registered charity with – following the Charity Commission's inquiries in the 1970s – an affiliated public limited company for campaigning purposes that are deemed too political to comply with the Commission's restrictions on charities and political activities. The organisation has 24 members of staff, and is administered by the Council of Management which is democratically elected annually by the organisation's members and which decides the direction of War on Want's work and activities. Anyone can become a member by giving a regular donation. Also, 'lead trustees' are appointed for each area of War on Want's work. The trustees meet with the relevant directors and staff regularly and are also responsible for appointing the executive director who manages day-to-day business assisted by the 'Senior Management Team' (War on Want Annual Report, 2009: 3).



2.2-1: Source: War on Want, Annual Review, 2009

Some of the main grant funders are the European Commission and Comic Relief (War on Want Annual Report, 2008).

War on Want has a membership base which includes 6,000 regular givers and 12,000 campaigners. The latter include activists engaged in issue-specific, often short-term, campaigns. The organisation has two student society groups at SOAS and Sussex University. For example, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) group has existed for two years with varying numbers of members primarily as a result of students graduating (Pete Chonka, interview, April 2009). The groups are not consulted annually on campaigns, but have been invited to provide feedback for the organisation's 15-year strategy due in 2010 (Hilary, interview, July 2009).

The organisation aims to build on its support base by developing its connections with youth activists. This is seen as extremely important to the organisation's profile (War on Want Annual Report, 2009). This expansion is pursued through offline as well as online promotional activities; offline activities focus on participation in youth-oriented events such as music festivals and student fairs, and expanding the organisation's range of merchandise, including t-shirts, badges, posters, etc., so as to appeal specifically to younger audiences. In terms of online activities, War on Want has started employing popular online spaces such as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube on a regular basis in order to "get in touch with audiences that were previously out of reach" (War on Want Annual Report, 2009: 8). In addition to providing a cost efficient method of reaching broader publics, War on Want's presences in popular online spaces have generated the support of more young people and have generated an increase in the number of referrals to the organisation's website, allegedly bringing hundreds of new visitors each month. Further, the number of sign-ups to the organisation's monthly email newsletter has increased by more than 2,000 during 2007/08 (War on Want Annual Report, 2009).

### **2.2.2 The World Development Movement**

WDM was set up in 1969 as a reaction to legislative structures preventing charities from directly challenging government for policy changes. Direct calls on government for a change of policy were deemed 'uncharitable' by the Charity Commission, and in response to this, the agencies connected to Action for World Development set up WDM as a non-charitable body (Luetchford and Burns, 2003: 69). In this way, WDM sprang from the same hotbed as War on Want but is not accountable in the same way to the Charity Commission's regulatory framework.

#### **2.2.2.1 Structure and decision-making process, internal governance and management**

WDM's organisational structure comprises a council, a representatives forum, a group of approximately 30 permanent staff members and 60 local groups run on a voluntary basis. WDM also has an affiliated charity, the WDM Trust.

The World Development Movement is governed by an elected council that approve the organisation's major policy positions and initiatives. The council also draw up the organisation's long-term plans and direction. The council appoint the director of WDM, and act as the legal employer of all the staff appointed by the director on behalf of Council. Each council serves for a two year term, while elected members can serve for a total of six successive years. The current council was elected in June 2008 (WDM, 2009). The council consists of nine members elected by WDM members, including three members appointed from the organisation's representatives' forum and three members appointed as required to balance the skills or diversity of the council. The positions of chair, vice-chair, national secretary and national treasurer are elected from within the council (WDM, 2009).

A distinct feature of the organisation and activities of WDM is their group structure. WDM has 60 local groups across the UK (WDM Annual Review, 2008). One of the oldest groups is the North London group which has evolved from the Camden group to

the Northwest London group and most recently to covering all of North London (Steve, interview, March 2009). This is not a common structure within WDM's organisational field, with only a few other 'campaign only' organisations emphasising group networks in their organisational structures, exceptions including Amnesty International and Friends of the Earth. The 60 groups carry out local campaigning based on guidelines prepared by permanent staff in the London office. In addition to voting for the council, WDM groups are also consulted on campaigns. Once a year the WDM office sends out a list of campaign proposals, asking members to vote on which campaigns they would like to see the organisation focus on in the coming year. Also, feedback is invited on content and strategies on the selected campaigns and on the organisational website. WDM groups were also invited to provide input and feedback for the organisation's 2008 10 year strategy WDM +10 (WDM Annual Review, 2008). Events such as the Annual General Meeting and the annual Campaigners' Convention provide forums for such feedback.

In this way the local groups are central, as WDM strives to organisationally reflect their own ethico-political agenda: "We will maintain our local groups at the heart of our campaigning strength" (WDM, 2008). The 'Movement' label is thus meant to reflect the organisation's structure, and serves the purpose of distinguishing them as an organisation within their social field (Benedict Southworth, former director of WDM, interview, July 2009; Katharine Talbot, Network Development Officer, WDM, interview, April 2009).

WDM's current campaigning revolves around three campaigns. These are 'Climate Justice', 'Trade', and 'The Financial Crisis'. In addition to these campaigns, the organisation often enters into coalitions centred on specific campaigns such as the Put People First march in March 2009, Make Poverty History in 2005, and the Trade Justice Movement, formed at the end of 2000. These all have globalisation as a focal point. Also at the level of local groups, alliances and coalitions around specific campaigns are formed. For example, the North London and Southwest London groups have both teamed up with Friends of the Earth and Central London Oxfam to lobby local MEPs to

commit to working against Europe's bilateral trade deals with countries in the global South (WDM, 2008). Some of the alliances with other organisations and activists are centred around an online presence, such as the 'Global Europe Watch' website which aims to bring together activists across Europe working on trade issues and corporate power.<sup>6</sup>

WDM also has an informal alliance with the students campaigning organisation People and Planet, which involves the two organisations recruiting members among different segments. People and Planet focuses on college and university communities through university societies, festivals, etc., while WDM targets a wider range of activists, not just focusing on students (Benedict Southworth interview, July 2009; James O'Nions interview, July 2009).

Approximately two thirds of WDM's income is provided by donations from members and other supporters. The organisation also receives funding from grant-making bodies and trusts.

#### WDM's income<sup>7</sup>

<b>Income</b>		
Individual donations	£735,879	56.96%
Charitable Trusts	£356,687	27.61%
Agencies and Institutional grants	£59,960	4.64%
Faith based organisations	£75,932	5.88%
Legacies	£34,726	2.69%
Other income	£28,632	2.22%
	<b>£1,291,815</b>	<b>100%</b>

2.2-2 Source: WDM Annual Review, 2008

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<sup>6</sup> [globaleuropewatch.org](http://globaleuropewatch.org)

<sup>7</sup> Figures show the combined income for WDM and WDM Trust.



Although set up as a limited company in response to the Charity Commission's regulatory restrictions on political campaigning, the World Development Movement Ltd does have an affiliated charity, the WDM Trust. The WDM Trust mainly serves a financial purpose, providing funds for WDM's research and education activities, and WDM then acts "as agent for the Trust" (WDM Annual Review, 2008). In this way, the Trust does not employ any staff, as this set-up entails WDM providing the services, and the trustees monitoring these services.

The Trust is governed by a self-appointed board, and board members can be re-elected and retire every five years. WDM is invited to nominate three trustees who "are selected for their knowledge and experience" (WDM Annual Review, 2008: 3). New trustees are carefully briefed, but are then expected to "keep abreast of charity requirements", as the trust does not provide further formal training (WDM Trust Annual Review, 2008: 3).

The thematic strands guiding the Trust's work are: (1) how climate change might affect development prospects; (2) the impact of privatisation on developing countries' economies, and on their poorest citizens; (3) the best way of delivering a public water supply; and (4) the widespread persistence of poverty (WDM Trust Directors Report, 2008: 2). In this way, the WDM Trust's themes reflect WDM Ltd's overall agenda, albeit there is a slight shift in terms of orientation in relation to WDM Ltd's 2009 campaign focus on climate justice, trade, and the financial crisis, as WDM Ltd's campaigns have a more focused orientation. Also, the Trust's themes reflect the educational and research-based rationale of the affiliated unit, while the campaigns are partly chosen by WDM members and serve the purpose of promoting the organisation's work.

## 2.3 Chapter conclusions

New social movements may not represent a complete break with the class related concerns of old social movements. However, the emergence of intersecting and overlapping movements around diverse issues such as gender, ethnicity, anti-war, and

the environment do represent a broadening of the scope of movement demands (Kriesi and Koopmans, 1992). With its wide-ranging perspectives on 'Global Justice', the GJM arguably provides an example of a new social movement (Fenton, 2008a). The GJM comprises numerous organisations, networks and groups. War on Want and WDM's concerns with issues such as poverty, war, trade, and the environment connect them to the GJM. Indeed, HQ staff, Annual Reviews, Reports and Strategy documents from both organisations position them in the GJM, towards the radical end. In this way, War on Want and WDM are similar in many respects. Some of their most similar traits relate to their size, local context, orientation towards the global South and place towards the radical end of the GJM. However, the two organisations also differ in many respects. While they both challenge the structures of global poverty and inequality as inherently political, they do so from different positions; War on Want tries to negotiate and contest the restrictions on political campaigning set up by the Charity Commission by pushing the boundaries from within the Commission's regulatory framework. WDM was set up precisely to circumvent these boundaries, and the organisation promotes the majority of its agenda outside the Charity Commission's sphere of influence. Also, the two organisations are structured in different ways. WDM grants local groups a relatively large degree of influence and autonomy, while War on Want tends to plan its campaigning activities centrally, with the support of a more loosely connected network. In this way, War on Want and WDM intersect at many different points on the political scene in the UK. At the same time, they each stress the ways in which they vary, conjuring up a notion of a narcissism of minor differences<sup>8</sup> (see Chapters 5, 6, and 7 for analyses of the ways in which this dynamic of compare and contrast emerges in War on Want and WDM's online campaigns, the rationales behind the online campaigns, and members' identifications with the campaigns).

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<sup>8</sup> Originally conceptualised by Freud (1918, see Werman 1988), the concept has been used theoretically beyond identity relations in cognitive psychology in IR and political negotiations (Volkan, 1987), in IR and environmental politics (Thompson, 2006), and in relation to European identities (Mayer and Palmowski, 2004).

### 3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that informs this study is mainly located within the areas of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and social movement framing theory (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Snow et.al., 1986). It brings into relief concepts of radical democracy, the public sphere, subjectivity and political and collective identity. These concepts are brought together in a conceptual framework at the end of the chapter. While this framework ranges across ontological and epistemological approaches to symbolic meaning-making, it subscribes to Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology, recasting selected concepts from social movement framing theory in this light.

This chapter does not aim to set the scene for a study that repeats previous discussions on the dialectics of democratic political debate and fragmentation. These have been important in terms of theorising and contextualising research on social movements through the emerging field of new media studies. However, given the political identity focus of this thesis, the aim is to flesh out the theoretical underpinnings of some of these debates so as to develop a conceptual framework for understanding processual, conflictual and impassioned aspects of SMO online media strategies on the basis of social movement framing and radical discourse theory. In so doing, the chapter aims to contribute to an on-going discussion on broadening the scope of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory to cultural approaches to social movement struggles.

The mapping of a theoretical framework for this study starts by introducing Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory as a social ontology, including core concepts: articulation and overdetermination, hegemony, antagonism, and logics of equivalence and difference. It then discusses social movement framing theory as discursive contestation. On the basis of this, it introduces the conceptualisations of political identity put forward in the two theoretical perspectives. Then it reviews the concept of the public sphere and specifically discusses the notion of an agonistic public sphere as a space where points of identification are offered and accepted, negotiated or rejected. Finally, against the backdrop of the theoretical framework introduced in the

preceding parts, the chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that integrates these insights, focusing on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework and social movement framing theory in an online setting. The conceptual framework thus tries to bridge cultural and political studies so as to provide a conceptual framework for exploring the ways in which SMOs use popular online spaces to promote their causes, tying together the central ideas of discourse theory and social movement framing theory in order to later operationalise these into analytical units that facilitate the empirical investigation of SMO online practices. Throughout the chapter, the theoretical debates are considered in relation to the GJM, and the review of central approaches to the concept of the public sphere is considered specifically in relation to the main debates around the role of the internet in facilitating the proliferation of non-institutional politics and fostering political engagement.

Conceptions of collective identity and strategies of visibility also feature in research in organisational studies (e.g. Carter and Dukerich, 1997; Schultz et al., 2000) and in the emerging intersection between management, organisational and social movement studies (Davis, 2005; Ganesh and Stohl, 2010; Ganesh, Zoller and Cheney, 2005; McAdam and Scott, 2005). These provide important new perspectives on strategising and sense-making in social movements. Nonetheless, with few exceptions (e.g. Böhm, Sullivan and Reyes, 2005; Fleming and Spicer, 2007) the discursive and hegemonic relations of politics and the political often remain undertheorised in these accounts, which mainly draw on critical management studies, critical organisational studies combined with an eclectic approach to social movement theory. While reviewing these accounts is beyond the scope of this theoretical framework, a derivative aim of this chapter is to contribute to the theoretical aspects of studies that engage with organisations and non-institutional politics. Here, a theoretical approach that grapples with discursive aspects of power relations is important. In the context of the GJM's concerns with globalisation, for example, discursive attempts to destabilise a neoliberal approach to globalisation as common sense bear a relationship to policy

outcomes, as they condition the way we think about, talk about and, ultimately, legislate on issues ranging from climate change to trade (Hajer, 1997).

### 3.1 Discourse theory as a social ontology

As a theory of discourse theory, Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework belongs to the post-Marxist approaches to discourse theory (Howarth, 2000). The framework's post-structuralist premises share similarities with the interplay between discourses, social practices, and social relationships and institutions in Foucaudian discourse theory, while it breaks with Fairclough's (1995) assumptions of a dialectics of mutual constitution between discourse and pre-determined structures. Moreover, in contrast to Fairclough's distinction between text, discursive practice and social practice, Laclau and Mouffe take discourse to include all social relations and practices. In this way, critical discourse analysis approaches discourse as a semiotic dimension of social practice, while Laclau and Mouffe broaden the focus to constitute the social and political world (Howarth, 2000). This difference in focus is central to the distinction between discourse *analysis* and discourse *theory*. Laclau and Mouffe's approach is thus mainly a political theory, but it also provides a set of concepts that can be taken as analytical starting points (Howarth, 2000; Carpentier and De Cleen; see Chapter 4 for the operationalisation of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory into an analytical framework). However, this holistic approach to discourse is not unproblematic and requires an account of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory as a social ontology in order to understand the role that they ascribe to discourse in conditioning politics and contestation.

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory builds on a social ontology that circumvents the distinction between materialism and idealism, between structure and agency (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008; Howarth and Stavrakis, 2000). Rather than dismissing realism as such, Laclau and Mouffe argue that the discursive conditions our understandings of the world and possibilities for action in that world:

*The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of “natural phenomena” or “expressions of the wrath of God”, depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 108)*

The foregrounding of a radical contingency of social relations entails viewing discourse as an ontological horizon (Glynos et al., 2009). This means that social and political practices are conditioned by discursive constructs. From this angle, the point is not the actual processes and structures of, for example, economy, technology, culture and governance, but, rather, the ways in which these are perceived by different actors. It is these perceptions that come to condition economic, technological, cultural and political practices. In the words of Hajer (2005a) “large groups of dead trees are, of course, not a social construct; the point is how one *makes sense* of dead trees” (p. 299, emphasis in original). In the context of the GJM, which is the focus of much of Laclau and Mouffe’s work, what is at stake is not whether a neoliberal model of globalisation renders groups of people in poverty and erodes cultural diversity. Rather, representations of globalisation and political struggles to stabilise and naturalise these representations are seen as key to conditions of possibility for political contestation. The discursive construction of a phenomenon such as globalisation as a political issue conditions the questions we can ask and the measures and remedies we can consider. In Hajer’s (2005a) example, dead trees can be taken as a consequence of “natural stress” or “victims of pollution” (p. 299). The latter constructs them as a political problem which allows for questions such as “what kind of society tolerates dying

forests?” (Hajer, 2005a: 299). In the context of the interests of the GJM, the social inequalities of the “globalized world” have come to “appear as fate”, “a historical necessity” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: xvi). Reconnecting these inequalities to their grounding in “relations between capitalist corporations and nation-states” (ibid) opens up possibilities for tackling them as political problems that require policy changes beyond “the neo-liberal order” (p. xvii).

### **3.1.1 Articulation and over-determination**

The social construction of our understandings of and thus capacities to act upon processes such as globalisation is premised upon the concept of overdetermination (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). There is always a surplus of meanings, rendering possible struggles over interpretations:

*Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 98)*

In this perspective, struggles over interpretations are struggles to temporarily fix meanings. The temporary aspect – or partial fixation – is central to the notion of overdetermination. Any fixation of meaning can only be partial, it can never reach “total closure” (Howarth, 2000: 122).

Critiques of relativism have been levelled against Laclau and Mouffe’s break with any notion of an essence of the social and predetermined structures (Geras, 1990: 99, see Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, for further discussion). Laclau and Mouffe’s social ontology implies that structures cannot be determined and be determining (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). Rather structure is only ever “one of the possible articulatory ensembles” (Laclau, 1990: 43). Yet, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112, see also Mouffe, 2000) are not suggesting a relativism of “everything goes”. The impossibility of final fixation of meaning does not mean that the social is reduced to escapism or anarchism (Howarth, 2000). They argue for the dynamics of overdetermination and partial fixity

as a position between voluntarism and structuralism. From this angle, the partial fixity of discourses works as partial limitations, structuring conditions of possibility (Dallmayr, 1987, 2001). Without such temporary fixations no meaning would be possible: "... a discourse incapable of generating any fixity of meaning is the discourse of the psychotic" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112).

It is this impossibility of a discursive totality that enables articulatory practices. The analytical aspects of articulation and its related concepts are outlined in the analytical framework (see Chapter 4). However, an excursion into the theoretical presuppositions and implications of these concepts is warranted in order to account for social practices in which social agents articulate discursive elements (Glynos et al, 2009). Thus, it is important that practices of articulation are situated at an ontological level rather than only at an epistemological level. The concept of articulation is defined as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 105).

*The practice of articulation consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 113)*

Discourse then is "the structured totality resulting from this articulatory practice" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 103). The nodal points that partially fix the discourse are privileged signifiers (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 112). They fix the meaning of a chain of signifiers (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008). Signifiers comprise both moment and elements. Moments are signifiers that "appear articulated within a discourse" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). Elements are signifiers that are not yet "discursively articulated", but "floating" in character during periods of crisis and dislocation (ibid). "[O]verflowed with meaning", floating signifiers can be articulated so as to assume different meanings in different discourses (Torfing, 1999: 301). Yet, no such discursive



articulation is ever final (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). It is always contingent and not anchored in presuppositions of any predetermined essential meaning (ibid). It is this contingency that enables possibilities for discursive struggles over meaning as social agents compete to (re)articulate and dislocate momentary fixations. From this angle, discursive articulation is conditioned by the “availability” of elements and the “creativity” of the social and political agents involved in the articulatory practice (Griggs and Howarth, 2004: 185). In the context of the GJM, a central struggle revolves around struggles to destabilise the articulation of globalisation as a set of processes grounded in neoliberal logics. The naturalisation of globalisation as premised upon economic growth involves articulations that link growth and deregulation to prosperity. A successful destabilisation of “globalisation” as necessarily neoliberal would render “globalisation” a floating signifier. When such attempts at rearticulation require “creativity” on the part of political agents it is because the momentary stability of globalisation as neoliberal has achieved hegemonic status (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

### **3.1.2 Hegemony**

Laclau and Mouffe’s social ontology involves a strong attachment to a Gramscian concept of hegemony (Mouffe, 1993; Torfing, 1999). Laclau and Mouffe conceptualise hegemonic practices as political activity that involves the articulation of different identities into a common project (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112). Hegemony is predicated on the articulation of political identities in relation to antagonism (Torfing, 1999). This involves the existence of antagonism, as well as the unfixedness of the political frontiers that divide them:

*The two conditions of a hegemonic articulation are the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of the frontiers which separate them. Only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps – which implies a*

*constant redefinition of the latter – is what constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 136)*

This understanding of hegemony as the process whereby the articulation of elements and their meaning are (momentarily) stabilised further highlights the power relations at play in the construction of ‘common sense’ in a particular space or sphere of the social, or in society more broadly (Böhm et al., 2005; Griggs and Howarth, 2004). Pointing to interconnections between resistance and culture, Gill (2003: 61) argues that “problems of hegemony involve not only questions of power, authority, credibility and the prestige of a system of rule; they also involve the political economy and aesthetics of its representation in culture and its media.” (quoted in Böhm et al., 2008). From this vantage point, neo-liberal articulations hegemonise the field of discursivity that surrounds the intersection of processes of globalisation and political engagement (Mouffe, 2000). The promotion of individual oriented initiatives such as civic consumerism and corporate social responsibility schemes as solutions to issues of climate change and third world poverty can be seen as part of a neoliberal model of societal organisation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006; Chatterton, 2006). The implications are two-fold: First, taking a neoliberal model for granted as the only approach to globalisation processes short-circuits possibilities for questioning presuppositions of economic growth as vehicles for democratisation and for debating alternative approaches (Mouffe, 2005: 51). Second, unequivocally viewing modes of political engagement that respond to problems associated with globalisation processes from a neoliberal perspective attaches their possibilities for action to civic consumption and voluntary corporate codes of conduct (Böhm et al., 2008). Anchoring political identity formation and political expression in civic or ethical consumption and corporate social responsibility brackets off possibilities for discussing the importance of policy initiatives that contribute to the construction and maintenance of regulatory frameworks that can ensure corporate accountability (Chatterton, 2006; Halkier, 2001). Consumerism comes to replace legally anchored structures of governance

(Chatterton, 2006). These issues lie at the heart of Mouffe's (2005: 50-56) argument with Giddens' (1991) notion of life politics and Beck's (1994) notion of subpolitics. Mouffe (2005: 50) argues that the grounding of these notions in individualism removes them from conceptualisations of collective power, which are essential to any counter-hegemonic project.

### **3.1.3 Agonism and antagonism**

Mouffe (1998, 2005) stresses antagonism as inherent to political engagement. Warning against the centrist third way politics promoted by Giddens (1998), Mouffe (1998: 13-14) argues that eliminating conflict and dissent from the political arena risks seeing democratic confrontation "replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identifications as is the case with identity politics."

To Mouffe (1998) relying on a politics of 'dialogue' and 'reflexive modernization' (Giddens, 1998) is capitulating to neoliberal hegemony rather than trying to challenge it, because "to be radical ... is to aim at a profound transformation of power relations." (Mouffe, 1998: 19-20). Challenging power relations requires drawing political frontiers and defining an adversary or enemy. Grounding the responsibility for alleviating climate change or eliminating poverty in civic or ethical consumption fails to challenge these power relations, because it "takes for granted the ideological terrain which has been established as a result of years of neo-liberal hegemony ... and reinforce[s] the power of big transnational corporations " (Mouffe, 1998: 18). The insistence on overcoming left/right distinctions denies antagonism in the centrism of a politics of dialogue. This impedes the possibilities of a counter-hegemonic strategy that aims to challenge precisely these relations of power:

*To believe that one can accommodate the aims of the big corporations with those of the weaker sectors of society is already to have capitulated to their power. It is to have accepted their globalisation as the only possible one and to act within the*

*constraints that capital is imposing on national governments.*  
(Mouffe, 1998: 19)

While antagonism is central to addressing and challenging relations of power and their constitutive role in society, the co-existence of disagreeing voices requires respect. Responding to issues brought about by extreme right discourses in society, Mouffe (2000) proposes the importance of turning antagonism into agonism. From this angle, “antagonism proper” is the friend and enemy relation, the “we/them” distinction (Mouffe, quoted in Miessen, 2007: 3; see also Cammaerts, 2009). Agonism is the construction of the “them” that construes the enemy as an “adversary” rather than as an enemy to be eliminated (Mouffe, 1998). An adversary is a “friendly enemy”, somebody whose ideas we contest while acknowledging her right to defend those ideas (Mouffe, 2005). The point of agonism is not to eliminate antagonism. Rather, Mouffe (quoted in Markus Miessen, 2007: 3) argues “there can exist between them what I call a conflictual consensus. They agree on the ethico-political principles that inform the political association but they disagree about the interpretation of those principles”. A political approach to inequalities points to the significance of movement actors’ roles as producers of agonistic confrontations – promoting confrontational politics while also turning antagonism into agonism (Mouffe, 2000).

Yet, it is important not to let the proposal that we turn antagonism into agonism lead us into a trap that conceptually treats the two as polar categories. Conceptually, overcoming a binary opposition between antagonism and agonism as discrete categories allows us to analytically and empirically approach antagonism and agonism as co-existing and sometimes intersecting dimensions of political practice; actors may assign the role of antagonist to be eliminated from the political arena in one context, but open up for mutual contestation, now construing the same actor as a legitimate opponent whose voice is important for a meaningful debate to take place. These contextual shifts are related to the construction of chains of equivalence. Therefore, similar tensions of fluidity must be considered in the conceptualisation of chains of equivalence and the logics of equivalence and difference that underpin them.

Antagonistic practices link together political struggles in so-called chains of equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

#### **3.1.4 Logics of equivalence and difference**

The concept of chains of equivalence works on two levels: at a discursive level and at a level of antagonistic practice as alliance construction. Discursively, chains of equivalence entail the articulation of elements and floating signifiers along an axis of equivalence (Glynos et al., 2009). At the level of antagonistic practice, chains of equivalence entail the linking together of social and political demands and struggles in alliances and coalitions, inscribing them into more general projects (Griggs and Howarth, 2004).

Yet, the articulation of chains of equivalence at a discursive level and political practice level are interrelated. This interrelation is inherent to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) social ontology, because it is premised on a view of discourse as constitutive of social naturalizations that can come to have structuring implications in society. As floating signifiers are forms of representation emptied of ideological and semantic content and thus open to articulations in relation to new demands and meaning, they serve as points of symbolic identification for a different groups and actors with divergent interests as they discursively and politically link these interests in chains of equivalence (Laclau, 1996; 2005). This is illustrated in Griggs and Howarth's (2008) example from the response from the proponents of an airport expansion to protests against a new Stansted terminal:

*Following Laclau, the logic of linking demands together into an equivalential chain involves the production of 'empty signifiers' – signifiers such as 'freedom to fly', 'sustainable aviation' or 'demand management' – with which subjects can identify. (p. 128)*

Chains of equivalence draw up "the frontiers which separate" political struggles (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 136), and, in so doing, identify the antagonists that come to work as

a constitutive outside to the construction of political identities. At the same time, the construction of alliances helps grant leverage to counter-hegemonic struggles. Alliances can be formed along a wide range of possible constellations. The construction of alliances helps strengthen counter-hegemonic articulations, but they also risk diluting these articulations. The broader an alliance is, the greater the risk of dispersion and difficulty of identifying a common enemy.

In contrast to the logics of equivalence that are at play in the construction of equivalential chains, logics of difference work to dissolve chains of equivalence and displace antagonistic polarities, and, in so doing, potentially relegating that chain's groups to the margins of society (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). Political actors and institutions may counter the recognition of interests, or break up the equivalential construction of interests so radically that they are rendered less threatening and more manageable as oppositional elements (Howarth and Griggs, 2008). Nonetheless, logics of difference are important to democratic pluralism; the multiplicity and diversity of voices, agendas, and modes of action that make up the GJM would be eradicated without some degree of logic of difference. Here, it is important to note that if taken to the extreme, the logics of equivalence and difference may both relegate groups to the margins of society (Dallmayr, 1987) - albeit neither logic is able to achieve complete self-closure. The challenge for democratic discursive practices is to balance articulations based on logics of difference and equivalence, to balance fission and fusion. If taken to its extreme, then, a chain of equivalence may polarise society into two hostile groups that operate based on the negation of the other. In its extreme, the logic of difference may work to disarticulate political alliances and weaken attempts at resistance (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

In ideal terms, the logics of equivalence and difference form opposite poles of a continuum (Griggs and Howarth, 2008). However, this does not mean they are mutually exclusive. There is always a complex interaction between the two (Howarth, 2000). This impossibility of final closure enables articulatory practices and resistance. In this way, hegemony presupposes a social field criss-crossed by antagonisms, and the

presence of elements that can be (re)articulated into oppositional political projects (Howarth and Stavrakis, 2000). Here, logics of equivalence and difference help explain the ways in which practices emerge, are contested, and potentially transformed. Political logics help conceptualise processes of collective dissent that seek to rearticulate social and political relations, and which involve constructing and sustaining political frontiers. But they also help conceptualise those processes that seek to dissolve alliances and break up the drawing of frontiers (Glynos et al., 2009).

The interplay between these two logics is crucial. Mouffe (1998) takes great care to argue that the construction of chains of equivalence should not be seen as eliminating possibilities for diversity within a chain. Here, the interplay between logics of equivalence and difference helps capture the dynamics of disagreement and plurality in alliances. Yet, this has to be taken a step further. The construction of chains of equivalence at the level of political practice is highly contingent and can take different shapes across contexts; social movement actors construed as allies in one context may be ascribed roles as agonists and work as a constitutive outside in other contexts. At the radical end of the GJM these contingent roles are often ascribed to larger NGOs. NGOs such as Oxfam and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) can be seen as allies, while at the same time they are also seen as agonists, because they focus on development and aid rather than changing the structures of governance that precipitate needs for development and aid. In this light, it is helpful to approach equivalential and differential logics as dimensions that can be conceptually distinguished and work within a dialectics of mutual co-constitution (Griggs and Howarth, 2008) as well as have fluid boundaries that do not preclude the simultaneous occupation of positions at both sides of the frontier.

In an online setting, possibilities for promoting articulations of global justice issues more speedily and at a lower cost also increase the movements' capacity to target international institutions or corporate actors directly (Crossley, 2003: 689). This type of agency can, for example, be traced in research on the implications for businesses' corporate identity and legitimacy, and how the negative publicity can be mitigated

through PR and CSR initiatives (Roper, 2002: 116). Karagianni and Cornelissen argue that “it is now essential for corporations to have the mechanisms in place in order to be able to detect, anticipate and effectively deal with these campaigns” (2006: 168). In this way, GJM actors’ efforts to enforce transparency and accountability have brought about the politicization of the corporation (Palazzo and Scherer, 2008: 81).

The constitutive role of discourse that underpins Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) social ontology is echoed in more recent approaches to new social movements. The discursive turn in social movement theory puts to the fore discursive aspects of grievance promotion and political engagement in the non-institutional realm (Benford and Snow, 2000; Johnston, 1995; Polletta, 1998). Here for example, the discursive articulation of chains of equivalences resonate the framing perspective’s concept of frame alignment.

### 3.2 The discursive turn in social movement theory

In this section, this purposive literature review focuses on the framing perspective in social movement theory. More particularly, it outlines the ways in which the framing perspective relates to notions of social movement identities in an online context.

As discussed in Chapter 2, new social movements can be seen as concerned with “the everyday” which simultaneously invoke politics, cultural expression, and material production (e.g. Cohen, 1985). The discursive turn in social movement theory shifted focus from emphasising structural and instrumental issues to also pay attention to the role of discourse in shaping social movement activities.

In social movement theory the framing perspective is connected to this discursive turn, and, drawing on notions from symbolic interactionism, began to establish itself as a perspective in North America in the 1980s. Other dominant perspectives are political opportunity structures and mobilisation theory.



As a theory of discourse, the framing perspective is informed by positivist and empiricists assumptions (Howarth, 2000). Approaching discourses as frames or “cognitive schemata” entails strategic underpinnings. This means viewing discourses, or frames, as intentional and instrumental constructs that can shape and guide collective understandings for specific purposes and goals (Snow and Benford, 1988; Howarth, 2000). From this vantage point discourses as frames are:

*...a general, standardized, predefined structure (in the sense that it already belongs to the receiver's knowledge of the world) which allows recognition of the world, and guides perception. (Donati, 1992: 141–142)*

This presupposition of a pre-discursive structure of meaning is significantly different from Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework's view of discourse as always unstable and contingent (Howarth, 2000). Taking care to keep these caveats in mind, social movement framing theory's approach to discourse as strategic constructs can be seen as complementary to counter-hegemonic articulation, capturing the intentional meaning-making aspects of rearticulation (see Chapter 4 for a further discussion of the implications of the different epistemological and ontological assumptions that inform the two approaches).

Political opportunity structures focus on conditions that influence agents of resistance and social movement groups' access to the political process, including aspects such as institutional possibilities for participation, political alliances, the stable or fragmented alliances among elites, level of repression (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1988; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996; Tarrow 1994). The mobilisation perspective focuses on the structural shifts that provide agents of resistance with the resources to engage in collective action, including tactical repertoires (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1988; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). In this way, the mobilization perspective is primarily concerned with the state as the target of protest based on presuppositions of rationality.

Framing tries to account for the ideational and symbolic issues that are eclipsed in these two perspectives by focusing on social constructivist aspects of meaning-making and processes of interpretation (Snow et al., 1986). This perspective is concerned with strategic attempts to construct, disseminate and negotiate the discourses and narratives that describe a movement so as to understand the perceptions and motivations that condition social movement actors' claims and action (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996)

While political opportunities and mobilization perspectives tend towards an ontology that favours structural determinants, the framing perspective is concerned with the dialectics of structure and meaning. Within this framework, the notion of collective identity formation works as a concept for exploring the motivations and understandings that guide collective action (Melucci, 1996: 77-78). In this vein, the framing perspective can be seen as central to studies that aim to account for the cultural and identity related aspects that play an important part in the protest issues of new social movements (Buechler, 1995).

### **3.2.1 Framing contestation in an online setting**

The role of the internet in relation to new social movements and the internet tends to mainly centre around political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes (see e.g. della Porta, 2005). In terms of mobilizing structures a largely descriptive approach focuses on means that enable users to organize and engage in collective action such as member recruitment, organising protest events, manuals (e.g. how to climb a building), and petitions (Garrett, 2006: 203). The political opportunities perspective argues that the internet is potentially global in scope and relatively free from coercive regulation and gatekeepers (in democratic societies), although concerns regarding state and corporate restrictions are gaining momentum (Dahlberg, 2005). Examinations of framing processes attempt to uncover activists' strategic attempts to

shape and contest the discourse used to describe a certain movement in order to justify their causes and motivate action (e.g. Olesen, 2005).

As the internet provides possibilities for bypassing traditional media gatekeepers, this holds significant potential for social movement organisations' representations of themselves. Although the creation and use of activist news media to bypass gatekeepers is not new, the internet has not only significantly reduced the required resources (Garrett, 2006), but also offers multimodal platforms for doing so.

Snow and colleagues (1986) introduced the concept of collective action frames into social movement theory as a way to conceptualise and analyse the production and maintenance of meaning. This perspective is anchored in Goffman's (1974) notion of frames as "schemata of interpretation" that ascribe meaning to issues and enable individuals to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" issues and events. Earlier studies of social movements, especially from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, problematised the ways in which grievances were often taken for granted (e.g. Turner, 1969; Gamson, 1975, 1992). The introduction of a framework that pays attention to strategic and interpretative processes more specifically conceptualises frames as discursive constructs which are used to win allies to the cause and mobilise members and bystanders in a highly strategic manner (Snow et al., 1986), for example by casting people as "potential agents of their own history" (Gamson, 1992: 7).

More recently, there has been a tendency for research on the media and social movement framing to focus on mass media framing of social movements, e.g. media representations of social movements as agents of possible change. Often, the anti-globalisation movement has been treated as centred on a uniform cause, disregarding the diversity of SMOs dealing with issues which in different ways are related to globalisation issues, and not necessarily concerned with opposing globalisation as such as an 'anti' prefix would imply (Benford and Snow, 2000; ; Johnston and Oliver, 2000; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996).

With the internet increased possibilities for editorial control allows SMOs to frame their organisations by defining the problems they seek to solve, to establish the causes that originated them and to outline alternatives and strategies to overcome them (Gamson, 1992; Snow et al., 1986). Focusing on the movement level, recent studies have begun to address these possibilities for self-framing in terms of transnational solidarity networks and the dynamics of competing frames in an online context (e.g. Eschle, 2004; Olesen, 2005; Pickerill, 2009).

Also, the possibilities of the online realm for integrating the audio-visual with text, introducing new forms of communication and a complex application of multimodal forms of communication, provide SMOs with new possibilities for promoting strategic frames (Iedema, 2003: 38). In this vein, Pickerill and Webster (2006) note that activists carefully consider what information and visual representations they will use to best convince broader publics of the legitimacy of their agenda and mentions an example of an animal testing campaign focusing on the vulnerability of the animals while showing the brutality of the experiments, in this way excluding information or complexities which might mitigate its arguments (Pickerill and Webster, 2006: 275).

### **3.2.2 The Global Justice Movement: framing globalisation from below**

Centred on issues such as ethical consumption, fair trade, ecology and women's rights, the shift from a focus on a Marxist paradigm to struggles connecting issues of capital and labour to issues of lifestyle which characterises new social movements is echoed in the GJM. However, the notion of a global justice movement is a contested one, and lies at the heart of a wide range of SMOs' framing strategies and negotiations; many social movement organisations have attempted to reorientate the GJM by moving from using labels such as 'anti-globalisation' and 'anti-capitalist' to labels evoking notions of what the movement is for (Eschle, 2004; Garrett, 2006).<sup>9</sup> Thus labels such as the 'Global

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<sup>9</sup> This label not only emerges as an intra-movement tendency, but is also produced from relationships between members, allies, bystanders and mass media counterframing (Hunt et al., 1994)

Justice Movement', the 'Global Democracy Movement', or 'Alter-Globalisation Movement' emerge, proposing alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation and contesting the increasing power and exploitative practices of corporations, the growing influence of international financial institutions, and policies of trade liberalisation (Eschle, 2004; Graeber, 2001).

The GJM can be considered as an attempt to provide an ideological framework to structure and connect a number of current struggles which are often transnational in scope (Held and McGrew, 2003), in this way complex rather than tied to a single set of issues or strategies (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007). In this way, the movement is not 'global justice' in any straightforward sense. It consists of a variety of social movement organisations, affiliates and opponents constructing competing movement identities (Eschle, 2004). Disparate organisations and interests thus define antagonists systemically and functionally. In different ways actors assign blame to 'those who occupy the commanding heights of neoliberal globalizing capitalism' (Fraser, 2007: 82), while situating their causes within an overall masterframe of global justice.

The move towards framing the GJM as opposing neo-liberal globalisation issues rather than globalisation per se can be interpreted as strategic attempts at frame alignment and gaining influence through alliances with institutional actors (Eschle, 2004). In this way, SMOs have been found to often have 'dual faces', adopting a 'dual strategy' which involves 'a discursive politics of identity and influence that targets civil and political society and an organized, strategically rational politics of inclusion and reform that is aimed at political and economic institutions' (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 550). However, this seems to be a contested shift within the movement, with some SMOs and groups apparently preferring to keep the 'anti-globalisation' label and extra institutional orientations (e.g. Nash, 2008).

Such struggles can be facilitated by the possibilities for bypassing mass media gatekeepers provided by the internet. Although GJM SMOs are often rooted in local

particulars, they are also connected to transnational systems and issues, representing what della Porta and Tarrow (2005) call rooted cosmopolitanism.

The implications of the possibilities for reaching new audiences is also approached by Bennett, who posits that powerful brands and their logos enable activists to get their messages into the mass media, reaching audiences who are not already politically engaged (Bennett, 2003). In this way, alter-globalisation organisations can “hold a corporate logo hostage in the media until shareholders or corporate managers regard the bad publicity as an independent threat to a carefully cultivated brand image” (ibid: 152). The view of the GJM as potentially detrimental to corporations’ images and identities is echoed in a media consultant’s point quoted by Bennett:

*I visit seventy-five boardrooms a year and I can tell you the members of the boards are living in fear of getting their corporate reputations blown away in two months on the Internet. (Media consultant Doug Miller quoted in Bennett, 2003: 143)*

Indeed, in the campaign against Nike’s use of sweatshops, the GJM successfully challenged the corporation’s PR campaigns for a fraction of Nike’s PR budget (Bennett, 2003: 152). Following the successful campaign, student activist organisations still monitor Nike’s claims of greater CSR (ibid).

Both from the perspective of social movement framing and discourse theory, some GJM actors can be seen as aiming to bring about changes which are not “a preliminary to participation in genuine politics”, but achieved by addressing consumers and corporations directly (Nash, 2001: 86; see also Crossley, 2003: 689), while others stress the importance of changing the regulatory framework that govern corporate possibilities for exploiting labour to increase profits. What counts as “participation in genuine politics” relates to conceptions of political identities and the enactment of citizenship.

### 3.3 Collective identity formation and subjectivity

Both Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework and social movement framing theory address the role of political and collective identities in extra-parliamentarian politics. Laclau and Mouffe attach great importance on the concepts of subjectivity and subject positions in their conception of discourse (Howarth, 2000). Social movement framing theory also grants a significant part to collective identity formation, albeit a less developed part (Benford and Snow, 2000). Conceptualisations of political identity formation in discourse theory and social movement framing theory differ significantly at an ontological level; the underdeveloped conceptualisation in social movement framing theory often means that collective identities are treated as pre-existing "things" (Benford, 1997: 418). This is significantly contrasted to the primacy of the discursive and contingent forwarded in Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology. Nonetheless, the two approaches share common ground.

#### 3.3.1 Subjectivity and subject positions in discourse theory

The notion of over-determination that sutures Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework entails a view of political identities as contingent and fluid. This precipitates possibilities for embracing different points of identification (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Political identities are forged through on-going processes of identification with a set of subject positions. Laclau (1990: 60-1) distinguishes between subject positions and subjectivity. Subject positions refer to the 'positioning' of subjects within a discursive structure (Howarth, 2000). The concept of subject positions serves to capture the ways in which subjects are "produced" as social actors (Howarth, 2000: 108). These subject positions are "constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation, but rather a constant movement of overdetermination and displacement" (Mouffe, 2005: 77). In this way, the political subject is constituted by multiple subject positions anchored in a multiplicity of social relations, memberships, allegiances and forms of participation.

This means that individuals can encompass several group identities or memberships at the same time (Dahlgren, 2007).

The importance of conflictuality not only works as a constitutive outside to counter-hegemonic contestation, it also plays an important role as mutually constituent of political identities, providing identification points for activists to identify with (Carpentier, 2005). In this way, political identities are intrinsically connected to logics of equivalence and difference, as well as antagonism. It follows that the possibility of simultaneously encompassing multiple political identities is not just premised upon a view of identity as contingent and unstable, but also connected to partial fixations constructed in the creation of political frontiers between chains of equivalence and adversaries. The political identity of a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore premised upon a simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal movement, as no centre of subjectivity precedes the subject's identifications:

*This plurality does not, however, involve the coexistence, one by one, of a plurality of subject positions, but the constant subversion and overdetermination of one by the others that makes possible the generation of totalizing effects within a field characterized by open and determinate frontiers. There is thus a double movement. On the one hand, there is a movement of decentering that prevents the fixing of a set of positions around a preconstituted point; on the other hand, and as a result of this essential non fixity, there is an opposite movement: the institution of nodal points, partial fixations that limit the flux of the signified under the signifier. (Mouffe, 1992: 28)*

The ways in which these political identities are played out is conceptualised as political subjectivity (Laclau, 1990; Mouffe, 2000). Drawing on Freud, Althusser and Lacan, Laclau and Mouffe distinguish between subject positions and political subjectivity (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). The concept of subject positions pertains to identification points for social agents to identify with (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007).



The concept of subjectivity concerns the agency of subjects, the ways in which social actors act. The subject is seen as required to actively identify with particular political projects and the discourses that they articulate when existing articulations are destabilised (Howarth, 2000). It is in the process of identification with rearticulations that political subjectivities are created. Once constructed and stabilised, they become those subject positions that position subjects and ascribe social actors with certain characteristics and attributes (Howarth, 2000).

Here, it is important to note that Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) notion of political identities sees these as never fixed but always contingent. The notion of overdetermination that underpins their social ontology implies a view of the subject as constituted by articulatory practices, which in turn are conditioned by discursive structures. This allows their conceptualisation to overcome binaries of voluntarism and determinism (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008; Dallmayr, 1987; Howarth, 2000).

### **3.3.2 Framing and collective identity formation**

While frames in this way are used persuasively to legitimise social movement causes and action, they are, as indicated above, discursive constructs that involve the negotiation between members as they highlight certain issues and connect and align these so as to compose a collective action frame that "hangs together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion" (Benford and Snow, 2000: 623). One aspect of this can be seen as the formation of a collective identity through which participants come to understand their involvement in relation to specific frames. The underdeveloped conceptualisation of collective identity and its construction in social movement framing theory has meant that studies that connect framing to collective identity formation are often accomplished with recourse to Mellucci (1996) and other social movement researchers at the intersection of political theory and cultural aspects (e.g. Polletta and Jasper, 2001; see also Benford, 1997).

As new social movements are not exactly seeking to displace traditional focus on Marxist dynamics of capital and labour, movement mobilisation is no longer entirely connected to coherent collective actors. Rather, movement participation involves “the search for different identities” (Jelin, 1990: 206) and articulations of signs in relation to frontiers beyond structures related to labour and capital. Melucci’s (1996) conceptualisation of collective identity formation in social movements implies that identity is created through an ongoing process of negotiation and meaning-making among participants; consensus is not to be expected (Melucci, 1989; Melucci, 1996). It follows that social movements do not act as “unified empirical datum” or “personages” with coherent identities and pre-defined interests (Eschle, 2004; Melucci, 1989). Yet, the power relations through which some movement identities become dominant over others are parenthasised in Melucci’s (1996) notion of collective identity (Eschle, 2004). This disregard is precipitated by the anchoring of the formation of collective identity in “symbolic codes” (Melucci, 1996). Echoing framing theory, symbolic codes presuppose a cognitive, empiricist approach to meaning-making which assumes that meanings reside in social practices and remains at the level of uncovering the interpretations social movement actors give to their practices rather than connecting them to the conditions that enable their politicisation and the implications this has in terms of political engagement as enactment of citizenship (see Howarth, 2000 for a discussion of structuralist approaches to discourse as empiricist). Although Snow and colleagues’ (1986) framework does not pay sustained attention to such processes, the notion of inclusivity/exclusivity in collective action frames holds the potential to interrogate such issues. Inclusivity/exclusivity refers to the degree to which frames are exclusive and rigid (Benford and Snow, 2000). The drawing of such boundaries is important, because it involves a struggle to establish the taken-for-granted social order, rendering certain discourses and frames dominant and others marginalised, thus contributing to the construction and reconstruction of social hierarchies of dominant and marginalised identities (Dahlberg, 2007: 836).

For Melucci, processes of identity-formation mainly take place in “cultural laboratories” of “subterranean” networks where movements and movement organisations meet face-to-face in everyday life, only occasionally surfacing as visible actors (Melucci, 1996: 113-116; Eschle, 2004). Whereas the internet far from offers the same possibilities for interaction as face-to-face encounters (see e.g. Thompson, 1995, 2005; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Diani and McAdam, 2003; Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993), it can provide spaces characterised by informal practices which may facilitate the negotiation of action frames and collective identity formation among social movement actors.

### **3.3.2.1 Political identity and collective identity: points of contrast and overlapping**

Thus differences exist between Laclau and Mouffe’s conceptualisation of political identity and the use of the concept of collective identities in social movement framing theory. A discourse theoretical approach to the notion of political identity as contingent and manifold entails a view of the political subject as conditioned by the subject positions available for them to identify with, as the subject is required to make choices between these offered positions (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2000). In contrast, the notion of collective identity adopted in the framing perspective hinges upon assumptions of intentionality and rationality (Benford and Snow, 2000). Yet, the tendency to treat collective identities as pre-discursive positions in studies on social movement framing (Benford, 1997) is partly alleviated by the incorporation of the concept of collective identity formation (Melucci, 1996). Coupled with the emphasis on strategy, the adoption of the concept of collective identity into the framing literature echoes the discursive construction of subject positions forwarded in discourse theory, and to some extent the negotiation of these offered points of identification in activist practices. What remains backgrounded in the framing perspective are the power relations at play in conditioning possibilities for constructing frames, and in the ways in which some frames become dominant over others. In this light, the two perspectives

place different emphases on the role of political identity in the discursive construction of contestation. The framing perspective can be seen as accentuating frames as strategically constructed discourses that offer subject positions. Discourse theory connects strategic constructions of subject positions to the discursive structures that condition them as well as the ways in which they are moulded as they are embraced, negotiated or rejected by social movement actors. A crucial space where (re)articulations are promoted, making available certain subject positions, and processes of acceptance, negotiation and rejection take place is the public sphere.

### 3.4 Social movement visibility and the concept of the public sphere

Studies on democratic potentialities of the internet often draw on different notions of the public sphere to theorise the importance of social movements' opportunities for challenging discursive boundaries of dominant discourses (e.g. Cammaerts, 2007; Dahlgren, 2005; Downey and Fenton, 2003; Fenton, 2007; Kavada, 2008). In Laclau and Mouffe's (1985: xvii) discourse theoretical framework the public sphere, or "public spaces" (Mouffe, quoted in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 973), is the multiplicity of spaces where political views and differences can be expressed and debated, and political identifications take place.

Historically, new media technologies have been greeted as ground-breaking tools for a revitalisation of the public sphere, the internet being no exception (Calhoun, 2001). Optimistic rhetoric on the advantages of the internet as a public sphere focuses on its opportunities for affording greater participation and possibilities for resistance, action and organisation by opening new terrains for groups excluded from the mainstream media to gain visibility (e.g. Bennett, 2003; Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Kahn and Kellner, 2004; Papacharissi, 2002).

In the wake of the initial optimistic views of the internet's role in facilitating discussion and contestation, thus enhancing the public sphere, a case of "novelty fatigue" seemed to bring about more bleak perspectives, including concerns about

fragmentation (Bakardjieva and Feenberg, 2004; Dahlberg, 2007; Silverstone, 2002: 767). Today, these debates have taken on a nuanced approach, addressing the interplay between opportunities and constraints, seasoning discussions on affordances by granting increased attention to practices (e.g. Coleman, 2007; Couldry, 2009).

### **3.4.1 Rational deliberation: the Habermasian public sphere**

Originally conceived in the aftermath of an “aestheticized politics” employed by the Nazis as a response to the challenge of establishing a legitimate democratic state for Germany (Garnham, 2007: 202), Habermas’ conception of the public sphere now serves as a key text in studying the media in societies which may be termed media saturated (e.g. Dahlgren 2005: 148; Peters 1993: 542).

Nonetheless, Habermas’ concept of the public sphere has been subject to much contestation. Building on a somewhat romantic notion of the 18th century public sphere of rational debate about common public interest between bourgeois, propertied men, Habermas’ initial conception of a healthy public sphere presupposed not just rationality, but also a public sphere in the singular and a view of lower social strata and popular culture as trite and the media as inherently harmful to the public sphere (Calhoun 1992: 9-10; Habermas 1992: 427 in Downey and Fenton 2003: 187). The rise of mass society has brought about a “refeudalisation” of the public sphere, breaking down the separation between public and lifeworld experiences that made civil life possible during the 18th century, and bringing the private, seen as the banal and the trivial, back into public life, corroding the possibilities for critical reflection and democratic participation (Habermas 1989). Also the upsurge of the private in terms of private enterprise is considered as contributing to the corrosion of the public sphere, in this way “colonised” by large corporations and advertisers (Edwards 2004: 116). Since the translation of Habermas’ initial conception of the public sphere in 1989, and its notion of the 18th century public sphere as a space for deliberating on equal terms, bracketing off social differences among the male bourgeois as an ideal for a public

sphere before its later corrupted by the influx of the masses and consumer culture, has generated criticism for failing to recognise the salience of agonistic debate as well as failing to include people from lower social classes, women and issues a priori labelled private (e.g. Fraser 1992: 116; Calhoun 1992: 21).

Habermas' more recent revisions of his conceptualisation of the public sphere recognise the potentiality of alternative public spheres for influencing discourse in the dominant, mainstream public sphere (Downing and Broton, 2007: 542). Also, the public is now recognised for its pluralistic diversities (Habermas, 1992: 438). Despite continuing to criticise the influential role of commercial and state interests in mass media Habermas has moved on to view these as also contributing to a healthy public sphere:

*Communication via the mass media plays an important role in the normative vision I advocate. A dispersed public interconnected almost exclusively through the electronic media can keep up to date on all kinds of issues and contributions in the mass media with a minimum of attention, even in fleeting moments during the day, in small private circles. People can take affirmative or negative positions on issues, and they do this implicitly all the time. In this way, they contribute to evaluating competing public opinions, if not their articulation. (Habermas 2006, quoted in Garnham 2007: 209)*

Yet, Habermas' conceptualisation remains anchored in a notion of a singular public sphere in which presuppositions of rationality and public/private boundaries eliminate the passionate expression and debate of conflictual views as legitimate.

Specifically in an online context, Habermas' critique of the commercial colonisation of the public sphere has been used to theorise studies that address the internet as subject to commodification. From this angle, a dominant presence of commercial, formulaic interfaces and formats and advertising revenue is argued to have more impact on programming than democratic ideals; the online is rendered a scene for

advertising rather than a space for counter-hegemonic discourse (e.g. Dahlberg, 2001). Also, a myriad of studies that advocate rational and consensus oriented deliberation have drawn on Habermas' public sphere to explore how these are played out in different online platforms as examples of 18th century coffee houses in late modernity (e.g. Papacharissi, 2002; Langman, 2005).

### **3.4.2 Subaltern counter-publics**

A key critique of Habermas has been put forward by Fraser (1992) who disputes the relegation of identity politics, especially feminist politics, to the private sphere. Further, Fraser argues against the necessity of a singular public sphere as crucial in ensuring a public domain catering for diverse identities and interests. Rather, she argues for the significance of overlapping multiple publics accommodating a widening of the 'discursive scope' of the public sphere (Haas and Steiner, 2001: 132). Here, she distinguishes between weak and strong counter-public spheres. According to Fraser (1990) subaltern counter-publics provide an arena for political voices that oppose dominant discourses and models to be expressed and gain visibility. Weak publics are formed around non-institutional politics and inferior in size, power and privileges, and strong public spheres, connected to institutional politics (Fraser, 1990).

While this dichotomous distinction between weak and strong publics to some extent is useful for understanding their connections to politics in terms of what is institutional and non-institutional, it becomes problematic when their connections to the media come into the picture. An understanding of weak publics as relegated to alternative media and strong publics as privileged with access to the mainstream media would fail to account for the increasingly blurred lines between radical, alternative, mainstream, micro, mass, etc. media as well as institutional/non-institutional politics. Bang and Esmark (2007: 42) argue for a conceptualization of weak and strong publics as placed on a continuum of "regime anchorage and culture anchorage". They argue that this would facilitate an understanding of the public sphere as a space for voices from

different constellations, including those that intersect at and cross institutional and non-institutional boundaries, cultural and political boundaries.

Also, Habermas' conception's Westphalian, national biases have been contested by Fraser (2007) and others (e.g. Stevenson 2000; Dahlgren 2005), who posit the salience of transnational movements and resistance, as economic, political, human rights, consumer and environmental issues increasingly transcend national, regional and continental boundaries.

Dahlgren (2005) points to the relevance Fraser's notion of subaltern counter-publics in an online setting as a way to theorise the mushrooming of online spaces for the expression and proliferation of grassroots politics. He cautions celebratory views of these spaces as unequivocal vehicles for a reinvigorated public sphere, as possibilities for accessing the dominant public sphere remain crucial; despite the capability of the internet's hypertextual structure in facilitating interspaciality, a lot of the information that we receive online presents one aspect of an issue, bits of information or factoids, and many spaces co-exist without ever overlapping, thus merely connecting likeminded users and failing to challenge presumptions or offer new perspectives (Dahlgren, 2000; 2005). In this view, the internet's possibilities for cheap, transnational and synchronous communication may contribute to advocacy groups only achieving visibility in counter-publics isolated from other counter-publics and the dominant, mainstream public sphere (Dahlgren, 2000).

### **3.4.3 The pluralism of an agonistic public sphere**

Against this backdrop of critique of Habermas' notion of a public sphere and the strive for consensus as exclusionary, Mouffe insists that radical democratic politics can take place in a stable space or an autonomous, mainstream sphere. Moreover, Mouffe (quoted in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 973) posits that she prefers "public space" to public sphere



*...in order to differentiate between the Habermasian model and the view I am trying to put forward. I also never speak of the public space, but rather of public spaces, because I think there is a multiplicity of public spaces. There are many different forms of articulation between all the different public spaces and it is important to work at all those different levels. (Mouffe, quoted in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 973)*

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue for the importance of radical democracy which asserts the need for a commitment to an agonistic public sphere – or spaces – that facilitates the voicing of diverse and contestatory interrogations in an extra-parliamentarian context. In this way, the conceptualisation of a public sphere that emerges from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory as a space for counter-hegemonic practices can be seen as a "plea for a radical democratic politics" developed to contribute to the theorisation of social movement struggles (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008).

The type of public sphere that Laclau and Mouffe (1985, see also Mouffe, 2000 and 2005) envision dissolves the public/private distinction. This is not a question of an infringement on the private by a unified public space as in the Habermasian conceptualisation. Rather, this blurring is precipitated by "a proliferation of radically new and different political spaces" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 181). The pluralism that underpins these political spaces does not entail the elimination of antagonism. Instead, it involves the conversion of antagonism into agonism – and enemies into adversaries (Mouffe, 2000).

#### **3.4.3.1 The political: radical democratic citizenship in an agonistic public sphere**

As an arena of politics an agonistic public sphere thus provides spaces for SMOs to offer specific subject positions, and for subjects to form political citizenship (Bakardjieva, 2009). For Laclau and Mouffe, this is a question of political identity (see

also Mouffe, 1992). This calls for an outline of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) notion of the political in relation to notions of civic culture (Dahlgren, 2005, 2009), public connection (Couldry et al., 2007) and citizenship (see Turner, 1993 for an overview). The distinction between liberal, communitarian and republican citizenship has been nuanced and challenged by numerous political theorists as well as from human geographers and cultural studies perspectives (e.g. Barnett and Low, 2004; Cammaerts, 2005; Dahlgren, 2005; Fenton, 2008a; Larner and Walters, 2004; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). The notion of citizenship that arises from Laclau and Mouffe ontology of the social as discursively constructed approaches citizenship as a "form of identification, a type of political identity; something to be constructed, not empirically given" (Mouffe, 1992: 231). This conceptualization can be seen as positioned at the edges of republicanism (Dahlgren, 2007); notions of republican citizenship break with liberalism's state-centred foregrounding acceptance of and abidance by of formal citizen obligations (e.g. voting) and communitarianism's focus on cultural aspects and social uniformity within communities (Turner, 1993). Against this backdrop, republicanism's foregrounding of active participation and 'civic virtue' resonates with radical democratic citizenship as a concept that encompasses emotional and counter-hegemonic dimensions beyond the acceptance and abidance by a formally specified set of citizen obligations (Bakardjieva, 2009: 93; see also Dahlgren, 2009; Mouffe, 2005). Yet, Mouffe (2005: 36) criticizes republicanism for not going far enough in articulating and problematising the boundary between the private and the public. Moreover, republicanism tends towards implying that it is possible for complex, multifaceted demands and interests to agree on what constitutes the public good (Mouffe, 1992). In this light, precisely what constitutes the public good is conditioned by hegemonic processes. Therefore, Mouffe (1992: 30-31) proposes a notion of citizenship that "is a form of political identity" and understands citizens as "persons who might be engaged in many different communities and who have differing conceptions of the good" (p. 30-31). Radical democratic citizenship, then, involves a form of political engagement that goes beyond the formal obligations of liberal citizenship and the collective uniformity of communitarian-republican citizenship

(Mouffe, 1992). As a form of identification, radical democratic citizenship is conditioned by the (re)articulations of subject positions enabled in a public sphere as well as possibilities for embracing, negotiating and resisting them.

Subject positions are not political by default (Bakardjieva, 2009). Both chains of equivalence, antagonism and the identification of adversaries are central for subject positions to become points of politicisation in a radical democratic project. Resisting decomposition requires a common enemy, or adversary, and hope. Conceptualising the interrelations of these aspects of collective political identities requires going beyond notions of politics proper. Responding to critiques that these interrelations are eclipsed by the primacy granted to politics over the social in their theory, Mouffe (2000) introduces the distinction between politics and the political:

*By 'the political,' I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in diverse social relations. 'Politics', on the other hand, refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political.'* (p. 101)

Drawing on Schmitt and Heidegger, Mouffe's (2005) notion of 'the political' adds to politics the dimension of the social and conflictuality which is crucial to political identity formation and engagement (see also Howarth, 2008). Connecting this to the importance of allowing for antagonism in politics while turning enemies into adversaries, Mouffe (2000: 149) argues that "the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards democratic designs."

In an online terrain, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and the idea of an agonistic public sphere, or spaces, can be seen as a normative approach to the potential of the internet for providing a space for social movements to articulate their causes without

the filtering of mass media gatekeepers (Bakardjieva, 2009; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007). This potentially facilitates key objectives for social movement: voicing issues and agenda setting. On a theoretical level, these possibilities facilitate the politicisation of subject positions and their acceptance, negotiation or rejection, by potentially enabling the identification of adversaries and linkages of allegiance. Exploring the ways in which the interplay between the articulation of counter-hegemonic discourses in a multisited and multimodal domain, and the rationales behind and identifications with these articulations is played out in practice requires a conceptual framework that captures the both the strategic and identity related aspects of political contestation (e.g. Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Cammaerts and van Audenhove, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009; Fenton, 2006).

### 3.5 Towards a conceptual framework

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, this thesis positions an analysis of SMOs' self-representations in online spaces, the rationales behind these self-representations and their role in the formation of political identities and engagement within an analytical framework that draws on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and social movement framing theory. To this end, I now set out to integrate these insights into a conceptual framework which bridges the strategic and subjective aspects of political contestation by approaching framing and political engagement as discursive and contingent constructs that involve intentional as well as affective and irrational dimensions.

First, a note on the epistemological implications of synthesising discourse theory and social movement framing theory is due. While the framing perspective breaks with the realist ontology of structural determinants and is lodged in a cultural studies epistemology of meaning and symbolic production, it nonetheless privileges a static bias and presupposes pre-determined structures that social movement actors navigate within. Particularly the presupposition of the existence of structures that actors try to

frame is at odds with Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology which is rooted in political studies. In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory structures of economy, technology, culture and governance are eclipsed in favour of the ways in which these are perceived by different actors. Pre-determined structures are disregarded, while the discursive is seen as conditions of possibility for political struggles. The discursive, again, is seen as constantly shaped by political struggles to variously stabilise (hegemonies) and destabilise discourses (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 108).

Integrating discourse theory and the framing perspective into a conceptual framework, I follow the premises of Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology and take discourse as constitutive of the social and political world, taking discourse theory as a conceptual avenue to explore these. The task of the concept of framing is to complement discourse theoretical concepts in capturing the strategic dimension of SMO contestation. In this way, discourse theory works as the overarching conceptual frame in which the framing perspective plays a supplementary role.

I thus also take the notion of an agonistic public sphere to represent an ideal sphere for radical democratic struggles and dynamics to take place. While I recognise the value of Mouffe's preference for "public spaces" discussed earlier in this chapter (Mouffe, quoted in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 973), I refer to spheres rather than spaces to avoid confusing online middle media as spaces with online public spheres (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of the decision to refer to online middle media as spaces). In other words, it is not helpful to risk collapsing online spaces into the notion of online public spheres, as this would obscure discussions of the influence of the former (technical and social construct) to the latter (conceptual construct).

Dahlgren (2005) argues that while social movement organisations externally seek to challenge dominant discourses rather than attain consensus, internally these organisations strive for some kind of consensus, often for some degree of collective identity (Dahlgren, 2005: 157). However, this suggests that the inclusive element of SMOs should not be taken for granted. The argument here is, as discussed above, that

framing does not pay sustained attention to the power relations that have implications for the ways in which some social movement identities become dominant over others (Eschle, 2004). For example, the injustice frames that are constructed around narratives of non-partisan positions rather than assigning blame to corporations and institutions may not reflect the more radical, oppositional positions of some movement actors. But the backgrounding of concerns about power relations in the framing perspective extend beyond intra-movement struggles. While the emphasis on strategy is useful for conceptualising intentions and rationales of contestation, it parenthesises the conditions that influence possibilities for constructing and promoting frames and how some discourses, or frames, become dominant over others.

In my view, the main strengths of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework pertain to its concerns with the unstable and contingent meaning of all objects and action (Howarth, 2000). This is of particular relevance to a study of SMOs' uses of the internet in constructing and promoting their causes for four main reasons: **(1)** the notion of overdetermination allows for a conceptualisation of the formations of political identities and contestation as on-going articulations rather than static phenomena that pre-exist the discursive, **(2)** the concept of antagonism provides a theoretical approach to SMOs and their role as producers of friend/enemy distinctions and promoting confrontational politics, **(3)** the concepts of logics of equivalence and logics of difference provide a conceptual and analytical construct for disentangling the nuances of SMO alliances, **(4)** the concepts of subjectivity and subject positions provide a conceptual and analytical lens for exploring radical democratic citizenship as political identity, as well as the discursive construction of points of identification and the ways in which they are accepted, negotiated or rejected along with multiple other political identities in an agonistic public sphere. Conceptualised in this way, discourse theory facilitates an understanding of agonistic practice as not aspiring to avoid, reduce, or manage visibility in order to achieve a shared communicative rationality and consensus, but, rather, to allow for disagreement (Mouffe, 2005).

The complementary conceptual lens applied in this thesis is provided by social movement framing theory. The framing perspective's strengths in capturing SMOs' management of visibility and organisational commitment in an online terrain relate to (1) its focus on symbolic meaning construction and communication as strategic practices and (2) its meso level framework for investigating communicative and cultural practices in an empirical manner. Where resource mobilisation and political opportunity approaches tend to presuppose state and resource-centred models, the framing perspective brings to the fore the link between culture and social movements actors' grievances as social constructions (Benford, 1997; Benford and Snow, 2000; Melucci, 1996). This attention to grievance construals helps theorise the generation, promotion and management of meaning-making in popular online spaces as a contextual factor that potentially facilitates SMOs' framing processes.

Social movement framing thus captures strategic aspects of symbolic meaning work that is a central part of media strategies as SMO actors construct collective self-representations. However, the assumption of pre-discursive structures that underpins social movement framing theory fails to fully account for the hegemonic relations that condition SMO actors' possibilities for constructing and promoting their causes in a field of discursivity. With this caveat in mind, I adapt the concepts provided in social movement framing theory to discourse theory's ontological presuppositions of contingency and unfixedity and approach framing as processual and contingent rather than selections and linkages of pre-existing constructs. Thus, I take frames to signify the strategic constructs through which SMO actors, often leaders (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995), construct organisational representations for utilitarian purposes with a view to obtain visibility, support and legitimacy in relation to other actors identified as important adherents (Benford and Snow, 2000) in a discursively constructed and unstable system of meaning (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). In this view, frames are not free floating but inextricably linked to struggles over taken-for-granted social orders and hence hegemony (Olesen, 2005).

Moreover, the neglect of emotions and affective appeals in social movements and the ways in which social movement organisations orchestrate and strategically deploy emotions in their collective action frames has been backgrounded in framing studies in the 1980s and 1990s (Benford, 1997: 418). The inattention to emotions and affective appeals in framing has been ascribed to Snow and colleagues' omitting these elements in their seminal article on framing and social movements (Benford, 1997). Although issues such as "affective amplification" (Benford 1997: 127-130) and "scripting of emotion" (Hunt et al., 1992: 41 -42) have been alluded to, the role of emotions and affective appeals in mobilising the passion of supporters remains largely sketchy (Benford, 1997). Nevertheless, the role of such appeals in forging emotional investment is important for social movement organisations, precisely because new social movement issues transcend traditional conflicts between labour and capital (Beck et al., 1994; Giddens, 1991), seeking to change attitudes, values and behaviours among wider publics, adherents, bystanders and antagonists (Cammaerts, 2007: 218). The notion of radical democracy in discourse theory acknowledges the value of the affective dimensions of publicness as an important dimension of political action, seeing persuasion and emotions as complementary rather than antithetical to reasoned deliberation (Mouffe, 2000; Nash, 2008). Mobilising "the passion of the actors" is an important aspect of political values, providing an intersubjective basis for forging political communities and political identities, and motivating political action toward democratic design (Mouffe, 2000; Cohen and Arato, 1992).

It is against this conceptual backdrop that this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing literature on discursive aspects of social movement contention and SMOs' uses of the internet by refining conceptual and analytical tools provided by political discourse theory and the social movement framing perspective. It does so by applying these conceptual and analytical tools to an empirical investigation of SMOs' online self-representations, the rationales behind them, and their role in forging political identities and fostering organisational commitment among SMO members.



## 4 Research design and methods

This chapter discusses both the overall research design of the thesis as well as the specific methods and research techniques used. It also addresses the methodological implications of the ontological and epistemic presuppositions of the theories on which the analytical framework relies. Discourse theory and social movement framing underpin my analytical approaches. In this chapter I argue that examining the study of how SMO actors think about, use and identify with their self-representations across online spaces requires an in-depth approach that pays attention to the contextualised articulations in interviews as well as to textual and multimodal modes of self-representations in online campaigns, both of which are aspects often neglected in qualitative content and frame analyses.

Operationalising discourse theory and notions of political identity, the study builds an analytical framework that draws on central concepts from the theoretical framework of the thesis. Here, core concepts from discourse theory work as the overarching framework, supported by elements from social movement framing and the analytics of multimodality developed within critical discourse analysis.

I begin by positioning the role of online media practices in the study and discussing how the case study can contribute to insights into the role of popular online spaces in political engagement and collective identity formation in SMOs.

### 4.1 Research focus and case study

This thesis takes online media as both the location and object of an investigation into possibilities for political engagement and political identity formation at an SMO level. In this way, online spaces are considered both as spaces where political identities are observed and as spaces that condition political identities. This means not only attending to the online media that social movement actors use, but also analysing why they use them the way they do, and how these uses are understood by social movement actors.

I focus on two specific GJM SMOs and their group members: War on Want and WDM. The GJM is made up of a messy range of overlapping and multi-level networks, groups and SMOs (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). Specific empirical focal points are needed to separate out what is otherwise a disparate field in order to better understand online media practices and highlight theoretical and analytical concepts. SMOs provide a pertinent focus for analysis because they need to mobilise and sustain a membership base as vast as possible in order to secure the resources to support their survival (Diani and McAdam, 2003). Moreover, SMOs are important because they can help provide stability during periods of decreasing visibility and between large-scale protest events (Juris, 2008). The focus on two similar UK-based SMOs is further anchored in McCarthy and Zald's (1977) notion of 'social movement sectors', later elaborated by Garner and Zald (1985), which approaches SMOs as interacting with each other within configurations of activity oriented towards change (see also Diani and McAdam, 2003; see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the GJM in the UK).

Methodologically, the study of online media debates and processes in relation to social movements and their publics has primarily focused on content analysis of websites (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2004; Mosca, 2010), emailing lists (Kavada, 2008), event-centred uses (Kavada, 2010), or link analyses (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2005). Exploring the role of online media in sustaining commitment at an SMO level requires focusing on existing members. While narrowing this focus to SMO group members reduces possibilities for exploring the role of SMOs' online media uses in mobilising among wider publics, it facilitates exploring possibilities for sustaining collective identities and belonging which this thesis is interested in. Furthermore, group members are actively involved in the SMOs on a voluntary basis. Therefore, this focus also enables extending the analysis to include their uses of online spaces for group self-representations. This additional entry point is important, because the pivotal interest of this study is to explore the interplay between rationales for, appearances of, and identifications with online articulations of contestation. SMO members' online representations of their groups can be taken to reflect what they deem important in

campaigns from the perspective of the SMOs' headquarters (HQ). In other words, the representations from HQ campaigns that members choose to foreground can be taken to reflect the articulations with which they identify or perceive as important in their own outbound online media strategies. The study further zooms in on popular online spaces as middle media so as to follow a focus on outbound articulatory practices. The foci on these spaces will be elaborated below in the sections on data selection.

This focus requires a comment on the generalisability and claims to knowledge that this study can make. First, WDM and War on Want are UK based SMOs and partly selected on the basis of these traits. SMOs are shaped by the social, political, economic and historical context within which they navigate (Tarrow, 1998: 3). Therefore, generalisability beyond a UK context or into the terrain of transnational NGOs or activist networks is problematic. The data collected from interviewees consist of self-portrayals of individual experiences that are inevitably a partial window onto rationales for the promotion of contestation or identification processes. Moreover, I only interviewed a selection of HQ staff and group members from WDM and War on Want that may not reflect a complete and nuanced span of perspectives. In order to address some of the partialities of the interviews, participant observation was used as a supplementary approach. However, the subjectivity and partiality of the interview data do not contradict Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) social ontology on which this study is based. Their social ontology entails a view of our understandings of the world and possibilities for action in that world as conditioned by the discursive (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008; Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). In this view, the point is not to discover the actual processes and structures of online media uses and their role in collective identity formations, but, rather, to identify the ways in which SMO actors highlight certain aspects of these (see also Chapter 3).

Recognising these caveats, the aim of this study is not to offer generalising explanations of online media effects, but rather a situated account of processes and practices of political contestation and identity formation in a specific social movement field in the context of online media, and to fill theoretical and analytical gaps in

relation to discourse theory and social movement framing. The study sheds light on only a particular aspect of the articulation of possibilities of online media for counter-hegemonic contestation. In this way, my thesis aims to contribute to previous research into social movements and online media by offering a case study of two specific SMOs from a perspective that remains under-researched. The purpose of this thesis is not simply to document the online media/political engagement interplay, but also to explore and offer conceptual and analytical insights beyond the confines of a geographically grounded empirical case. While claims about WDM and War on Want may not directly apply to other GJM actors, the theoretical and analytical concepts used and proposed in this thesis such as antagonism/agonism and chains of equivalence are not resolved and fixed ideas. Instead, they are engaged and presented with an aim to contribute to our understanding of the role of online media in counter-hegemonic practices and the ways in which this conditions political contestation and engagement.

## 4.2 Selecting cases

The case research design is well-rehearsed for examining specific groups of actors and the interactions between them (Tellis, 1997). Yin (1993) argues for research designs based on multiple cases so as to strengthen the empirical results as well as theoretical insights. Proponents of fewer cases stress the importance of in-depth case studies that enable time-consuming tasks of thick description and the disentangling of the minutiae and specificities that make up the cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Stake, 1995). For the purpose of exploring the interplay between rationales for, appearances of and identifications with online campaigns, a study based on just two cases was deemed more appropriate mainly for three reasons: (1) it allows a focus on depth; (2) it allows in-depth multifaceted investigation; and (3) practical necessity (McCurdy, 2009; Pickerill, 2003; Snow and Trom, 2002).

This study tries to balance the advantages and challenges of case studies by choosing two cases which both serve to illustrate practices of contestation and political identity formation in popular online spaces anchored in similar political and discursive settings. Importantly, even though both SMOs operate within the same social movement field, this selection allows an investigation of the implications of differing organisational practices on uses of and identifications with online campaigns within a specific contestatory context. Therefore, this study adopts an information oriented selection strategy (Flyvbjerg, 2001), selecting the case SMOs on the basis of expectations about their information content rather than representativeness and random sampling so as to gain a deeper understanding of the goals, processes and strategies at stake in the framing practices at different levels (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Snow and Trom, 2002).

The study further zooms in on the two case SMOs' trade campaigns. Concentrating on campaigns as a genre of mediated contestation provides a confined focus that enables selecting online spaces for analysis on the basis of campaign appearances rather than by imposing a potential bias by *a priori* selecting sites (this is elaborated below in section 4.3.1 on selection of online spaces). These campaigns were chosen for two reasons: first, they were chosen on the basis of respondents' focus, that is, because respondents foregrounded the trade campaigns as key campaigns in general as well as during the time of data collection. Second, they were chosen because they enabled comparability across online platforms. The long-running status of the trade campaigns in both SMOs (see Chapter 2 for outlines of the SMOs' other campaigns) corresponds with the interest of this thesis in political identity formation and political engagement between cycles of protest events.

The study's information-oriented selection strategy was primarily based on three criteria: (1) SMOs which have multiple online presences in popular platforms; (2) affiliations with the GJM; and (3) offline location (Dahlgren, 2000: 340). In this study, such cases would be SMOs that have "a strong outward presence on the Net" (Dahlgren, 2000: 340), that is, different online presences that they use consistently.

First, selecting case SMOs based on 'a strong outward presence' is a prerequisite for exploring SMO members' identifications with their appearances in online spaces.

The second criterion on which the SMOs were selected was their affiliation with the GJM. This meant selecting case SMOs that were concerned with problems associated with globalisation issues. Their affiliation with the GJM was not taken for granted at the outset, but identified by respondents in interviews and participant observation. In this way, the study includes organisations which may be construed by different actors as 'Alter-Globalisation', 'Anti-Globalisation' or 'Global Justice' (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Eschle, 2004).

Finally, the third criterion was offline location. Although the internet is a transnational medium and the GJM and its agenda are often transnational in scope, many GJM SMOs are place-bound, sometimes with local branches, and deal with local as well as transnational issues (Cammaerts and van Audenhove, 2005). Dahlgren (2000) also argues for considering offline location when selecting cases for comparative research on online political engagement. On the basis of this, the study examines cases that are potentially transnational in scope, but based in the UK. Therefore, the study does not centre on issues of access as these are often more prominent for social movements based in so-called 'third world' countries (Crossley, 2003: 301). Issues of access and possibilities for resistance outside a western hemisphere are immensely important in research on social movements and the internet. However, this study only includes issues of third world poverty and repression to the extent that they are part of the case SMOs' agendas, but it does not seek to evaluate the potential of the internet in facilitating a transnational public sphere. Rather, it explores how SMOs make use of popular online spaces to promote their particular construals of globalisation issues in a European setting.

In conjunction the three criteria on which the information oriented selection strategy draws also enable the identification of case SMOs that can be taken as belonging to the same social movement sector (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Social movement sectors

were initially conceptualised within the resource mobilisation perspective, thus presupposing rationality and focusing on possibilities for mobilisation within state restrictions (Tarrow, 1994). However, later developments have extended the empirical concept to more analytical concepts such as the social movement family (della Porta and Rucht, 1991), and the social movement community (Buechler, 1993). The concepts aim to capture constellations of SMOs and networks as inter-connected, sharing participants, and providing mutual support as well as cultural values (Staggenborg, 1998). It is this location of the case SMOs in an inter-connected constellation that enables an analysis of the ways in which organisational practices condition uses of and identifications with online campaigns within a specific contestatory context.

#### 4.3 Data collection and analysis

Case studies in online media studies have adopted a wide range of methods and analytical strategies: individual interviews, group interviews, participant observation, actor network analysis, content analysis, and visual analysis (e.g. Flyverbom, 2010; Kavada, 2009; Pickerill, 2003; Rannikko, 2010; Turnsek and Jankowski, 2008). This study also draws on a number of methods: discourse and framing analysis, and in-depth interviews. Balancing problems stemming from researching practices related to online media and the rapid changes that characterise technology environments, this study is situated within a limited time-frame (Pickerill, 2003). At the same time, in order to move beyond an event-centred focus and to explore possibilities for identification between large-scale events in an ephemeral environment, this study draws on the appearances of two online campaigns between November 2007 and January 2010. It focuses on WDM's and War on Want's respective trade campaigns. These were chosen because they featured prominently among the two SMOs' online campaign at the time and were accordingly reported by respondents as an important focus at the time of the interviews.

#### 4.3.1 Selecting online spaces

Reviewing the emergence of what he calls ‘multi-sited’ ethnography, Marcus (1995) lists media studies as one of the interdisciplinary fields that contributes to the development of new ethnographic practices, including ‘tracking’ strategies. Rather than conducting fieldwork in one ‘physical’ place, ‘tracking’ entails following the people, the thing, the metaphor, the plot, the life, or the conflict. This study follows two specific campaigns as they appear across online platforms. Online groups are often multinodal, connecting in multiple online (and offline) venues (Castells, 2001, 2008; Flyverbom, 2010; Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2005). The analysis traces the online presences of the case SMOs rather than *a priori* selecting spaces for analysis.

The internet is a lot of things to social movement actors. It is a place for self-representation, a place for organisation, a place for keeping updated, and many other things. Therefore, further delimitation is warranted. In tracing online presences of the case SMOs, I focus on what Resnick calls ‘middle media’ (e.g. blogs, organisation sites, e-zines, social networking sites) (Resnick, cited in Meikle, 2002: 4).<sup>10</sup> Resnick grounds this definition in a distinction between three types of internet politics: “politics within the Net, politics which impact the Net, and political uses of the Net” (Resnick, 1997, quoted in Meikle, 2002: 4). ‘Politics within the Net’ refers to the internal politics of online communities and group identity and entails email, listservs and discussion forums. ‘Politics which impact the Net’ refers to offline politics that affect the internet, including issues relating to access, ownership, control, regulation, and censorship. ‘Political uses of the Net’ refers to political uses of the cheap, fast, interlinked and multimodal possibilities provided by the internet in attempts to influence offline

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Micro media’ such as email and listservs are also important for SMOs and insight into their users would undeniably tell us more about issues such as intra-organisational frame disputes (Bennett, 2003, van Aelst and Walgrave, 2004). However, such media tend to be used by already engaged activists and are less likely to form a part of everyday practices of wider publics (Bennett, 2003; Garrett, 2006). Therefore, this study focuses on the role of ‘middle media’, and social networking and file sharing sites more specifically, in SMOs management of visibility towards broader audiences.



political agendas (Meikle, 2002: 4). This study focuses on the third type of internet politics at an organisational level: SMOs' uses of the internet for the promotion of their causes. From this vantage point I take online spaces to mean middle media. I will mainly refer to these middle media as online spaces. This term is preferred, because it has a wider resonance and, as such, was one of the terms used by interviewees.

This focus is concerned with the SMOs' outbound communication and ties in with Bennett's (2003) distinction between micro, middle and mass media. In an online domain micro media (e-mail, lists) are typically used for planning and organisation (Kavada, 2008) while middle media (e.g. blogs, organisation sites, e-zines, social networking sites) tend to serve outbound purposes (Bennett, 2003, see also Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007). As indicated above, this study focuses on middle media. More specifically, it looks at popular social networking and file sharing sites. This focus is important, because "popular media ... are the public domain, the place where and the means by which the public is created" (Hartley, 1992: 1, see also Dahlgren, 2005; Ellis, 2000; Livingstone, 2005). In an online context, popular, non-political spaces such as Facebook and YouTube have been argued to play an important role in mobilising individuals and engaging them in informal political participation (Graham, 2008: 20). In this way, going beyond their websites and alternative sites such as Indymedia and establishing a presence in popular online spaces that form part of existing and potential members', bystanders' and affiliates' quotidian practices may help SMOs sustain commitment and reach wider audiences.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Just as traditional mass media may influence SMOs' framing processes, alternative online spaces such as Indymedia may also influence framing processes, for instance in terms of counter framing, as SMO members and leaders respond to divergent views published by SMO or movement actors in such sites. Nevertheless, for the purpose of studying framing processes in online spaces that attract users beyond those already involved and the activist hardcore, alternative spaces are less significant (see e.g. Couldry and Curran, 2003; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Carroll and Hackett, 2006, for a discussion of the role of alternative online spaces sites in social movements' external communication and attempts at gaining visibility).

However, this focus was not chosen on the basis of an *a priori* assumption about SMOs' online media uses. Rather, as predicated by multi-sited ethnography, the focus on popular online spaces was chosen on the basis of the case SMOs' uses of online spaces, selecting the spaces in which their trade campaigns appear. Nonetheless, conceptualising these online platforms as 'popular' needs unpacking. 'Popular' is understood here as widespread and appreciated among broader publics (Hartley, 1992; Howarth, 2008; Laclau, 2005). This does not entail a view of popular and quality or depth as binary poles. Rather, it serves to position sites such as YouTube and Facebook in relation to online alternative or citizen media as "media produced outside of mainstream media institutions and networks" (Atton and Couldry, 2003: 579). At the same time, for the purpose of this study I prefer conceptualising these spaces as popular rather than mainstream, so as to better capture the user-generated dimensions to these spaces. In this way, the use of 'popular online spaces' in this study builds on an understanding of popular as widespread everyday uses that transcend binaries of quality/trivial and public/private (Dahlgren and Sparks, 1992; see also Chapter 3 for a discussion of public/private boundaries in relation to notions of the public sphere).

Increasingly social networking and file-sharing sites can be seen as popular in the sense sketched above, as they have become a part of everyday media uses beyond teenage communities (boyd and Ellison, 2007; Kumar, Novak and Tomkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2007).

The online sites in which WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns appear are the SMOs' own websites, MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and Twitter. A cursory outline of these spaces serves to explain their characteristics as social networking sites.

MySpace was set up in 2003 and soon became a space where indie rock bands joined individual users in creating profiles as a response to Friendster's more rigid profile regulations. In 2005, News Corporation purchased MySpace for US\$580 million (Baym, 2009).

Launched in 2004 as a Harvard-only social networking site, Facebook began supporting other schools in September 2005. Facebook then expanded to include high school students, professionals from specific corporate networks, and, eventually, opened up to everyone (boyd and Ellison, 2007). In 2007 Facebook sold 1.6 per cent of their shares to Microsoft (Baym, 2009).

Launched in 2004, Flickr was purchased by Yahoo in 2005. Organised around photo sharing, Flickr provides possibilities for users to leave comments, place notes, add tags to pictures, and create lists of connections. (Baym, 2009)

Set up in 2005 as a video sharing platform, YouTube also provides possibilities for creating a personal profile page (a channel) and connections lists (Markham and Baym, 2009; Lange, 2007). YouTube was purchased by Google in 2006 (Lange, 2007). In addition to a range of individual and collective channel categories, the site also hosts corporate and non-profit channels.

Twitter was founded in 2006. Twitter is a social microblogging site that provides possibilities for users to disseminate and read short (140 characters-long) messages. It is also a social networking site and facilitates lists of connections. In contrast to the other social networking sites listed here, Twitter is asymmetric and does not require mutual connectivity: you can follow another user without that user following you (Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev, 2011).

Following boyd and Ellison (2007), social networking sites can broadly be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a profile within a bounded system; (2) construct a list of other users with whom they are connected; and (3) view and navigate their list of connections and others' lists within the system. Social networking sites vary greatly in terms of their features and affordances, and user base, with most of them adopting a hybrid structure of social networking and file sharing possibilities (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Sites such as Facebook incorporate possibilities for file sharing, whereas YouTube and Flickr are constructed around a focus on file sharing (Baym, 2009). The proliferation of social networking sites varies greatly across

geographical regions. MySpace and Facebook dominate North America, Orkut South America, and CyWorld South Korea (Baym, 2009). MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter, the popular online spaces used by WDM and War on Want, have all been experiencing increasing popularity in Western Europe, and are the sites with the largest user bases in the UK (Baym, 2009).

#### **4.3.2 Interviews**

Face-to-face, in-depth interviews serve as the cornerstone of the part of this research that explores rationales for and identifications with SMOs' online self-representations.

Studies of SMOs and online media tend to either focus on online uses through different kinds of textual or network analyses<sup>12</sup> or motivations for and perceptions of these uses through surveys or in-depth interviews (e.g. Pickerill, 2003). Aiming to contribute empirically to research on social movements and online media, this study focuses on the gap in qualitative research that probes the intersection between rationales for and identifications with online self-representations in SMOs. Exploring the role of online media in this interplay requires paying attention to SMO members as well as HQ staff. Here, in-depth interviews enabled the generation of a series of accounts in which directors, campaign managers, and web editors were given the opportunity to talk about their rationales for using various online spaces. Similarly, SMO group members were given the opportunity to articulate their understandings of HQ staffs' and their own uses of online spaces in their own terms (Blee and Taylor, 2002; Denzin, 2009; Johnston and Noakes, 2005).

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<sup>12</sup> Focusing on online content and/or hypertextuality, these employ a range of different qualitative and quantitative methods such as content analysis of websites (Aelst and Walgrave, 2002; Mosca, 2010), emailing lists (Kavada, 2008), discourse analysis of websites (Simone, 2006), or link analyses (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2005).

#### **4.3.2.1 Interviews: Methodological considerations**

As a method, in-depth interviews are appropriate for such explorations of perceptions and motivations that aim to capture members' and HQ staffs' experiences of contention as political engagement and the role that they ascribe to online spaces in conditioning possibilities for extra-parliamentarian politics (Flick, 2006; Kvale, 1996). In providing textual depth, offline qualitative interviews enable access to this level of understanding (Orgad, 2005).

However, qualitative interviews are also associated with certain challenges. Some of the most common caveats raised against qualitative interviews and qualitative research more broadly criticise the qualitative interview for not being scientific, trustworthy, reliable, generalisable, or valid because it relies on subjective interpretations (Kvale, 1996: 284). But critiques have also been waged from within the qualitative camp. Here, concerns relate to interview methods as individualistic, idealistic, trivial, interpretist, and devoid of context (Kvale, 1996: 284-91).

Qualitative interviews are certainly not natural interactions free of power relations, neither are they objective, indiscriminate accounts. Interviews involve socially constructed interactions (Järvinen and Mik-Meyer, 2005). They are often initiated by researchers for a specific purpose. The researcher may have an educational advantage. At the same the interviewee has a 'subjective theory' based on explicit as well as implicit knowledge about the topic that the researcher is interested in obtaining (Scheele and Groeben, 1988, cited in Flick, 2006: 82). As such they involve power dynamics between researcher and researched which may influence the outcome of the interview, depending on the interviewee's perception of the situation (Kvale, 1996: 126). In this way, problems are embedded in the in-depth interview as a method and cannot be avoided. This calls for researcher reflexivity and the combination of methodological approaches so as to provide different points of entry to the research focus and thus increase the reliability of data that I discuss below as participant observation (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000). At the same time, as a response to the objectivist concern regarding accuracy or interviewee interpretation, it is important to

remember that the epistemological frame of this research entails a concern with articulations of contestation and political identity formation rather than assuming the possibility to reveal truths or an incontestable and universal picture of these processes. Therefore, in this research, interviews are considered as sites of articulation. This relates to the study's anchorage in Laclau and Mouffe's ontology of the social as breaking with the realism/idealism dichotomy (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

#### **4.3.2.2 Topic guide, interviewees and timeframe**

Aware that attending to how social movement actors perceive their activities, and what meanings emerge around their online experiences, the interview topic guides were designed around questions about how SMO staff and group members understand uses of online spaces for activism as well as their SMOs' uses of popular online spaces more specifically. The questions therefore sought to capture both the rationales for uses of online spaces, reflections on these rationales, and identifications with these rationales as they are manifested in SMO campaigns across online spaces (Blee and Taylor, 2002; Polletta and Jasper, 2001).

Following these reflections, the face-to-face interviews were designed as in-depth interviews, semi-structured, tending towards being unstructured, using a checklist of general themes and questions in a highly interactive manner. The purpose was to provide room for the interviewees to construct a sense of their experiences of the SMOs' online practices. As mentioned, the topic guides were adapted to accommodate the experiences of two different groups of interviewees: HQ staff (SMO directors, campaign managers and web officers) and members (SMO group volunteers), respectively exploring their experiences in terms of rationales and identifications. Both topic guides were open and flexible, allowing the interviewer to follow her 'hunches' (Orgad, 2005).

In order to move beyond bias often caused by focusing only on carefully managed SMO representations and the leadership level, which bracket the diversity of

negotiations at the membership level, interviews were conducted with HQ staff as well as SMO members (Blee and Taylor, 2002; Johnston and Noakes, 2005).

The interviews were conducted in London over a five-month period – March to July 2009 – with 14 respondents from WDM and War on Want. The interviews provided rich data for inductive analysis. Apart from two interviews, they lasted between 80-110 minutes, took place in a location convenient to the interviewee – the SMO HQ offices, venues for regular SMO group meetings, or the SOAS student union – and were recorded and fully transcribed. Two interviews were not face to face, but conducted as an email interview and a telephone interview, respectively. All the interviews were analysed on the basis of the analytical framework outlined below.

For the purpose of capturing rationales behind SMOs' uses of online spaces (the spaces used and the ways in which they are used) key informants from SMO HQ staff were interviewed. In WDM these included the former director, the Network Development Officer, the Campaigns Officer (also a member of War on Want's Council of Management and co-editor of *Red Pepper* Magazine), and the Web Officer. In War on Want, interviews with HQ staff included the director, the Outreach Officer, and the Trade Campaign Manager.

For the purpose of capturing SMO members' identifications with their SMOs' uses of online spaces, group members from WDM and War on Want were interviewed. Group members are members of the SMOs who volunteer to organise and promote SMO campaigns at a local level (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed outline of WDM and War on Want's organisational structures, including their group structures). Focusing on SMO group members allows an exploration of experiences of political engagement and commitment beyond participation and single-issue involvement (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the distinction between political participation and engagement). Probing issues of identification and sustained commitment requires talking to activists whose involvement extends beyond single issues or events and beyond the payment of membership fees. In WDM group coordinators and five members from the North

London and South West London groups were interviewed. In War on Want the coordinator and one group member from the SOAS War on Want student society group were interviewed. While relying on two interviews with members from the SOAS War on Want group may pose potential challenges in terms of generalisability (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000: 347), the difficulties I encountered in trying to obtain more than two interviews reflect the relatively ephemeral constellation of the student society group; student society group members are only involved on a group basis during their studies. In the case of the SOAS War on Want group this means between one and four years. Moreover, the attention that students award the group during exam periods is minimal. Therefore, the scarce access to War on Want group members can be seen as indicative of aspects of the group's set-up and practices (the implications of these tendencies in terms of identification with and commitment to War on Want and allegiance to WDM are elaborated on in Chapter 7).

#### **4.3.2.3 Participant observation**

Participant observation can help access what Gould et al. (1974: xxiv-xxvi) call 'perspectives in action' and 'perspectives of action'. Perspectives *in* action refer to talk that occurs during ingroup interaction in an on-going social context (Snow and Anderson, 1993). Perspectives *of* action are articulated to make a context or situation meaningful to an outgroup member, such as when an informant answers a researcher's questions (ibid). In order to enable perspectives in action to inform perspectives of action, participant observation served as background knowledge for conducting and analysing interviews and online campaigns.

Drawing on Lichterman's (2002) distinction between field-driven and theory-driven participant observation, the conduct and analyses of interviews and online campaign material were informed by theory-driven participant observation. Grounded in sociological theory from the outset, theory-driven participant observation entails approaching and theorising the case study "as a very specific instance of social and



cultural structures or institutional forces at work” (Lichterhan, 2002: 122) rather than as “a given subject matter ‘in the field’ [that] directs the goals of research” (Lichterhan, 2002: 122). In social movement research, this approach facilitates the connection of micro and meso level processes of contestation and identification to macro level social structures (ibid). Therefore, the participant observation in this research was guided by specific concepts of collective identity and political engagement.

Over a period of seven months (December 2008 to July 2009) I followed different WDM and War on Want online and offline activities. This included participating in WDM’s 2009 campaigners’ convention organised as a series of presentations and workshops to equip WDM members with “useful skills for campaigning for a better world”.<sup>13</sup> I also attended trade related seminars organised by War on Want and WDM North London’s MEP Hustings event. In addition to this I lurked in WDM and War on Want’s main and group-based Facebook groups and joined the North London Yahoo group.

Adopting a theory-driven approach entails potential caveats. An important point of caution in relation to theory-driven participant observation is for the researcher to let her theoretical lens become so dominant that data are ignored or misinterpreted in her search for “a theoretical prize” (Litcherman, 2002: 125) or “theoretical vindication” (Shapiro, 2002: 601, see also Glynos et al., 2009), impeding possibilities for surprises. Therefore, participant observation in this research works to support and increasing the interpretive validity of the case study (Flick, 2006; Litcherman, 2002; Snow and Anderson, 1991).

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<sup>13</sup> [www.wdm.me.uk/news/events/thinkglobal06062009.htm](http://www.wdm.me.uk/news/events/thinkglobal06062009.htm)

#### **4.3.2.4 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are important in any social science research. Fieldwork with social movements can be particularly sensitive (Litcherman, 2002). This research was conducted with an awareness of the Ethics Policy set out by the London School of Economics and Political Science and the Association of Internet Researchers' ethics recommendations.<sup>14</sup> It was ensured that interviewees were informed of the purpose and nature of the research and permission was obtained to record the interviews, as well as making it clear that the material obtained would remain confidential. Interview recordings are held by the researcher. In relation to the research observation, not all research participants were informed of the observations. However, the researcher took an overt role in relation to participants in the study. In offline settings, permission to participate was obtained from SMO organisers, HQ staff or group members. In the Yahoo group, the researcher was approved by the group administrator. Data collected from additional online presences were meant for outbound purposes. Still, administrators of the various spaces that feature affordances to potentially facilitate interaction and deliberation were informed of the researcher's interests. Finally, interviewees were given the opportunity to read and comment on the analyses of data obtained on the basis of their accounts. The latter is not an issue about ethics guidelines but an issue about an ethical duty of care to the research subjects.

Having explained the conduct and methodological considerations of the overall research design of this study, I now turn to the analytical framework which has been developed and employed to analyse the data collected on the basis of multi-sited ethnography, interviews and participant observation.

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<sup>14</sup> [aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf](http://aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf)

### **4.3.3 Analytical framework: discourse theory as an overarching analytical lens**

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and notion of radical democracy has been criticised for remaining at an abstract level and failing to provide a set of methodological guidelines (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008; Howarth, 2000). In order to respond to these difficulties and to contribute to the development of an analytical infrastructure, the analytical concepts offered in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory are put to work in combination with analytical tools from social movement framing theory and the analytics of multimodality developed within critical discourse analysis. In social movement theory, the framing perspective tends to focus on social movements' self-presentations vis-à-vis external actors. This involves an approach to social movement communication as strategic. Rather than merely a strategy, framing should be understood as a 'battle for symbolic encoding' – in terms of strategic outbound communication and inbound among rank-and-file members (Swidler, 1995).

Discourse theoretical concepts are useful for analyses that are aimed at unravelling the complex interrelations between representations, practices and identities, and the ways in which they condition possibilities for contesting dominant meanings. To be sure, the operationalisation of discourse theory into an analytical framework is challenging. Yet, Blumer's (1969) suggestion that we approach the concepts of social theory as 'sensitizing concepts' that suggest 'what to look for and where to look' is helpful (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007). In this thesis the translation of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory into an analytical framework is supported by the analytical toolbox provided by the concept of framing. Further, the analysis of the campaigns in online sites requires attention to the multimodal environment of the internet (both in format and content) and its ephemeral qualities that are very different from that of print media and non-interactive electronic media (Chouliaraki, 2010; Livingstone, 2007). The project will, therefore, also look into the multimodality of campaign texts and will also rely on existing tools for analysis of the technologisation of action and multi-modality

of mediation (difference within the semiotic) (Chouliaraki, 2006a, 2010) within the overarching discourse analysis.

#### **4.3.3.1 A three-dimensional analytical focus: rationales, online campaigns, and identifications**

Focusing on the role of online spaces in the two case SMOs, the analysis will examine three aspects of their online communication practices. First, it seeks to uncover the rationales and intentions behind the SMOs' promotion of the trade campaigns in online spaces. For this purpose, an analysis of interviews with campaign managers and directors from the two case SMOs serves to unveil their understandings of their organisations' positions and aims and the translation of these into outbound communication. Second, it analyses the online texts, including audio and visual material, in order to unveil the contestatory stances and subject positions articulated in the SMO campaigns as they are manifested themselves in the different online environments. Third, the analysis attends to interviews with SMO group members in order to elucidate the role of strategic contestation articulated for outbound purposes, and specifically the ways in which they are portrayed in popular online spaces, in conditioning political engagement and collective identity formation among SMO members.

In this way, political discourse theory and social movement framing theory serve as analytical lenses to interrogate the tripartite focus on practices of contesting neo-liberal globalisation in online spaces and political identity formation in terms of the interplay between (1) *rationales* for using online media for contestation, (2) *manifestations* of the rationales as they appear across online spaces, and (3) *identifications* with these appearances as they are expressed by SMO members.

Because this entails analysing online self-representations as they appear in text and multimodal formats as well as rationales for and perceptions of online media uses as they are expressed in interviews, challenges connected to variations across data arise.

In responding to these challenges of heterogeneity of data, the analytical framework adopts a two-fold approach, distinguishing between outbound framing (appearances; online campaigns) and intra-organisational framing (rationales and identifications; interviews). The former focuses on the textual and multimodal articulation of interpretative repertoires: hypermediacy and spacetime (Chouliaraki, 2006a), motivational framing (agency) and subject positions. The latter focuses on rationales for and negotiations of outbound frames: the processes through which shared understandings of outbound frames are first constructed (HQ interviews) and then negotiated at an intra-organisational level (member interviews) as the subject positions made available in the proposed frames are partially accepted and rejected.

#### **4.3.3.2 The epistemology of discourse theory, framing theory and multimodal analytics**

Before digging into the specificities of operationalising these concepts and their challenges into analytical categories, an elaboration on the epistemological presuppositions of the theories introduced in Chapter 3 is required. These have analytical implications, because discourse theory's focus on discourse-as-representation entails a blurring of the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), while the analytics of hypermediacy and technologisation of action are anchored in critical discourse analysis which views discourse as a dimension of the social in a dialectical relationship with structural dimensions that condition the discursive (Chouliaraki, 2008).

For the purpose of analysing the articulation of contestation in online spaces, the two need not be contradictory. Indeed, they can be seen as complementary as the latter provides an approach to multimodal dimensions in a non-deterministic manner, insofar as it conceives of multimodality beyond affordances – capturing the ways in which modes of presentation, verbal-visual correspondence, and the aesthetic qualities of online campaigns condition complex processes of meaning making. In this

way, the multimodality of mediation as connected to agency and modes of action are important for analysing the manifestations of contestation across online platforms as articulatory practices in a field of discursivity.

Dovetailing on these premises are the dialectics of continuity and partial fixity in discourse theory. This complements the static tendencies of framing theory, while recognising the significance of the partial fixity of meaning. Yet, the challenge that follows from the presupposition of nonfixity is that any analysis of hegemonic practices will inevitably be shooting at a moving target (Mueller, 2006). This is precisely why we need to explore the interplay between SMOs' strategic articulation of subject positions and the ways in which they are perceived and renegotiated by SMO members. We need to consider both strategic communication and identifications with strategic communication. From this angle, the approach to framing adopted in this analytical framework considers framing as a constitutive aspect of the social and its empirical analysis as a key part of understanding social phenomena. In other words, positioning framing within a framework that draws on discourse theory as its overarching analytical lens entails retaining the strategic aspect of framing while repositioning the concept in an epistemology of overdetermination and the impossibility of the total fixity of meaning (see Griggs and Howarth, 2008, for a discussion of incorporating structurally grounded approaches to textual analysis into a discourse theoretical framework).

Finally, discourse theory is underpinned by an understanding of the affective as a key dimension to the political engagement of social agents (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), while social movement framing theory presupposes strategic intent (Snow et al., 1986). Yet, synthesising the two perspectives should not be seen as antithetical to this dimension, as the attention to the affective in discourse theory's approach to the political and the constitution of the social does not entail a rejection of the role of reason and rational argument in politics, but rather that this role must be coupled with passion (Mouffe, 2000: 148). In a similar vein, the primacy of strategy in social movement framing theory does not foreclose the possibility of emotional appeals.

The consequences that follow from this in terms of combining the two perspectives in an analytical framework is that elements from social movement framing work to support the guiding concepts from discourse theory. Departing from the concepts highlighted above, this section outlines the supplementary tasks of central framing constructs specifically in relation to these concepts.

First, in order to ground the supplementary purpose of framing and multimodality in the analytical framework, a note on the analytical dimensions to social movement framing is warranted.

#### 4.3.3.2.1 Analysing the technologisation of action and multimodal campaigns: the analytics of multimodal mediation

While discourse theory's approach to discourse as representation puts into the background attention to discourse as language and the multimodality of mediation (Chouliaraki, 2002; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), it provides a theoretical orientation for guiding an analysis of contestation and the formation of political identities, embedded in the sociology of conflict and antagonisms (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007). The analytical framework adopted in this thesis foregrounds selected concepts from the theory: nodal points and floating signifiers, antagonism/agonism, subject positions and chains of equivalence (Laclau 1990; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Therefore, a discourse theoretical perspective provides an analytical lens for exploring macro-contextual aspects of activism and online media (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007), while framing theory and the multimodality of mediation work on a supplementary level, together capturing the rationales behind managed self-representations of challenges to dominant models of globalisation, their textual manifestations in online spaces, and the ways in which they are perceived and renegotiated by SMO members.

#### 4.3.3.2.2 Analysing strategic aspects of discursive contestation: framing as a complementary toolbox

While frames are generated as SMO members discuss ideas and interpretations, they are also attempts to obtain visibility, support and legitimacy in a highly strategic manner. Benford and Snow (2000) identify three main processes by which frames are generated and elaborated as 'strategic', 'discursive' and 'contested' (Benford and Snow, 2000: 623). 'Strategic' processes refer to framing processes that are utilitarian and goal-oriented, linking SMO interests and frames to those of potential members and resource providers or symbolic allies. 'Discursive' processes refer to speech acts, mediated and face to face (Benford and Snow, 2000). While the 'discursive' potentially provides a view of framing as moulded in interaction between members, SMOs and networks, casting these processes as 'discursive' is problematic; the distinction implies that the strategic and contested processes are not discursive. Moreover, Benford and Snow's (2000: 624) notion of a discursive dimension is anchored in a view of this dimension as limited to 'movement gatherings and campaigns'. While this approach is valuable in terms of drawing attention to the role of events in shaping movement and SMO self-understandings, it is inadequate if we are to address SMO participation as active civic engagement beyond counter-summits and spectacular events. It also puts into the background the interplay between strategic and 'discursive' processes, or negotiations of frames at the membership level. In contested framing processes elements such as frame disputes begin to address crucial intra-SMO and inter-SMO processes, but these generative and processual elements fail to fully provide an analytical construct that aims to capture the processes of collective identity formation, especially in relation to the role of SMO activities in sustaining political engagement between protest events (see e.g. Benford and Snow, 2000, for a critique of this gap). In a similar vein, Benford and Snow (2000) argue that while some scholars (e.g. Gamson, 1992; Hunt et al., 1994) have noted connections between social movement participation and identity, the interrelations between political identity formation and political engagement beyond participation remain under-researched (see Chapter 3 for



a clarification of Dahlgren's distinction between political engagement and involvement).

While the framing perspective is helpful in the translation of discourse theory into an analytical framework, it is important not to lose sight of discourse theory's conceptual nuances and their significance to the political as inherent to engendering engagement and solidarity. In other words, the role of core concepts from discourse theory in sensitising the analytical categories provided by the framing perspective serve to ensure that these pay attention to the affective and engagement-related aspects of contestation and intra-organisational processes of political identity formations.

The idea is not to neatly map framing categories onto discourse theoretical concepts. Rather, the task is to attune certain aspects of the concepts to exploit their potential at a toolkit level of analysis, and to add an agency component that in some ways is eclipsed in discourse theory (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008; Howarth, 2000).

#### **4.3.3.3 Analytical strategy: rationales and identifications**

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory works sensitise the central concepts that guide the analysis (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007). In so doing, discourse theory's notions of radical democracy and political identities inform the analytical framework by foregrounding four central concepts: nodal points and floating signifiers, antagonism/agonism, chains of equivalences and subject positions (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau 1990).

**Articulation: nodal points and floating signifiers.** Nodal points are an important analytical construct for exploring representations and understandings of counter-hegemonic contestation. As privileged signifiers they throw into relief the process by which floating signifiers are assigned new meaning in the process of articulation. This is pivotal to the analysis of the role of online spaces in GJM SMOs' attempts to challenge neo-liberal globalisation and to call for alternative models. Within the remit of the GJM attempts are made to render visible the link between globalisation and the nodal point

neo-liberalism, which fixes the meaning of globalisation and hegemonises the discursive field in which approaches to globalisation are debated. In this way, struggles over meaning through the articulation of nodal points as reference points in relation to floating signifiers suture the analytical categories on which this study draws.

**Antagonism/agonism and diagnostic framing.** The analytical framework further draws on the concepts of antagonism and agonism. Discourse theory's attention to the roles of antagonism and agonism in producing friend/enemy distinctions and fostering political engagement is supported by the notion of diagnostic framing. Diagnostic framing's attention to problem identification and focusing blame helps connect the articulation of antagonists to the role of nodal points in (partially) fixing floating signifiers in attempts to assign new meaning to contested elements. Yet, it is important to note that Mouffe's (2000, 2005) elaboration that an inclusive, democratic politics requires us to turn antagonists into agonists is not fully captured by diagnostic framing. Possibilities to challenge dominant discourses rest upon antagonism as crucial to the construction of an 'us' against an external 'them', as well as allowing for affective dimensions of anger, indignation and compassion to mobilise towards political engagement. This reminds us that it is important not to reduce antagonism to the identification of enemies. Nonetheless, the identification of an enemy – an antagonist – that can work as a constitutive outside is imperative (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Moreover, as argued in Chapter 3, the relationship between antagonism and agonism should not be seen as a duality. Rather, it is more helpful to adopt a more fluid approach to the two. Analytically, this means treating the articulation of antagonists and agonists as contingent processes that can vary between contexts, including contexts related to different online modes of contestation. This ties in with the notion of chains of equivalences as alliances in relation to a constitutive outside. We also need to open up the dualities of logics of equivalence and logics of difference to be seen as reciprocal dimensions rather than a duality of tension.

**Chains of equivalences.** The concept of chains of equivalence provides an analytical lens for exploring activists' constructions of alliances. On a textual level chains of

equivalence are discursive constructs that link together signifiers semantically (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, chapter 2). At the level of radical democracy, chains of equivalence work to create equivalential linkages between different social struggles, between demands, interests and identities, between SMOs, activist groups and networks (Howarth, 2008; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, chapter 4). These two levels are interconnected: the equivalential linking together of signifiers works to connect counter-hegemonic issues as SMOs enter into coalitions with other SMOs so as to help the proliferation of their agendas against a political frontier constructed in relation to an antagonistic outside (Cammaerts, 2009). Yet, we need to move beyond considering the construction of chains of equivalences against an external frontier only in relation to antagonists, but also in relation to allies. It is important not to reduce ingroup/outgroup distinctions to a distinction between good and evil, but to allow for the ambiguities and ambivalences of 'us' and 'them' distinctions as forged in relation to allies as well as antagonists. Countering these analytical rigidities can be achieved by considering chains of equivalence as doubly constitutive dimensions rather than polarities of logics of difference and equivalence, to analytically approach the boundaries of alliances as working in relation to allies as well as antagonists and agonists. The double potential of chains of equivalences as constitutive constructs means that in some contexts allies within an equivalential chain can work as adversaries. At the same time, actors identified as adversaries can in some contexts be assigned roles as allies. The latter usually serves a strategic purpose and is captured by the analytical category frame alignment in framing theory (Benford and Snow, 2000).

**Subject positions.** The concept of subject positions addresses the ways in which social agents are identified and/or identify themselves within a certain discourse (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007). In this respect it is important to note that Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) notion of political identities sees these as never fixed but always contingent. This notion of over-determination lends itself to an approach to subject positions as an analytical tool for exploring the points of identification provided in articulations of contestation. These are important for forging political engagement at the SMO level in

relation to a constitutive outside. Similarly, subject positions as an analytical lens also lends itself to the analysis of SMO members' identification with the subject positions articulated in online campaigns, (partially) embracing and rejecting the offered points of identification. This also ties in with the articulation of an alternative imaginary which is central for subject positions to become points of politicisation in a radical democratic project. Within this analytical framework, this entails looking for subject positions of radical democratic citizenship articulated in SMO HQ staffs' rationales for using online spaces to promote their causes. Further, it involves probing to what extent these are accepted, negotiated or rejected by SMO members as political points of identification.

#### **4.3.3.4 Analytical strategy: online appearances**

Attending to the task of analysing the manifestations of HQ respondents' rationales as they appear across different online spaces, the analytical framework draws on the focal points specified in the section above which outlined the analytical strategy for expressions of rationales and identification in interviews: nodal points and floating signifiers, antagonism/agonism and diagnostic framing, subject positions and chains of equivalence and frame alignment.

In this way, the analysis of the SMOs' online self-representations addresses the ways in which antagonism/agonism, chains of equivalence, subject positions and agency are articulated in visual and multimodal compositions. In order to fully capture the visual and multimodal aspects of the online terrain and its ephemeral qualities, this part of the analytical framework further incorporates elements from Chouliaraki's analytics of mediation (2006a) and the technologisation of action as part of campaign communication (2010).

Focusing on WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns as they appear across online spaces requires approaching their various campaign elements as patterns of appearances that employ different textual and multimodal modes of articulation. This

part of the analytical framework takes two aspects of hypermediacy to be relevant in the construal of contestation in SMOs' online campaigns: (1) aesthetic quality and (2) technological agency (Chouliaraki, 2010). These are integrated into the discourse analytical categories outlined above so as to analyse the interplay between the textual and multimodal articulations across online platforms.

**Aesthetic quality** captures the use of verbal and visual modes and their correspondence. In other words, it attends to the multimodal articulation of enemies/adversaries and diagnostic framing, subject positions and chains of equivalence and frame alignment.

**Technological agency** addresses technological aspects of proposals for action such as online petitions as effortless immediacy. Such technologisation of action has been argued to recast the act of participation itself as the political purpose rather than commitment to bringing about social reform (Fenton, 2006). In this way, technologisation of action ties in with articulations of agency as well as subject positions: ***agency and motivational framing***. While the contingency and non-fixity of identities and the impossibility of reaching a fully constituted identity creates the space for agency, the analytical specificities of articulations of agency remain obscure in discourse theory (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). The concept of motivational framing helps add an agency component to the framework that works on a textual as well as multimodal level by paying attention to vocabularies and visual and auditory representations of severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety (Gamson, 1992). To fully capture the new dimensions that articulations of agency take on in an online terrain, the analytical concept also needs to be connected back to technologization of action as proposals for instant agency. ***Subject positions***. The role of subject positions in forging political engagement at the SMO level through emotional involvement (Mouffe, 1992; 2005) is also conditioned by the technologisation of action. The ephemeral involvement required in online petitions risks failing to provide subject positions that sustain identification beyond a single-issue action. Antagonism is rendered a fleeting sensation at the expense of instant gratification, and as such fails to provide a

constitutive outside that can work to forge political identities. Yet, the online and multimodal articulation of political contestation may make available subject positions of radical democratic citizenship. The analyses of online campaign material probe the extent to which the subject positions offered are subject positions of radical democratic citizenship as a form of political identity. In this way, subject positions work as an analytical and normative construct for examining the online campaign material in terms of the possibilities for acting as radical democratic citizens (see Chapter 3, for a discussion of radical democratic citizenship and political discourse theory; see also Dahlgren, 2007, for a discussion of translating notions of citizenship into analytic constructs).

In relation to these categories and their interconnected roles in strategically framing SMO orientations, the study takes as its focus framing processes at the meso-organisational level of analysis, considering discursive articulations as properties of organisations, and thus located in their textual material, including texts, visuals, films, etc. rather than simply in the heads of SMO members (Hunt et al., 1994; Snow and Trom, 2002). Therefore, this part of the analysis examines the repertoires of symbols and meanings, including images, visuals, metaphors, stereotypes, catch phrases, etc. that the case SMOs use in their strategic framing. Focusing on the manifestation of frames in online textual material helps provide an understanding of the ways in which SMOs manage their thematic visibility in online spaces, which provide levels of editorial control unprecedented in traditional, multimodal mass media (Cammaerts, 2007; Fenton, 2008b; Melucci, 1989).

#### 4.4 Chapter conclusions

This chapter has discussed both the overall research design of the thesis and the specific methods and research techniques, including the methodological implications of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of the theories on which the analytical framework relies.

The research design is devised around two case studies: the SMOs WDM and War on Want. A case study research design allows a focus on depth and multifaceted investigation. This, of course, entails a tradeoff between the in-depth research necessary to obtain such multifarious detail and claims to representativeness (Couldry, 2004). Yet this chapter has argued that the study's anchorage in Laclau and Mouffe's ontology of the social as breaking with the realism/idealism dichotomy (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) entails an epistemological concern with articulations of contestation and political identity formation in a specific context rather than assuming the possibility to reveal truths or an incontestable and universal picture of these processes.

The chapter has also argued for further centring the empirical focus of the study by focusing on the two SMOs' trade campaigns. Drawing on Marcus' (1995) notion of 'multi-sited' ethnography, this provides a confined focus that enables selecting online spaces for analysis on the basis of campaign appearances rather than by imposing a potential bias by *a priori* selecting online sites. The online spaces in which the study traces these campaigns are limited to 'middle media' (outbound media such as blogs, organisation sites, e-zines and social networking sites) (Resnick, 1997, cited in Meikle, 2002). This focus on outbound online media facilitates an analysis of the internet as a place for self-representation and political identity formation. Further, the chapter has argued that within this focus, 'popular' online media are important spaces for mobilising individuals and engaging them in political participation, mainstream and non-institutional (Dahlgren, 2005; Ellis, 2000; Graham, 2008; Livingstone, 2005). This means looking beyond SMOs' websites and alternative sites such as Indymedia.

In addition to online campaign material, it has been argued, interviews are appropriate for explorations of motivations for and perceptions of online media practices (Kvale, 1996; Orgad, 2005).

Together, these three sources of data (interviews with SMO HQ staff, online campaign material and interviews with SMO members) are important in studying a tripartite perspective on practices of contesting neo-liberal globalisation in online spaces in

terms of the interplay between (1) rationales for using online media for contestation (HQ interviews); (2) manifestations of the rationales as they appear across online spaces (online campaign material); and (3) identifications with these appearances as they are expressed by SMO members (member interviews).

Finally, the chapter has shown how discourse theory and social movement framing underpin my analytical approaches. In this chapter I argue that examining how the study of SMO actors think about, use and identify with their self-representations across online spaces requires an in-depth approach that pays attention to the contextualised articulations in interviews as well as to textual and multimodal modes of self-representations in online campaigns, both of which are aspects often neglected in qualitative content and frame analyses.



## 5 Managing political identities: Rationales for promoting campaigns in popular online spaces

The internet is often seen as a vehicle for reinvigorating an inclusive public sphere that grants voice to counter-discourses and attempts at challenging dominant discourses. Nevertheless, for some time, the advantages in these optimistic accounts have been tempered by concerns regarding the professionalisation of online campaign communication brought about by the expansion of media platforms, forms and formats (Cottle, 2003; Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2010). The argument is that NGOs and SMO actors operate along profit-driven media logics and thus fail to forge commitment to the cause beyond single, spectacular events (Cottle and Nolan, 2007).

In the context of the GJM the challenge is to forge commitment to the political demands that underlie collective action events – online and offline – beyond the single street demonstration or online petition. At the level of SMOs, the challenge is to forge commitment to political demands as well as commitment to the single SMO. This requires the formation of political identities, it requires making available political points of identification that can create lasting bonds between citizens and between citizens and a political project of social change (Fenton, 2008b).

In order to understand the role of the internet, and popular online spaces more specifically, in conditioning SMOs' possibilities for forging political identities, this chapter explores popular online spaces as a strategic scene of politics and contention beyond event centred purposes. As the following quote from Cammaerts suggests, we need to ground the possibilities for political contestation and engagement provided by different online spaces in the practices that give shape to them.

*The Net is not going to radically change us; we are moulding it to our own ways of thinking and action. It is neither a monstrosity nor a saviour; it is a new venue for the same old human compunction: politics. (Cammaerts, 2007: 279)*

However, before we can begin to disentangle these practices, we need to explore the rationales that underpin them. To this end, this empirical chapter analyses the motivations for using popular online spaces expressed by directors, former directors and campaign, outreach and web officers in GJM SMOs (HQ staff), and compares these examples from a specific organisational field. The chapter is driven by research sub-question one: *What are the rationales that inform the SMO's campaigns, and how are these understood specifically in an online context?*

To address this question the chapter analyses WDM and War on Want's promotion of strategic articulations as management of visibility and political identification. The chapter focuses on outbound strategic communication in terms of fostering enduring commitment through political identities among members and the potential contradictions that this entails in relation to building alliances and to mobilising broader publics (for an analysis of members' identifications with these uses see Chapter 7). To go about this task, this chapter mainly builds on SMO HQ staff's accounts of the rationales behind the strategic promotion of the organisations' agendas. It also draws on War on Want's five year strategy from 2010 and WDM's 10-year strategy from 2008.<sup>15</sup>

The HQ staff respondents are WDM Director from 2005-09, Benedict Southworth, WDM Network Development Officer, Katharine Talbot, WDM Campaign Officer, *Red Pepper*<sup>16</sup> co-editor and War on Want board member, James O'Nions, WDM Web Officer, Pete Taylor, War on Want Director, John Hilary, War on Want Trade Campaign Manager, Dave Tucker and War on Want Campaign and Outreach Officer, Nadia Idle.

The first part of the chapter locates HQ staff rationales for promoting a counter-hegemonic agenda in relation to two levels: first, the level of the SMO and, second, the level of the GJM. The second part of the chapter relates these specifically to rationales

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<sup>15</sup> War on Want (2010); WDM (2008b)

<sup>16</sup> *Red Pepper* is a UK based, independent magazine that covers ideas across the progressive green left in the UK and across the world ([www.redpepper.org.uk](http://www.redpepper.org.uk))

for promoting the agendas in popular online spaces. Here, again, the level of the SMO and the level of the GJM are considered. Finally, the second section addresses HQ staff's understandings of possibilities for political identity formation in these spaces.

The first part of the chapter shows that while WDM and War on Want intersect at many different points on the political scene in the UK – both attempting to challenge the hegemony of a neoliberal globalisation discourse – the two SMOs' approaches to fostering and sustaining political identities differ in certain respects. Respondents from both SMOs place them at the radical end of a GJM spectrum, addressing the “root causes of poverty”. However, WDM respondents stress structured but autonomous member roles as important, while War on Want respondents stress the importance of fluid member roles within a coherent managed frame.

The second part of the chapter shows that, in an online context, this perceived radical position of the two SMOs does not translate into acute concerns about profit-driven online spaces. In this way, the SMOs risk playing to rather than challenging neoliberal power structures. Also, respondents' interests in securing SMO members come to a head in an online context, because popular online spaces are seen as providing possibilities for visibility, but not for forging lasting commitment to specific SMOs. The possibilities for visibility are seen as favourable for the proliferation of coalitions. This further complicates the forging of political identities and membership commitments at an SMO level, as SMO profiles are put into the background in issue-centred alliances.

## 5.1 Rationales for promoting a counter-hegemonic agenda

Before attending to the task of uncovering the rationales behind WDM and War on Want's uses of popular online spaces, this part of the analysis focuses on the rationales behind the articulation of the SMOs' agendas and positions in the GJM as they are portrayed by WDM and War on Want HQ staff.

War on Want and WDM both advocate an agenda that addresses inequalities in relation to trade, corporate power and globalisation. HQ staff in both SMOs see them as belonging to the GJM. While both SMOs address inequalities as politically conditioned, War on Want respondents focus on politics as central to their agenda, and WDM respondents focus on empirically grounded evidence. Further, for WDM internal diversity becomes a part of their strategic outbound communication.

The first section of this chapter identifies two issues that are both pivotal to SMOs' strategic communication of their agendas: (1) at the SMO level, the promotion of and identification with a political critique of the 'root causes' of inequality and the current approach to globalisation issues is seen as central; and (2) at the movement level, gaining leverage for the promotion of this political critique through alliances is seen as a trade-off in relation to maintaining a distinct SMO profile.

For War on Want and WDM, globalisation is important in relation to uneven aspects of interregional material, cultural and political globalisation processes as well as cross-boundary media processes more specifically: (1) the two organisations have a transnational agenda and *orientation*, addressing issues brought about by globalisation processes; and (2) they *operate* on a transnational scale, working with partners in southern regions and continents and employing media that potentially transcend geographical boundaries. In relation to both aspects, the possibility to challenge the hegemony of neo-liberal discourses of globalisation is important, because War on Want and WDM aim to destabilise these dominant discourses that construct neo-liberal globalisation processes as apolitical and natural, so as to uncover "the dislocating effects of globalization" (Mouffe, 1995: 502). Their overall aim is to open up possibilities for negotiating these processes as political, tackling the decisions behind issues of, for example, inequality and climate change rather than treating the symptoms.

### **5.1.1 The SMO agenda: Articulating the problem and its perpetrators**

In all accounts from respondents, the articulation of the perceived problem identifies the current model of globalisation as grounded in the logics of the marketplace. This organisation of society is conveyed as the problem that lies at the heart of social inequality. On this basis, policy makers and the corporate world are identified as villains.

#### **5.1.1.1 WDM's diagnostic framing and identification of villains: The 'root causes' of poverty are political**

From 'climate justice' and the financial crisis to trade, all WDM's campaigns in 2009 deal with issues that respondents relate to globalisation processes. More particularly, the issues addressed in the campaigns are construed as related to a neo-liberal version of globalisation, which is seen as "the dark side of globalisation" (Talbot, interview, April 2009). This is central to the ways in which HQ staff in WDM articulate the organisation's demands and focus blame or responsibility by identifying problems and their perpetrators.

WDM's diagnostic frame comprises an articulation of injustice in processes of globalisation in which 'neo-liberalism' and 'free trade' serve as nodal points around which signifiers such as 'injustice' are clustered. This discourse of injustice is captured in the following comments by James O'Nions and Katharine Talbot. O'Nions describes WDM's transnational orientation as an organisation that is "...critical of neo-liberalism in the global South or its impacts on the South...drawing links to what will be going on here" (O'Nions, interview, July 2009). He elaborates to point to "injustice as being the root causes of poverty in the global South" (ibid). Here, in relation to 'injustice' neo-liberalism is articulated as an unjust approach to globalisation that brings about poverty. In a similar vein, challenging the hegemony of neo-liberal globalisation is seen as "a political project of structural change to inherently unjust systems of power" (ibid), addressing "what politics keep people in poverty" (Talbot, interview, April 2009). Identifying and representing poverty as brought about and/or reinforced by political

decisions supporting neo-liberal globalisation places blame with policy-makers. As Benedict Southworth notes, “political strokes are required” to achieve change (Southworth, interview, July 2009).

However, this articulation of policy makers as responsible for poverty and inequality remains at a systemic level. Respondents do not give details or examples that connect this critique to specific institutions, policies, politicians, or cases. As a consequence, the identification of policy makers as the perpetrators of the problem articulates them as adversaries rather than enemies. An abstract level of articulation implies that the actors identified as accountable for a problem are considered legitimate opponents rather than enemies to be destroyed (Griggs and Howarth, 2004).

Informants stress the importance of formulating alternatives to the processes that they critique. As Katharine Talbot, puts it:

*...the base of all our material is a very strong critique of globalisation. But we are also very conscious of offering alternatives as well and sort of saying this is...we're not just criticising we are sort of saying 'This is how the world could work'. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

In constructing discourses imagining alternative forms of organisation for economy, politics and society (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999 [2005]), WDM “... use[s] a lot of the messaging around things like ‘another world is possible’” (Talbot, interview, April 2009). ‘Another World is Possible’ is the World Social Forum slogan that has been adopted widely in the GJM, including by WDM (Bennett, 2003; Jong et al., 2005). In this way, WDM attempts to destabilise the discursive structure of neo-liberal globalisation. However, HQ respondents’ accounts are vague in terms of articulating what this ‘Another World’ would entail. It is this articulation of a viable alternative to dominant models of governance that is central for a political project of the left to move beyond its ‘no’ to capitalism and neo-liberal globalisation (Fenton, 2008b; Juris, 2008). Nonetheless, advocating for ‘Another World’ implies a dominant model as a contrasting reference point that gives meaning to the slogan as an alternative

approach to globalisation. In this way, a neo-liberal approach to globalisation serves as a constitutive outside stabilising the SMO's political identity.

#### **5.1.1.2 War on Want's diagnostic framing and identification of villains: 'poverty is political'**

From 'supermarkets and sweatshops', 'corporations & conflict' and 'tax dodging' to 'trade justice', all War on Want's campaigns in 2009 deal with issues that respondents refer to as different aspects of globalisation processes.

Central to the SMO's campaigning is the articulation of "global injustices" as political. In the words of War on Want's director, John Hilary:

*We do stuff from an overtly political position...engaging in political debate is second nature for us. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

Similarly to WDM, War on Want HQ staff emphasise the importance of unveiling the political aspects of the power of corporations and transnational economic arrangements. Yet War on Want respondents also address the power of corporations and transnational economic arrangements. They do so through a critique of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In this critique they link CSR to the failure of policy makers to provide a regulatory framework that holds corporations accountable for their operations. While this articulates the corporate world as adversaries, it still places blame and responsibility with policy makers. This is reflected in the following quote from John Hilary:

*We are anti-CSR [...] which we see as a political mechanism besides accountability and basically a way of organisations to keep their power rather than for us to reclaim power over capital. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

Nonetheless, the corporate world does work as a constitutive outside against which War on Want's position as an SMO at the radical end of the GJM spectrum is identified

as one that “kicks up the backside of the corporate world” (Hilary, seminar, June 2009). A constitutive outside of those who are excluded is important, because framing of meaning involves exclusion (Dahlberg, 2007; Mouffe, 1992; Stevenson, 2006); democratic potential requires antagonism and conflict, and the identification of a ‘them’ (Mouffe, 2000). This involves the demarcation of boundaries in terms of identifying an ‘us’ against an external ‘them’, creating in-group/out-group distinctions. This constitutive outside not only involves assigning blame and identifying antagonists, it is simultaneously mutually constituent of in-group identities. Identifying antagonists and defining boundaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’ provide identification points for SMO members to identify with (Carpentier, 2005).

In neo-liberal discourses CSR is articulated as an undeniably beneficial approach to fairer trade and better working conditions. It is articulated in a discourse that construes corporate accountability as relegated to the realm of voluntary codes of conduct rather than international frameworks of regulation. This hegemonic articulation of CSR within the discursive structure of neo-liberal globalisation contributes to a naturalisation of CSR as the principal approach to corporate accountability (Falk, 1999).

In corporate discourses, CSR may be understood as an approach to stakeholder management (Feddersen and Gilligan, 2001), whereas in discourses of global justice and alternative globalisation CSR might be taken to represent a means for the corporate world to retain power in a capitalist system. For example, War on Want’s director points to CSR as “a particular strategy they have in order to pre-empt and see off corporate accountability” (Hilary, interview, 2009).

Campaign officer Nadia Idle seconds this perspective and also stresses the impossibility of War on Want entering into strategic alliances with corporations as a way of ensuring funding for War on Want and facilitating CSR schemes or what has popularly been called cause-related marketing (Brønn and Vrioni, 2001).



*So we don't do this Corporate Social Responsibility sort of schemes where we work with big corporations at all. What for us is, what they call a greenwash ... it's those corporations trying to validate. And we are very critical of Corporate Social Responsibility as a policy actively within our supermarkets and sweatshops and tax work. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

This further stresses the importance that War on Want respondents attach to recognising poverty structures as political:

*War on Want...recognises that poverty is political and it is unashamed about saying that the solutions to poverty, the solutions to human rights, have got to be political solutions. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

This rationale then

*...puts you in a particular political space. And that particular political space brings with it consequences. (Hilary, interview, July 2009).*

A political approach to inequalities points to the significance of War on Want's role as producers of agonistic confrontations. In other words, War on Want respondents articulate an understanding of War on Want's agenda as confrontational. Their identification of policy makers and the corporate world as adversaries suggests a willingness to turn 'antagonism' into 'agonism' (Mouffe, 1998).

### **5.1.2 The movement agenda**

The identification of enemies and adversaries works as a constitutive outside to the SMO and provides identification points for SMO members to identify with (Carpentier, 2005). This is also related to chains of equivalence and frame alignment which addresses the ways in which SMOs position themselves in relation to other organisations within the GJM by linking and making equivalent different identities, and opposing these to another negative identity (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008).

Both WDM and War on Want respondents understand their SMOs as part of the GJM. This is captured by WDM campaign officer and War on Want board member, James O’Nions:

*We have called it the Global Justice Movement...It tends to be the press that uses Anti-Globalisation. Although Alter-Globalisation expresses it quite well, it is not really a word that is used in English.*  
(O’Nions, interview, July 2009)

Naming their movement as the Global Justice Movement rather than the Anti-Globalisation or Alter-Globalisation Movement is important. As Heidegger (1968) put it “What is called appears as what is present...So called by name, called into presence, it in turn calls. It is named, it has the name” (Heidegger, 1968 [1972]: 120). In Laclau and Mouffe’s social ontology names have no extra-discursive meaning (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). From this perspective, names link together disparate actors and activities. The practice of naming constitutes and shapes that which is named (Griggs and Howarth, 2004). This ties in with the construction of chains of equivalences whereby the articulation of elements and floating signifiers along an axis of equivalence links together different social movement actors (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of chains of equivalences at a discursive level and at the level of alliance construction).

The ‘Global Justice Movement’ invokes notions of moderate and reformist actors and articulations of adversaries rather than enemies. The label ‘Anti-Globalisation’ invokes an unwillingness to turn antagonism into agonism. The ‘Global Justice Movement’ also allows for the possibility of an articulation of an alternative. The prefix ‘alter’ signifies precisely the struggle for an alternative. WDM and War on Want’s preference for the ‘Global Justice Movement’, because ‘alter’ is “not really a word that is used in English”, as O’Nions explains above, emphasises their UK roots and a concern with resonating with UK publics.

The different ways in which WDM and War on Want articulate certain SMOs as allies are strongly connected to the subject positions of radical and mainstream. The GJM

consists of disparate and diverse voices (Kavada, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 2, the polyphonous character of the movement means that its contours are hazy and include a wide array of activists, ranging from established SMOs and NGOs to groups of protesters and loose networks of individual activists. Similarly, the thematic span of the movement is broad and includes issues such as human rights, environmental issues, animal rights, anti-capitalism, etc.

#### **5.1.2.1 WDM's movement agenda: on the edge of the GJM**

Within this eclectic movement, WDM informants see WDM as one of the more radical SMOs, as Katharine Talbot's remark reflects: "I guess WDM is kind of more out on the edge and is more radical" (Talbot, interview, April 2009).

This understanding of WDM as at a radical end of a spectrum related to the GJM is closely tied to an understanding of some allies as mainstream, because chains of equivalences do not entail a complete elimination of differences. Rather, bringing together different identities in a chain of equivalence can weaken, but not eradicate, intra-movement differences (Laclau, 2005). For example, WDM respondents mention Oxfam as an ally that is less radical, partly because it works with government allies and, in doing so, aligns its campaigning to accommodate such alliances. As Benedict Southworth says:

*Some organisations work in quasi-partnerships with the government.  
And that is why people compare WDM very much with Oxfam,  
because Oxfam is the...they have a completely neutral status.  
(Southworth, interview, July 2009)*

In this respect, informants also see WDM's status as a limited company rather than a charity – with the restraints on political campaigning that a charitable status entails (see also Chapter 2 for an outline of the Charity Commission's regulatory framework) – as significant to the SMO's radical position:

*I mean within the, sort of, the spectrum of the development organisations I suppose we distinguish ourselves by being more radical than some of the others in our messaging. So for example we would be more radical than Oxfam, and more than Christian Aid as well. And that has partly to do with the way that WDM is structured and our funding and that we are not a charity. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

It is important to WDM respondents that this understanding is reflected in the SMO's outbound communication:

*...we have a very solid policy base and, you know, we put out reports. We have quite a kind of intellectual base I guess. We never start a campaign without having done a significant amount of research and all our campaigns really are kind of based on the reports that we send out and we have the briefings that come out with that and then the campaign materials. So, it is really important to WDM that everything that we say can actually be backed up by the policy research that we have done. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

In this way, WDM HQ staff emphasise the articulation of their agenda as overtly political when they position their SMO in relation to movement allies. Here, WDM's political concerns are linked to an intellectual approach that involves policy research. This is contrasted with relief-centred NGOs. WDM informants portray an understanding of the SMO as more radical than allies with the GJM. These articulations result in the construction of a political frontier that separates the two sides and makes ambiguous the chains of equivalence that are constructed on the ally side. As Katharine Talbot puts it:

*...it is really important to WDM that everything that we say can actually be backed up by the policy research that we have done... that is a way that we distinguish ourselves. And that goes for our*

*members, but also decision makers as well, they know that we have done our research and we can backup what we are saying with the research we've done. (Talbot, interview, April 2009).*

At the radical end of the GJM WDM respondents portray War on Want as the SMO most similar to WDM:

*So WDM is definitely one of the organisations that are closest to us [War on Want] in that sort of hub of progressive, more radical, so to speak, organisations, according to the UK spectrum anyway. (O'Nions, interview, July 2009)*

Linking up with other SMOs promoting related agendas is seen as important in gaining visibility to the cause. However, WDM HQ staff's view of their SMO's position in the GJM, as well as the increasing competition for visibility and long-term members within the movement contribute to contradictory circumstances. Increasing possibilities for visibility and legitimacy by creating chains of equivalence is seen as potentially making the discursive construction of WDM's political, radical and intellectual position vulnerable. As Katharine Talbot puts it:

*...it makes everyone's voices stronger if we are all supporting each other...but we obviously don't want our brand to get hidden underneath all these other coalition brands. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

#### **5.1.2.2 War on Want's movement agenda: 'on the outside'**

To War on Want HQ staff the expansion and professionalisation of the communicative domain in which the SMO competes for visibility stresses the significance of creating and promoting a cohesive discourse in their outbound communication that distinguishes them from other GJM SMOs and groups:

*...if people look over the broad set of different NGOs in the UK where...they could be really well forgiven for saying 'you know, why do we need so many? What makes you different from Oxfam or from ActionAid? And I think it is important for us to be able to articulate more clearly that fundamental political sense and what it means in practice. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

War on Want's diagnostic frame in which political solutions constitute a significant nodal point articulates aid and poverty relief as answers that fail to recognise the political decisions that underpin the conditions that keep some people in poverty. Aid and poverty relief are therefore seen as short-term solutions that will not bring substantial change and create "the sort of development models that we think are progressive and sustainable" (Idle, interview, April 2009). In this way, the articulation of poverty as political also involves aid and relief-centred NGOs as a constitutive outside.

This position at the radical end of the GJM spectrum builds on War on Want's construal of poverty as political. This is a strategic decision that is articulated in War on Want's five-year strategy:

*...it [the future] must witness a democratic revolution to reclaim power from the governments, institutions and corporations that have condemned so many millions of people to poverty and despair. (War on Want, 2010)*

This is also reflected in War on Want's trade campaign officer Dave Tucker's point:

*We have a much more forthright reputation...we are always the critical voice especially regarding the UK government...Others are more pleased to be invited to the table and sacrifice criticism for perceived progress and assurances that steps will be taken. On the*

*other hand, we lose some influence by being 'on the outside' all the time. (Tucker, interview, May 2009)*

This position of being “on the outside” is understood as impeding possibilities for gaining influence by aligning their causes and collaborating with politicians that back neo-liberal policies. It is also seen as impeding possibilities for obtaining funding from those politicians.

HQ staff talk about War on Want’s position in the GJM as not just distinct from aid and relief-centred NGOs, but also from its allies at the radical end of the GJM spectrum. Here, WDM is seen as the most similar SMO. War on Want’s roots in the labour movement are mentioned as a distinguishing feature:

*It means that we are within that political tradition in a way that WDM isn't...Our roots in the labour movement means it is very easy for War on Want to say certain things because we come out of that milieu. You don't need to argue if you are within a labour movement context...For WDM, they come from a different basis, which is much more liberal evidence based, almost an empirical discourse rather than an ideological discourse. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

Challenges to enduring organisational membership brought about by tendencies to favour looser networks and ephemeral connections in the social movement field are also stressed as pertinent. Further, they are portrayed as particularly important because the political nodal point around which War on Want respondents articulate their perception of human inequalities render possibilities for obtaining government funding problematic. Nadia Idle sums this up:

*...we depend very heavily on our membership to pay for the money that keeps the organisation going basically which isn't fixed to a particular project. So we always need more members. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

In this light, offering points of identification that enable members to distinguish War on Want from other GJM actors is central to motivating existing and potential members to identify with and pay fees to War on Want.

### **5.1.3 Conclusions: constructing each other – narcissism of small differences**

War on Want and WDM both address inequalities as politically conditioned. However, War on Want respondents focus on politics as central to their agenda while WDM respondents focus on empirically grounded evidence. This is also the focus of the ways in which respondents from both SMOs construe each other.

Other points of difference that are frequently stressed include WDM's group-based structure, WDM's connections to communities of faith and War on Want's roots in the labour movement.

This dynamic of compare and contrast illustrate the ways in which the two SMOs construct each other in a small radical field within the GJM in the UK. This evokes the contradictions of the importance of creating chains of equivalence as well as maintaining a distinct SMO profile in order to sustain political belonging among existing members and to mobilise new members (Dahlgren, 2009).

In this way, creating chains of equivalences to gain visibility to the cause and promoting the SMO involves a politics of agonism at several levels: it involves discursive counter-articulations of political actors as adversaries, it involves allowing for differences within an inclusive chain of equivalences within the GJM and it involves enabling political engagement beyond single-issue events. The ambivalence of a narcissism of small differences and the construction of a political frontier against a common adversary ties in with the contextual dynamics of logics of difference and equivalence; chains of equivalences put intra-movement differences into the background. Yet intra-movement differences, even within the radical segment of the GJM, are crucial to ensure democratic pluralism (Mouffe, 2000) as well as the survival of the SMO.



In both SMOs HQ staff express a view of the identification of adversaries that ascribes an abstract role to the corporate world. From the perspective of political discourse theory, this suggests that when we talk about adversaries, it is important not to conflate opponents and perpetrators. Corporations are not portrayed as responsible for the inequalities that lie at the heart of WDM and War on Want's agendas. Nonetheless, they are identified as adversaries and opponents, and they do form part of WDM and War on Want's constitutive outside. Rather, the adversaries to whom responsibility is ascribed are policy makers. Placing blame in this way is grounded in the two SMOs' overtly political approach to social inequality.

## 5.2 Rationales behind promoting a counter-hegemonic agenda in popular online spaces: 'The flighty world of online activism'

This section specifically addresses the rationales behind the framing strategies that War on Want and WDM develop and promote in different online spaces in the context of their campaigns on trade.

Online media are subject to considerable ambivalence in a time of fragmenting users, dislocation time and space, intensified transnational flows of images and declining engagement with traditional state-based politics (Couldry, 2008). SMO HQ staff's understandings of online spaces are important because these spaces have come to play a key part as a site of struggle in contestations over the ways in which globalisation is represented. At the strategic level, the ways in which HQ staff understand online spaces shape how they articulate, frame and represent campaigns and agendas to members and wider publics.

While similar in a number of respects (as discussed in the first section of this chapter), the rationales behind the use of popular online spaces relayed by HQ staff from War on Want and WDM are significantly different. These rationales coincide when it comes to optimistic views on possibilities for visibility and cautious views on the online realm as a collective action space. They primarily differ in relation to takes on engagement –

accounts from War on Want respondents are much more gloomy than WDM respondents' general hopefulness. Generally, as an interface between outbound self-representations and internal political identity formations, online spaces are seen as places of contradiction.

### **5.2.1 Projecting the SMO agenda onto spaces of self-representation**

Before accounting for some of the central specificities of War on Want and WDM respondents' perceptions of the potentialities and challenges of different online spaces, I want to note one theme which permeates all the themes they touch upon in their accounts – the idea that the SMOs must have presences in popular online spaces, because other activist organisations and social movement affiliates are using them. This is captured by network development officer Katharine Talbot's comment on WDM's uses of popular online spaces:

*...the crucial thing for WDM is not to fall behind in any of that kind of thing...And we do have a Facebook group, we are Twittering, we do have stuff on YouTube, so it is clear that we are actually making use of all of these sorts of things and we are not just ignoring it. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

Respondents' rationales for using popular online spaces are grounded in a hopeful cynicism. This ambiguity is particularly underpinned by scepticism of the role of popular online spaces in fostering political engagement. It poses the question whether SMOs' uses of online media can significantly alter the action space around them (Couldry, 2009).

For WDM and War on Want, popular online spaces are seen as important platforms for unbiased and cost-efficient dissemination of their self-represented agendas. This can be seen as a response to previous concerns about the grassroots and non-profit sector being relegated to the remote margins of the internet (McChesney, 2000).

However, as popular online spaces have become a key site for the contestation over globalisation and other processes of change, the role of corporate power is increasingly central to democracy and possibilities for dissent; the notion of democracy itself becomes influenced by market principles and commercial interests (Fenton, 2009). For example, for organisations in the non-profit sector to gain visibility for their causes requires adapting to a system of commodification and consumer media culture in which visibility entails persuasion and impression management (Vestergaard, 2008).

The online mediascape has been argued to reflect the market diktat that sutures the contemporary media logic more generally (Cammaerts, 2007; Dahlberg, 2007; Fenton, 2009). This is accentuated in the context of popular online spaces, as the majority of these are owned by private media corporations (Dahlberg, 2005). As the agendas of WDM and War on Want are grounded in a critique of the profit-driven logics of social organisation that also characterises the online mediascape, this poses a potential tension. However, neither SMOs regard this as an acute problem.

One aspect particularly prompts respondents to talk about possibilities offered by online media as vested with ambiguities, especially in terms of engagement. The potential of online media, and popular online media in particular, is seen as an overall forte in helping reach beyond those already politically engaged in the GJM. However, this possibility to “broaden the scope of conflict” (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993: 116) does not extend to optimism in terms of the possibility for online spaces to generate committed members. This is related as a major concern in terms of securing fee-paying members; defining themselves against the corporate world as a constitutive outside means that War on Want and WDM cannot accept corporate funding. Therefore, forging political identities around the SMO is seen as important for online participation to translate into membership subscriptions.

### 5.2.1.1 WDM: sceptically hopeful

WDM respondents all refer to the significance of popular online spaces as linked to possibilities for reaching broader publics. Popular online networking and file-sharing sites such as YouTube and Facebook are primarily seen as venues for getting the SMO's message across to potential members who are not already familiar with WDM, recognising the internet's characteristics as a pull medium (Cammaerts, 2007). This is illustrated by former WDM director, Benedict Southworth's metaphor, contrasting the high street chemist chain Boots and independent health food stores:

*...if you're in the high street and stick a poster in a health food store, it might be difficult getting the wider population to go into the health food store, whereas if you put up your poster in Boots. If there was an alternative people would use it. (Southworth, interview, July 2009)*

While illustrating the possibilities for reaching beyond like-minded allies who would visit WDM's website or an alternative online site such as Indymedia anyway, Southworth's comparison also points to the corporate aspects of many popular online spaces. The corporate affiliations of online platforms such as YouTube (Google) and MySpace (NewsCorp) might be construed as posing a potential tension for WDM. However, apart from alluding to preferences for alternative media as in Southworth's comparison, WDM respondents do not convey corporate ownership or risks of cooptation as indisputably problematic. Rather, popular online spaces are regarded as crucial platforms – even if preferences for non-corporate alternatives are expressed when prompted. This is reflected in the following point from Katharine Talbot:

*...if you have a choice you wouldn't use things like Facebook and you wouldn't use Google, but in reality we need to reach people via those media. And that's what we're gonna have to do until some kind of ethical version of Facebook gets set up. But we do need to use mainstream tools to get our messages out as widely as we can. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

Alternative spaces such as Indymedia – generating hopes of visibility to counter-discourses in the wake of their central role in the protests against WTO in Seattle in 1999 (e.g. Kahn and Kellner, 2004) – are no longer seen as a realistic option. The problematics of the corporate ownership of mainstream online spaces are seen as linked to issues of ethics:

*I've had to set up a list on, well one list on Google and one list on Yahoo, which was not the idea and I wanted to do them on Rise Up which was the more ethical choice. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

The point is seconded by James O'Nions in his comment on the importance WDM HQ staff assign to having a presence in those spaces:

*I don't think it's a problem to have that. You are trying to protect a successful position as a campaigning organisation and I think you've just got to use those [corporate owned online sites]. It would be nice if everything was...had no logo, but actually it's not really a realistic thing at the moment. (O'Nions, interview, July 2009)*

The advantages of using popular online spaces that WDM respondents talk about are connected to cost-efficiency and possibilities for reaching broader publics. Of course, different offline platforms for a wider proliferation of the organisation's agenda exist. Traditionally, music and art festivals have provided venues for SMOs to reach new members. Also in this offline context, some sites are visited by broader publics, while others tend to appeal to more specific audiences. For example, O'Nions compares the broad appeal of the Glastonbury music festival to the WOMAD festival's more alternative appeal with its anchorage in the world music genre:

*I mean we go to very appropriate festivals like WOMAD, we haven't been to Glastonbury which is actually much more kind of mainstream audience, where WOMAD is just very kind of, well, we should go there because that's so our audience, if you like, or such a sympathetic*

*audience. But perhaps it misses out on... (O’Nions, interview, July 2009)*

In this way, WDM respondents’ distinctions between ‘mainstream’ and ‘sympathetic’ festival audiences can be seen as mirroring the different internet users that WDM staff expect to find in popular online spaces and alternative online media such as Indymedia, respectively. However, these similarities do not extend to the cost-efficiency of online campaigning:

*But it is a bit of a gamble sometimes going to festivals. You don’t know in advance...because it costs quite a lot of money for a small organisation to get everything there, to have people there to get the tickets. (O’Nions, interview, July 2009)*

The cost-efficiency and potential reach of online campaigning in popular sites makes it a significant tool for WDM. It is the possibility to reach beyond the SMO’s usual audiences that also potentially brings about changes to the membership base:

*I think that it will change – the members that we get. I think this is another reason for us to be doing quite a lot of social networking online type stuff, because it does appeal to a different type of audience...So it should be beneficial to us I think in the issue of kind of to expand the audience we are able to reach. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

This “different type of audience” signifies younger people – an audience which WDM previously has not had the resources to target specifically. With the advent of social networking sites, trying to target younger age groups is now a possibility:

*...there are older members who are happy to e-mail and happy to do online actions as well, but maybe they’re not gonna be quite as comfortable with all that kind of Facebook, twittering, all that sort of*

*thing, which I guess is clearly aimed at a younger audience. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

Nevertheless, this opportunity seems tentative, as WDM respondents convey a view of WDM's strategic uses of popular online spaces as falling short of exploiting their full potential. As WDM's Web Officer Pete Taylor explains, talking specifically about the social networking site Facebook:

*And there is this possibility of connecting with new people. Although I suspect a lot of the people in our Facebook group are also people who subscribe to our e-mail newsletter. So it is not new people, it's who already knew about us. (Taylor, interview, June 2009)*

Respondents distinguish between the ways in which different online media facilitate different discursive possibilities. For example, while WDM's organisational website is seen as providing "more avenues for disseminating our materials" (Talbot, interview, April 2009), Twitter is seen as suitable for reporting from demonstrations such as the protests organised around the G20 summit in London in April 2009:

*...there have been some new things we've been doing, for example around the G20 our web officer used Twitter a lot, sort of on the day of the Put People First rally and then on April 1st with the demonstrations in the city...And we did have a lot of people following WDM that day. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

WDM respondents' enthusiasm about the file-sharing site YouTube is very subdued. The possibilities for multimodal self-representations are not seen as central to fostering political engagement at an SMO level. Nevertheless, WDM has a YouTube channel which includes videos from offline events such as the G20 demonstrations in London and video clips such as the animated film, *The Great Trade Robbery*, which critiques UK and EU policies on trade relations with developing countries. The subdued enthusiasm is summed up in the following comment by Katharine Talbot:

*It feels as though it hasn't necessarily changed so much as given us more options. With the video for example, The Great Trade Robbery, we would have had that prior to putting stuff up on YouTube, we would have produced that as a DVD and we would have sent it out to our groups. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

This reflects an understanding of YouTube as peripheral to strategic attempts at forging political identities around the SMO so as to sustain and grow the membership base, to bring peripheral supporters to the core. In this way, popular online spaces are seen as a supplement rather than a substitute to other forms of communication. Further, WDM respondents stress the role of these spaces as one of directing potential members on to WDM's organisational website and micro media such as an email newsletter. The transient characteristics of many online spaces are conveyed as enabling visibility and ephemeral political action rather than fostering long-term engagement. This is indicated in Talbot's comments on the role of online media in reaching new members:

*...it is a way for us to get new members as well as to get our campaign actions out there just by making it easier for people to engage in various ways. And if they want to just do online actions – fine, sign up to e-news. Hopefully, further along the line they'll get more involved with us. But I think if we weren't doing that we would be losing out on a potential audience. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

This echoes what Raley (2009) has called clicktivism and stresses the importance that WDM respondents ascribe to possibilities for turning online contact into lasting commitments so as to cultivate the SMO's membership base.



### 5.2.1.2 War on Want: cynically positive

War on Want respondents also see the significance of popular online spaces as linked to possibilities for reaching broader publics. This is exemplified by Nadia Idle, talking about the social networking site Facebook:

*...we get a lot of hits on our website through Facebook, because a lot of people link through. So it is very good for us and it has been very good to have Facebook. (Idle, interview April 2009)*

While this perceived possibility of reaching broader publics is seen as positive, it is tempered by a cynical view of the online as a site for activism proper. Indeed, offline activism is conveyed as 'real'. This suggests a view of online activism as artificial or, at least, inadequate for fostering engagement. This is illustrated by John Hilary's remark:

*...we do want to go beyond it and we try to continue our very much real world engagement with supporter groups...We do want to make it real and to be involved in the struggles as well. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

As in the case of WDM, War on Want respondents' accounts relay practices that consider the internet's characteristics as a pull medium; they stress the importance of presences in popular online spaces primarily in terms of reaching beyond what is often seen as the radical periphery of the internet (Dahlgren, 2009). This is illustrated by Nadia Idle's comment comparing popular online spaces with offline merchandise in relation to the possibilities of these different media in reaching new, younger supporters:

*...there is a bias towards young when you're talking about Facebook, MySpace, Twitter. It will be proportionately more young people, definitely. But we always had an emphasis of working with youth, because our campaigns have always been a little bit more radical and our materials are also quite fun. Our badges are very, very popular wherever we go. They are like sweets, people love our badges. We*

*have War on Want condoms, we have War on Want matches, we have War on Want stickers. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

The comparison with merchandise also indicates the role of popular online spaces in providing users with artefacts for the construction of personal self-representations and self-biographical image management, which can be seen as similar to badges worn to signal political affiliations and sympathies. Commercial logics underpin both the role of online spaces and traditional merchandise in individuals' image management. Merchandise can be seen as transmedia in which "commercial interests and ideologies interact with consumer interests and consumer interests and beliefs" (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 16). In the context of the radical end of the GJM, these also interact on a third axis: political ideology. Using consumption-oriented modes of visibility when contesting the consumer and market-driven logics of neo-liberalism potentially corrodes the perceived credibility of the SMO.

In a similar vein, using profit-driven online spaces is not relayed as a major worry by War on Want respondents. For example, when encouraged to talk specifically about the corporate affiliations of many popular online spaces, Nadia Idle distinguishes between using these spaces and accepting corporate funding:

*...I mean of course we have views on the corporate takeover of the world and what corporations are doing and their ethics. But I think it is slightly different to be using Facebook to taking money from Coca Cola, which we would not do. So we don't take any corporate funding whatsoever. And that's very serious in the sense of we don't take funding from corporations which go against our beliefs in a sense. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

While "the corporate takeover of the world" constructs corporate power as detrimental to "ethics", this understanding does not extend to profit-driven online spaces. Silverstone (2002: 129) has argued that "subjects are complicit when they play according to the rules". While War on Want respondents perpetually stress the

importance of challenging neo-liberal globalisation processes and disrupting them from within the Charity Commission's regulatory framework in the UK,<sup>17</sup> they remain relatively unconcerned about contesting the logics of profit-driven online spaces. This poses the question whether there can be disruption from within in popular online spaces if the practices they foster are taken for granted. I will return to this discussion later.

### **5.2.2 Projecting the movement agenda onto spaces of self-representation**

The challenges brought about by problems of quantity and chaos of information in an online setting are seen as substantial by respondents from War on Want as well as WDM. These challenges call for special attention to the promotion of the SMOs' particular position within the GJM. While carving out their own positions is seen as critical in this messy and cluttered online mediascape, forming alliances with other SMOs is also seen as important; despite risks of obscuring individual SMOs' particular agendas, forming alliances – creating chains of equivalences – is portrayed as imperative to gaining visibility for the cause. This illustrates an important aspect of the complex interrelations and tensions between the SMOs and their aims (Cammaerts, 2007). In doing so, it points to the narcissism of small differences that characterise the ways in which WDM and War on Want respondents simultaneously construct each other as significantly distinct.

#### **5.2.2.1 WDM: the brand gets hidden in chains of equivalences**

In WDM, the importance attached to promoting WDM's particular position within the GJM is summed up by Katharine Talbot:

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 2 for an outline of War on Want's position in relation to the Charity Commission.

*...[the internet] it is useful in campaigning our own and furthering our own campaign objectives. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

To WDM respondents, portraying WDM as an SMO whose demands are based on policy research is important. But promoting WDM's groups is also seen as crucial. As Benedict Southworth puts it:

*...the tone online needs to reflect the organisation. (Southworth, interview, July 2009)*

While what is seen as WDM's radical, in-depth and democratic approach is sought reflected and proliferated online, the promotion of alliances is also portrayed as valuable. Nonetheless, here, risks of obscuring WDM's particular agendas are conveyed as a major concern. This concern is epitomised by the following remark by Talbot:

*...what is probably also going to be a problem with any coalition is that inevitably messages get watered down [...] it is a bit of a trade-off...also from a branding point of view. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

This perceived tension between organisational positioning and coalition building is seen as potentially enhanced in an online setting, because new possibilities for self-representations also facilitate the promotion of coalitions. This perception is exemplified by Katharine Talbot in her comment on WDM's role in the Stop Climate Chaos coalition which campaigns on climate change issues:

*Stop Climate Chaos has millions of members and people know it as a brand more so than they know WDM. So it is of value to us to be associated. But also we obviously don't want our brand to get hidden underneath all these other coalition brands. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

The opportunity for promoting coalitions online entails producing empty signifiers that enable the forging of alliances between SMOs (Griggs and Howarth, 2002). However,

extending coalitions such as Stop Climate Chaos to incorporate a growing number of differences renders the content of nodal points more and more indeterminate, more and more empty, although never completely devoid of meaning (Griggs and Howarth, 2002; Laclau, 1996). In this sense, empty signifiers are means of representation that, as new elements are added to a chain of equivalences, become more empty. They get “watered down”, as Talbot worries. This is reflected in Talbot’s concern that WDM’s “brand” may “get hidden underneath all these other coalition brands”. While a significant strength in terms of cross-movement solidarity, visibility and possibly bargaining power, this tendentially empties the nodal points around which political identities form. As this backgrounds the particular agenda of WDM, also the particular profile of the SMO becomes is backgrounded to accommodate the more universal agenda and profile of the coalition.

#### **5.2.2.2 War on want: Chains of equivalences as a trade-off**

War on Want respondents also regard the possibility to promote the SMO as central to ensuring commitment among members. At the same time, online media are seen as enabling the proliferation of SMO coalitions constructed to achieve collective goals. Although both possibilities involve strategic elements, the former is underpinned by an understanding of political activism at an organisational level as closely connected to a sense of morality of cooperation, passion and belonging (Fenton, 2008a). In a somewhat different vein, the latter presupposes a view of strategy and rationality as key elements to deal with resource deficiencies and to maximise perceived output from alliances (Griggs and Howarth, 2004).

War on Want respondents talk about this tension as highly relevant in an online context. It is seen as having implications – on the one hand, both possibilities for joint proliferation of these alliances in spaces that the coalition partners use for this particular purpose and possibilities for directing users to War on Want’s organisational website. On the other hand, War on Want respondents point to challenges in terms of

blurring or distorting War on Want's profile and agenda. These possibilities and challenges are illustrated in Nadia Idle's comment on the Put People First coalition:

*...we would try and keep a lot of stuff on our website. But, obviously, if you are working with a coalition like Put People First – I mean it is so big and so big of a project – there is no way we would host it, or no way we would be right to host it. The Put People First site would link through to us, but, also, we would have a text about Put People First on our website before it links through to them to make sure that we are also retaining people a bit and getting them to think about how War on Want fits in with that. So, obviously, we want as many people to stay and browse our website and read our stuff but it is within limits and within reason, where can you maximise the benefit, in a sense. ... It is a bit of a trade-off sometimes. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

The possibilities of different online spaces in relation to these constellations of SMO alliances are thus primarily relayed as important in terms of visibility. The challenges are relayed as connected to potentially redefining political identities, jeopardising a coherent unity at an SMO level.

Political identities are doubly differentiated; *internally*, they are related to different subject positions within a discourse. For example, within the GJM and its discourse on globalisation, WDM members may co-exist with, although differ from, War on Want members. *Externally*, identities acquire meaning by being constituted and defined in relation to other identities. For example, the GJM's identity will be defined by its opposition to proponents of neo-liberalism, corporations, right-wing politicians and so on (Griggs and Howarth, 2002). In this way, for political identities to acquire meaning, they require the drawing of boundaries in relation to insiders within the GJM and outsiders, often by the identification of adversaries or enemies. In this light, the tension referred to by Talbot from WDM is echoed in concerns expressed by War on

Want informants such as Idle's reference to 'trade-off'; the cross-movement construction of chains of equivalences enables visibility, but also runs the risk of impeding political identity formation at the SMO level.

### **5.2.3 Managing political identities in popular online spaces: Reaching broader publics versus sustaining commitment**

As we have seen in this chapter, the importance of engaging members is recognised as key by both War on Want and WDM respondents. At the same time, the role of online media in supporting such commitment is seen as vulnerable by respondents from both SMOs.

Online media may make the importance of building and sustaining relationships and forging political identities rather than simply providing information even more pertinent (Hill and Hughes, 1998). In this vein, Dahlgren argues that it becomes:

*... difficult to maintain organizational control or coherent frames of collective identity ... The very fluid nature of the groups means that groups and their memberships can unintentionally morph into something its original members had not intended, as transitory membership results in a new profile. (Dahlgren, 2009: 193)*

#### **5.2.3.1 WDM: Offline commitment**

In relation to WDM's position at the radical end of the GJM spectrum, the subject positions articulated by WDM respondents cluster around the SMO's analytical and intellectual approach. Here, the SMO's allies within the movement constitute a constitutive outside. This is illustrated by Benedict Southworth's comparison of WDM members to other SMO's members in the Make Poverty History coalition in 2005. In some ways, the Make Poverty History coalition worked within dominant neo-liberal discourses, while challenging on narrower grounds rather than protesting against a

systemic enemy (Hodkinson, 2005). Southworth compares WDM's members to coalition members as a constitutive outside: "Our supporters had a much more sophisticated analysis of Make Poverty History than most of the other supporters" (Southworth, interview, July 2009). In this way, the subject positions made available by WDM for their members to identify with are connected to thorough research on globalisation issues and include "intellectual" and "engaged and informed activists" (Talbot, interview, April 2009). Further, if we take globalisation to be a floating signifier temporarily fixed by the hegemony of a discourse of neo-liberalism, attaching it to "global justice" constructs it as a political project. This is the rationale that WDM HQ staff express when they reflect on the importance of talking about "the root causes of poverty". This is seen as a set of subject positions that entail a sensibility of solidarity with people in the "global South" more so than the proliferation of a need for providing humanitarian aid.

Another set of subject positions that is conjured up vis-à-vis other GJM actors is related to WDM's organisational structure. WDM has a horizontal and loose organisational structure, comprising 60 local groups run on a voluntary basis. These are all consulted for feedback on WDM's campaigns, website and events (Talbot, interview, 2009; WDM, 2008b, see also Chapter 2 for an outline of WDM and War on Want's political and organisational contexts). Allowing for diversity at the membership level is referred to by WDM respondents as a key characteristic of WDM. This is captured well in the quote from Benedict Southworth:

*No one is fighting to win in WDM, even where there were quite substantial differences across the spectrum, the solution to the problem would always seem to be diversity. (Southworth, interview, 2009)*

Compared to other GJM SMOs, this degree of involvement of volunteer activists is not the most common model. Allowing for disparate voices to be expressed risks blurring the coherence of the SMO's outbound message. However, in WDM precisely the



multiplicity of voices is seen as an essential aspect of the SMO's communication to external actors. The subject positions articulated in accounts from WDM HQ staff are subject positions of engaged radical democratic citizenship.

For WDM respondents, the vulnerable role of different online media relates to possibilities for members to engage briefly with short-term issues rather than time-honoured commitments or deep loyalties (Bennett, 2003; Tarrow, 1998). WDM respondents perceive online media as posing a potential tension: while they are seen as providing new possibilities for the SMO's self-representation that could help foster political identification and commitment, online media are also seen as facilitating tendencies towards short-term, issue-specific involvement pointed to by media sceptics. This ambiguity is captured by James O'Nions:

*...you know with the online stuff...I guess we've got to sort of accept that people do, just, to some extent, just pick and choose stuff now. People don't just join something and do whatever they're given within that organisation. Although I don't think we should underestimate the extent to which people do like that idea as well, to have something to identify with. And I think WDM definitely plays that role for a lot of our most committed activists. But we've got to try and dip into the flighty world of online activism as well and make the most of it as well. (O'Nions, interview, July 2009)*

Thus, this "flighty world of online activism" is seen as catering for the multiple, fluid identities that involvement with several SMOs and campaigns may incite. However, WDM respondents also convey an understanding of online media that echoes Cammaerts' (2007) point that the internet may play a part in pulling sympathisers to the core. In this vein, Talbot elaborates:

*...there will be some people who are really committed to WDM and happy to engage fully with everything that we are doing and there will be other people who may be members of ten different*

*organisations. And so, I think if we can at least get those people to engage on some level and it might be that further down the line they actually, you know, they do something else and they write their own letter to an MP that isn't just one of the website, they have actually tailored their own things, so I guess it is sort of drawing people in.*  
(Talbot, interview, April 2009)

Online media are treated by WDM respondents with a precarious but hopeful optimism. For example, a critique from a member calling online campaigning “slacktivism” brings WDM web officer Pete Taylor to express concern in an online post on The Nag<sup>18</sup> that:

*...after months (if not years) of careful nurturing, suggesting that we do a bit more things online, and encouraging, and quite a lot of online campaigns that have worked, I get this in my inbox (and sent round the entire campaigns team, and director of the organisation by a campaigner determined not to use the web)...this has now made my job much harder! (Taylor, interview, July 2009<sup>19</sup>)*

WDM respondents see different online media as suitable for different purposes. While the main reason for accommodating ephemeral involvement is undoubtedly the possibility to build lasting commitment on the basis of this initial contact, they also express an understanding of popular online spaces as key for reaching beyond like-minded bystanders in connection with offline events. The vulnerability of online media is primarily conveyed as related to their insufficiency for building trust and forging political identities. So, online media are cast as fostering a certain artificiality in terms of political engagement.

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<sup>18</sup> Started in 2006, The Nag is a website that aims to help users become politically involved, e.g. by connecting them with pressure groups, SMOs, etc. ([www.thenag.net](http://www.thenag.net), n.d.)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.thenag.net/thoughts/45>

It is argued that this tendency is amplified by the use of online media for political campaigning, including extra-parliamentarian campaigning, as the ease of joining is matched by the ease of leaving online campaigns and groups (Bennett, 2003; Dahlgren, 2009).

#### **5.2.3.2 War on want: Mobilising for offline action**

War on Want respondents convey the “need to have them [members] in a more sort of old fashioned way within War on Want” (Hilary, interview, July 2009). This is underpinned by an ambivalence of ephemeral and long-term connections: on the one hand, it entails allowing for ephemeral, short-term involvement, for example, in connection with specific campaigns. On the other hand, it entails fostering an organisational political identity in order to get potential members to commit to long-term, membership fee-paying affiliations. This ambivalence is captured by John Hilary’s remark on tendencies towards multiple, fluid identities:

*People now are less keen on being sort of locked in as members of particular groups and much more given to one of affiliations which they see as going...which they think is fun and they will join and maybe be off with something else and come back. A much more fluid approach. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

While expressing War on Want’s interests in facilitating ephemeral involvement, Hilary also points to the significance of membership fees that long-term commitment involve:

*It is important for us on a very base level that we continue to have that support because that is the sustainability of our movement you know, we can’t rely on government funding, because we are opposed to the government on so many different levels. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

To further complicate this ambivalence, the fee-paying members are portrayed as traditionally less active than more loosely affiliated supporters. This evokes Dahlgren's (2009: 81) distinction between political participation and political engagement by which participation entails some form of "activity" such as the act of voting, while engagement refers to "focused, mobilized attention". Although Melucci (1989: 173–74) only talks about participation, he makes a similar distinction, pointing to the double meaning of participation as both taking part "to promote the interests and the needs of an actor as well as belonging to a system, identifying with the "general interests" of the community". This distinction is seen by John Hilary as dissolving:

*There have been sort of two distinct groups, the ones who give money and the ones who take action and they are gradually coming together ... you're gonna have your funders on one side, who were sort of passive, stay at home, eventually sign a cheque to War on Want, and, on the other, the activists. And I think again the feeling now is that that distinction no longer holds true. And it is a much greater blurring of the lines where people recognise that political activism is as much the sort of sustaining that type of movement as it is taking part of it. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

In accommodating these complexities, the articulation of subject positions is key. The subject positions that War on Want informants talk about in their accounts mainly cluster around two strands: supporters who have been members since the organisation was set up anchored in the workers' movement in the 1950s and 1960s on the one hand and younger generations on the other:

*So it is trying to cater for all of those within our capacity really and not go overboard on one and not on the other. Trade unions and younger people – And it is the older people that give us money and it is the younger people who do the activism. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

At the same time, the subject positions connected to trade unionists and to ‘younger people’ are seen as transcending the articulation of poverty as political. In this way

*...it’s not just about trust and customer loyalty but it is actually about political identity. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

To War on Want respondents a significant caveat in terms of popular online spaces’ potential for fostering political engagement at an SMO level relates to the tendency for people to engage with specific issues for short-term campaigns. The issue-specific campaigns in the online realm facilitate short-term involvement, often without commitment to specific organisations (Bennett, 2003; Castells, 2001). This concern is captured well by Nadia Idle’s comment on the ability of the online support that the monks’ protests in Burma in 2007 and the displacement of Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka in 2009 have generated:

*Facebook have been used heavily when you are talking about a single issue campaign which is very live. For example, if you look at the monks in Burma when that was happening, or now the Sri Lankan Tamils. Once this group starts – because it is a single issue I think – and it is related very closely to a real life event and a media event. Now, people will be debating this, whereas our group is more about people who support War on Want overall. It is an area for people to post information about campaigns that they are interested in, and using it as a hub. And for us to let people know when things are happening, so I think because it is not a specific, certain campaign, you don’t have that sort of heat that comes and goes. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

This underscores the importance that War on Want respondents attach to the role of a political SMO identity in forging commitment. In this vein, War on Want respondents see popular online spaces as inadequate for fostering lasting, meaningful commitment beyond short-term visibility to single issues. This is illustrated by Nadia Idle’s comment

on Facebook's role in fostering consumer-oriented activism as a part of individuals' self-biographical image management:

*And in terms of how Facebook works for us, I think, I'd rather have it as a slow burn. Because we haven't had the situation where, hopefully, touch wood, a situation where a thousand people join us and next week it is not fashionable anymore, so they leave, whereas you do get that with single-issue campaigns, obviously, because people are reacting to a real life thing, whereas we are trying to use the group to let people know about all our work, overall of which campaigns go up and down, are successful or are not successful, etc. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

In addition to viewing popular online spaces as tenuous beyond possibilities for ephemeral political involvement, War on Want respondents also convey the importance of popular online spaces as linked to reaching broader publics. Importantly, reaching broader publics online is seen as an avenue to facilitate possibilities for sustaining collective solidarities in offline contexts:

*...there is a very big difference between getting people on Facebook to know about us and calling that online activism in its sense...cyberspace is only the space or the tool through which we reach those people. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

Pessimistic accounts of point-and-click activism and lazy politics in the literature on the internet's potentialities as a vehicle for reinvigorating the public sphere (e.g. Dahlberg, 2001; Sunstein, 2001) are echoed by War on Want respondents as they express scepticism towards online petitions:

*...there is sort of a type of online action which I don't like and we don't really do, which is that sort of thing where you're pledging things ... it's feeling you have done something but you haven't really*

*done anything. And that's where I think there are some campaigns that lack honesty and you're sort of demanding up support for something and making people feel that they've done something. And sometimes they haven't done anything at all. (Idle, interview, April 2009)*

In this view, petitions rather than popular online spaces as such are conveyed as inadequate in fostering political engagement. Again, this invokes Dahlgren's distinction between political participation and political engagement, the latter entailing some degree of affective bond while the former may merely (although not necessarily) imply participation with a minimum engagement in a nonreflexive manner (Dahlgren, 2009). Nonreflexive participation does not ensure fee paying members for SMOs. Moreover, it does not forge the political identities as citizens that is required to bring about social change – a form of radical political citizenship that is grounded in our political identities, not “an empirical referent” (Mouffe, 1992: 30). SMOs are important in this respect because they work as hubs for long-term engagement between large-scale counter-summits. Social change requires a political project to which individuals are committed and collectively engage in the nitty-gritty of everyday organisation of resistance and imagining of alternatives that happen beyond single-issue campaigns and large-scale events (Cammaerts and van Audenhove, 2005; Fenton, 2008a). This, then, requires members that are committed to SMOs and their agendas.

### 5.3 Chapter conclusions

Online presences are more than ever essential for SMOs to attract attention in the public sphere. The range of popular online spaces has expanded significantly, as has the professionalisation of campaign communication. Consequently, a range of civil society networks and groups, including SMOs, now attempt to influence political agenda setting through a diverse array of communication forms and formats (Cottle, 2003).

The chapter has shown that War on Want and WDM HQ staff are concerned with the promotion of their own SMO and its particular agenda. This works on two levels: (1) at the SMO level, they reflect on their SMOs' agendas as articulated within a discourse of justice, calling for political solutions to poverty and inequality rather than aid-centred relief or voluntary codes of conduct; (2) at the movement level, they reflect on the construction of chains of equivalences by entering into coalitions as a trade-off between the promotion of the particular agendas of their own SMOs and gaining leverage for the cause through the promotion of the movement or of coalitions. There is a negotiation between the universal and the particular (Howarth and Griggs, 2008; Laclau, 1996).

These issues are intensified in HQ staff's rationales for using popular online spaces. Again, these rationales are concerned with the SMO level and the movement level, but they also involve the management of political identities, as War on Want and WDM HQ staff attach great importance to forging and sustaining commitment among existing members and reaching new members:

- 1) At the SMO level, popular online spaces are seen as essential in promoting the particular SMO agenda especially to gain visibility among broader publics, but this is tempered by concerns about bringing them from the periphery to the core, from the online to the offline. However, accounts from War on Want respondents are characterised by a somewhat gloomier take on these potentialities, whereas WDM respondents are more hopeful, if not quite optimistic, in their understanding. Despite presenting different degrees of scepticism, respondents from both SMOs express a cautious outlook on online media in relation to political engagement that suggests a disillusioned understanding of these possibilities.
- 2) At the movement level, concerns about the "tradeoff" between promoting the SMO and promoting the movement are augmented as online spaces are seen as facilitating both. In accounts from HQ SMO staff, 'justice' works as a nodal point as well as an empty signifier in the articulation of the GJM. 'Justice' is an empty



signifier that is sufficiently emptied of meaning to cover an eclectic movement that comprises issues ranging from anti-capitalism to climate change (Griggs and Howarth, 2002). In this sense, messages get “watered down” (Talbot, interview, April 2009). At the same time ‘justice’ works as a nodal point that ties together disparate issues related to inequality. This is seen as posing increased challenges for the SMOs to discursively carve out a distinctive position for their particular agenda. In doing so, both WDM and War on Want respondents understand their SMOs as overtly political in their approach to inequality. This is seen as locating them at the radical end of the GJM spectrum. Here, the dominant signifiers are “poverty is political” and “fighting the root causes of global poverty”. At this radical end, respondents see their SMOs’ roles in relation to coalition partners and particularly in relation to each other, simultaneously conjuring up similarities and constructing each other as significantly distinct. They see their two SMOs as similar, because they are overtly political in their approaches to inequality. At the same time, respondents from both SMOs see WDM’s agenda as based on empirical policy research and War on Want’s agenda as historically based on the interests of the labour movement. In this way, meaning construction at this radical end is driven by a narcissism of minor differences.

- 3) In terms of managing political identities, the overarching narratives expressed by respondents from the two SMOs are characterised by a cautious take on the potentialities of online media in fostering political engagement. This is deeply rooted in the view that political identities are forged in offline settings. Online spaces are seen as privileging visibility over engagement, and constitute a cause for tension, because the latter is essential to SMOs to ensure membership contributions, and, thus, survival independently of corporate funding.

At the intersection of these three aspects, the explanations relayed in relation to rationales for using popular online spaces primarily cluster around the possibility for reaching broader publics. For WDM respondents, an additional incentive is a wish not to fall behind as other SMOs follow a trend: “Ahm...because everyone else was doing

it. It was a bit of a bandwagon jump on thing” (Taylor, interview, April 2009). In contrast, War on Want respondents stress the importance of using these sites because they provide certain possibilities rather than seeing them as a fad: “There are so many NGOs and charities and campaign groups that are just doing it because it is the next thing to do. And it’s like...these things shouldn’t come with fashion.” (Idle, interview, April 2009). WDM respondents seem sceptically hopeful in the sense that their accounts are vested with hopes for visibility, while they are deeply sceptical, if not outright disillusioned as to possibilities for fostering meaningful political engagement in an online context. War on Want respondents seem cynically positive; they harbour no illusions about possibilities for political engagement and collective identity formation, but possibilities for visibility are relayed as already proving successful. Regardless of their approaches to and experiences with using these sites, respondents from both organisations demonstrate awareness that they significantly condition their terms of existence.

Despite the contradictory relationship between profit-driven online spaces and War on Want’s and WDM’s agendas, respondents from the two SMOs do not convey decisive concerns regarding corporate ownership of the spaces they use. When prompted, they express wishes for an alternative, but they no longer regard radical or alternative<sup>20</sup> online spaces as a realistic alternative option for visibility in a mainstream public sphere. This seeming lack of reflexivity is problematic, because, as Fenton (2008b) argues, the internet “is an enabling device that is as susceptible to the structuring forces of power as any other technology”. In this sense, WDM and War on Want are vulnerable to co-optation, subjugating their political agendas to commercial logics:

*To consider the internet as an unproblematic force for social change is to ignore the political and economic determinants that shape the technology; it is to pay little attention to how technological*

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Atton’s notion of an alternative internet vis-à-vis Downing’s notion of radical media.

*‘advances’ may be shaped or determined by particular social and cultural elites (corporations, governments); and it is to ignore the obstacles to empowerment that legislation, inequalities of access, limits on media literacy and the real-world situation of disempowerment necessarily place on groups and individuals. (Atton, 2004: 24)*

A major concern that follows from this is that extra-parliamentarian politics cannot be divorced from profit-driven logics “so that what appears to be political may be no more than market-based activism” (Fenton, 2008b: 241). Promoting their SMOs in profit-driven online spaces possibly corrodes the possibility of certain kinds of democratic politics – it can be seen as antithetical to constructing the corporate world as the antagonist and their own position as one of “being on the outside” (Tucker, interview, April 2009) and “more out on the edge” (Talbot, interview, April 2009). However, respondents convey a sense of reflexivity and do not take for granted the corporate structures of many of the popular online spaces they use. Rather, using profit-driven online spaces is seen as necessary. In other words, respondents see the promotion of the agendas of their SMOs as requiring adapting to a system of commodification and consumer culture in which visibility entails persuasion and impression management as a logic they have to play by. As Benedict Southworth put it “If there was an alternative people would use it” (Southworth, interview, July 2009).

This chapter has shown how SMO HQ staff think about popular online spaces and their possibilities for promoting the causes of their SMOs and forging political identities. The next chapter shifts from rationales for using popular online media to an analysis of the manifestations of these rationales as they appear in SMO campaigns.

## 6 Managing political identities: Appearances of SMO campaigns in popular online spaces

Chapter 5 analysed the rationales behind online media strategies as they are conveyed by SMO directors, campaign and outreach managers and web officers. This chapter explores the ways in which these understandings are manifested in the appearances of the SMOs' campaigns in different online spaces.

Chapter 5 showed that SMO HQ staff understand the agendas and positions of their SMOs in relation to other actors, social movement allies as well as enemies and adversaries. In protesting against a neo-liberal model of globalisation these understandings revolve around three dominant themes: first, SMO HQ staff regard the possibilities provided by popular online spaces as important for self-representations to wider publics, but inadequate for forging political identities; second, the construction of alliances to gain momentum for the cause is seen as potentially obscuring the visibility of the SMO's own brand; third, SMO HQ staff attach great importance to targeting structures of governance rather than promoting voluntary codes of conduct and political consumerism as a key part of the agenda of both WDM and War on Want.

Exploring how these issues are manifested in WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns as they appear across online spaces, this chapter is driven by research sub-question two which asks: *How are SMOs articulated as agents of resistance and members of the GJM in their campaigns in popular online spaces, and what possibilities for political identity formation does this entail?*

In addressing this question, the chapter analyses the manifestations of the rationales behind the self-representations and their promotion in online spaces through a focus on two specific SMO campaigns. The analysis draws on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory supplemented by concepts from Benford and Snow (2000) framing perspective so as to address the strategic aspects of the communication of contestation across online spaces. In order to fully capture the visual and multimodal aspects of the online terrain and its ephemeral qualities, this part of the chapter further draws on elements

from Chouliaraki's analytics of mediation (2006a) and also considers the technologisation of action as part of campaign communication (Chouliaraki, 2010). To this end, the chapter analyses the SMOs' trade campaigns, focusing on four analytical concepts: (1) antagonism/agonism and the articulation of enemies and adversaries; (2) logics of equivalence and difference and the articulation of alliances and ingroup/outgroup distinctions; (3) agency and motivational framing to capture articulations and multimodal representations of severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety; and (4) subjectivity and the articulation of subject positions with which members are invited to identify in textual, visual and multimodal compositions.

These categories help unveil the online promotions of the SMO agendas that the campaigns make available for WDM and War on Want members. As the analysis in Chapter 5 showed, the strategic attempts to invert the hegemonic positioning of economic liberalisation, transnational capitalism and corporate domination is central to the SMOs' positioning vis-à-vis other actors as well as in fostering political identities that form the crux of members' commitment to the SMO and its cause. In this way, the analysis serves to open up possibilities for examining the dialectics of, on the one hand, management of visibility and strategy and, on the other, political identity formation and commitment in the context of social movement contestation. Exploring these dialectics in the context of popular online spaces warrants unpacking how the campaigns – using various modes of representation available in online media – appeal to sensibilities of passion and rationality, resistance and an alternative imaginary, the particular and the universal. And in doing so, how they represent the interrelated concerns of visibility, alliances, and commitment raised by respondents in Chapter 5.

The analysis in this chapter first looks at the trade campaigns in the SMOs' websites and then shifts to its appearances across different online spaces. In the case of both WDM and War on Want these spaces are Facebook, Flickr, YouTube Twitter and MySpace. This chapter first looks at WDM's trade campaign, following it from WDM's website and across online spaces. Next it moves on to War on Want's trade campaign, repeating this procedure.

## 6.1 SMO uses of the possibilities of popular online spaces

This chapter shows that the issues of visibility, alliances, and commitment disentangled in Chapter 5 are reflected in different ways in WDM and War on Want's online communication practices. Overall, the SMOs are similar in terms of the online spaces they employ and the coalitions they promote. However, they differ in their modes of self-representation. Nonetheless, as we saw in Chapter 5, both SMOs see online media as a key platform for putting across their agendas. Accordingly, both SMOs also make use of a wide range of online spaces, embracing the argument that "electronic media have become the privileged space of politics" (Castells, 1997: 311).

## 6.2 WDM: calling for justice

*Free trade isn't working (WDM, 2009)*

As Chapter 5 showed, the main understanding that underpins WDM's overall agenda is a critique of the hegemony of neo-liberal globalisation and its implications in the southern hemisphere. In this vein, WDM respondents talked about "the dark side of globalisation" (Talbot, interview, April 2009) and being "...critical of neo-liberalism in the global south or its impacts on the South" (O'Nions, interview, July 2009). Thus, respondents sought to destabilise the dominant neo-liberal approach to globalisation by linking globalisation as a floating signifier to the nodal point 'neo-liberalism'. Making this link explicit and thus visible serves to show the neoliberal model of globalisation as one that should not be taken for granted as the only approach to increasing interregional and transnational connectivity.

Before exploring the appearances of the trade campaign in the various popular spaces employed by WDM, the analysis first attends to the ways in which it is expressed in WDM's website. WDM's website was re-launched on 6 June 2009, following a structural and visual redesign. The new design was first presented to members at the annual Campaigners' Convention, where it was introduced by web officer Pete Taylor

as “a showcase for WDM to complement our campaigns”, inviting feedback from members at all levels.

### **6.2.1 WDM’s trade campaign: multiple appropriations**

WDM has been campaigning on trade since 1970, with 1992 onward seeing intensification in this arena, addressing issues such as subsidies and quotas on sugar and textiles and the by now legendary protests against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1996 and WTO in 2004. WDM was also a founding member of the Trade Justice Movement<sup>21</sup> (WDM, 2008a).

The current WDM trade campaign addresses the role of transnational political institutions, such as the WTO and EU, in favouring corporatist arrangements and “...hurt[ing] the poor”.<sup>22</sup> In this way, the campaign focuses on the role of political institutions rather than corporations in contributing to trade regimes that keep certain groups in poverty and harmful working conditions. In so doing, it calls for political solutions rather than targeting corporations by, for example, suggesting boycotts and promoting ethical consumption. Nonetheless, this way of trying to change the regulatory framework that governs trade is not overtly articulated as a solution exclusively preferable to targeting the corporate world directly. As we shall see, in some contexts WDM’s trade campaign identifies the corporate world as adversaries, while attempting to align its demands with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

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<sup>21</sup> The Trade Justice Movement was set up in 2000 to campaign on regulations on international trade. Coalition partners in the Trade Justice Movement include ActionAid, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, TUC, War on Want and WDM.

<sup>22</sup> [www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign-summary](http://www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign-summary)

### 6.2.1.1 The Trade campaign on WDM's website

The campaign as it is introduced in WDM's website is centred round the slogan 'Free trade isn't working' and appropriates one of the slogans of the GJM, 'Capitalism isn't working'. This is a culture-jamming appropriation that mocks the Conservatives' 1979 'Labour isn't working' election poster that reflected discontent at growing unemployment in a time of recession (see e.g. Cammaerts, 2007, and Harold, 2004 for discussions of the intertextual strategies of culture-jamming in counter-cultural movements). In this way, the slogan begins to capture two of WDM's key articulations: (1) diagnostic framing and rearticulation of free trade; and (2) the creation of equivalences.



Figure 3: Campaign photo in WDM's trade campaign website [www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign](http://www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign), WDM, 2009

First, the slogan articulates free trade as a problem that contributes to power structures that keep poor people in poverty and privilege the interests of the corporate world and northern states and transnational alliances. Second, it works to align WDM's trade campaign with the GJM, positioning WDM in a chain of equivalence with other GJM organisations and networks. Thus, the campaign slogan extends WDM's particular campaign struggles to change the regulatory framework that allows trade relations to keep poor people in poverty to a more universal struggle that critiques a broader range of aspects of capitalism, including gender and ethnic inequality, social exclusion and climate change (Griggs and Howarth, 2004; Laclau, 1996).



The subtitle in WDM's trade campaign further appropriates the GJM's use of the original Conservative slogan. In the GJM's version, the alternative proposed in the original subtitle 'Britain's better off with the Conservatives' has been changed to the World Social Forum's 'Another world is possible'. WDM's campaign appropriates this to the subtitle 'The world's better off with trade justice'. In addition to beginning to outline the SMO's re-articulation of free trade by suggesting the existence of an alternative to the current organisation of trade relations, the subtitle further emphasises WDM's alliance with the GJM. Additionally, it invokes WDM's orientation towards 'the Global South' by representing what can be seen as workers from this region. But the outlining of an alternative is not followed up by suggestions that envisage the specifics of how things could be different.

The aesthetic quality of the campaign is multimodal equivalence: the different elements that the campaign employs invoke the same historical allusions and intertextual references. Visually, the campaign slogan also appropriates the Conservative's election campaign and the GJM campaign. It uses visual aesthetics to subvert political and corporate campaign material and advertisements through a deconstruction and ironic appropriation of their visual material (Harold, 2004). As in the campaigns it draws on the image against which the slogan is placed, showing a line of people queuing for the unemployment office. None of the people in the queue are Caucasian as in the original poster.<sup>23</sup> This further stresses WDM's transnational orientation and positions people in the 'Global South' as a part of the WDM's ingroup.

The text that elaborates the slogan of the campaign foregrounds problem identification and the identification of adversaries. It problematises the neoliberal model of globalisation and its market-driven doctrine. At the same time, it identifies the corporate world as an adversary:

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<sup>23</sup> Whereas the Conservatives' campaign shows a black and white image of what can arguably be construed as middle-class people, the unemployment queue in the GJM's campaign represents a more diverse cast.

*In the era of globalisation the search for profit has gone global. Trade has the potential to lift millions out of poverty. But the current rules of trade are biased in favour of big business at the expense of the world's poor. (www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign, WDM, 2009)*

The campaign does not denounce globalisation altogether. And, globalisation and trade are not constructed as inherent evils. Instead, the campaign points to possibilities for approaches to globalisation that are not based on neoliberal market logics. These alternatives are not proposed as lying with the corporate world. Despite naming 'big business' as an adversary, the campaign points to 'the current rules of trade' as key in conditioning the possibilities of 'the world's poor'. In this way, the articulation of adversaries works to indirectly identify policy makers as another adversary as well as suggesting alternatives. Again, this alternative is articulated around trade policies as a significant point of attention and change, suggesting "trade policies that put people before profits" (WDM, 2009).

More specifically, the campaign grounds the problem in a regional focus. Specifically addressing the 'Problem', the campaign's outlook is grounded in a European perspective:

*The problem...In 2006, European officials and big European companies cooked up a new strategy in the quest to become the world's biggest trading power... corporate giants reaped the profits. (www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign, WDM, 2009)*

The corporate world is identified as the villain along with international organisations such as the WTO. In both cases – the corporate world and policy makers – the roles of villains are articulated as adversaries rather than enemies. The trade campaign does not construct them as illegitimate actors who must be eliminated from the political, institutional or social scene. Rather, the campaign aims to influence the ways in which these actors govern and are held accountable for their operations. This entails a view of the enemy, or rather adversary, as a legitimate opponent whose existence is

respected, although contested (Griggs and Howarth, 2004). This aim emerges in the campaign's diagnostic frame, which is explicitly articulated as 'The solution' and proposes a number of points that would be components in an alternative framework. These suggest policy making as central to ensuring a just trading regime that does not let European corporate interests' dominate development policies. Again, the corporate world is constructed as a massive, powerful adversary and plays a central role in formulating alternatives. However, the responsibility to bring about the changes the campaign advocates and holding companies accountable rests with policy makers: "Such a system would ... [b]e transparent, democratic and truly representative" ([www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign](http://www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign), WDM, 2009).

The identification of the corporate world and policy makers as adversaries also works as a constitutive outside against which WDM establishes its identity. The signifiers 'the *world's biggest* trading power' and 'corporate *giants*' work as contrasts to WDM, construing WDM as the unrenowned challenger from the non-institutional periphery of the scene of institutional politics and corporate lobbying ([www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign](http://www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign), WDM, 2009, emphasis added). As we shall see later, WDM's trade campaign also invokes a position as a minor, challenging player at an intra-movement level.

This discourse of (in)justice and system critique that cast transnational institutions and big business in the roles of adversaries persists across trade campaign texts in the website, but the use of justice as a nodal point fades. For example, the call for action in connection with the WTO ministerial conference from 30 November to 2 December 2009 focuses on the EU's role in negotiating a trade deal 'that pushes for more free trade' and is constructed as an online petition to ask the European Trade Commissioner to reconsider the EU's support for such a deal.

This attempt to assign new meaning to trade at a policy level also appears in the visuals of the call that substitute 'Trade' for 'Takeover' in graphics that resemble graffiti. Using a visual style that is often associated with street centred counter-culture to change World Trade Organization to 'World Takeover Organization' conjures up

notions of dissent and can be seen as an attempt at placing WDM at the radical end of a GJM spectrum in the UK. Further, this serves to destabilise free trade as a way to facilitate growth and prosperity that the hegemony of neo-liberalism constructs as taken for granted.



Figure 4: Campaign photo in WDM's trade campaign website  
[www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign](http://www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign), WDM, 2009

The articulation of agency is prominent in the WTO sub-campaign with its explicit call for action. This is uncharacteristic of the overall discourse in WDM's trade campaign. The WTO sub-campaign is event-centred and the relevance of its timeframe is therefore limited, providing a tangible sense of urgency. Apart from this attempt to inspire action, the trade campaign includes little motivational framing; the email petition 'Take action to make trade work for the world's poor' and 'Support our trade campaigning work with a donation or by joining WDM as a member' are the only explicit possibilities for action provided as part of the trade campaign in the WDM website. The former is an invitation to sign an online petition, and the latter a request for financial support. While financial support helps the WDM remain independent of government or even corporate funding, it does not necessarily involve political engagement and commitment to the cause or organisation (Vestergaard, 2008). An invitation to sign an online petition is an example of technologisation of action (Chouliaraki, 2010). As a mode of political engagement it connects agency to effortless immediacy. This offers subject positions that are tied to the single act of participation

rather than commitment to the political cause that underpins WDM's trade campaign (Fenton, 2008a). Neither possibility for action encourages a kind of political engagement that translates into radical democratic citizenship (Mouffe, 2005). The political identity of a 'we' against an external 'them' that this would involve remains scant in the possibilities for action provided in WDM's trade campaign on the organisation's website. There is no substantial attempt at constructing a sense of solidarity that might facilitate a move beyond point-and-click activism to motivate engagement at the collective level through, for example, an invitation to join the local groups' work on the trade campaign. Indeed, WDM's 64 local groups are not represented in the context of the trade campaign. However, they do figure prominently (granted equal visibility as WDM's campaigns) with contact details and visual representations from offline events under the 'Community' heading ([www.wdm.org.uk](http://www.wdm.org.uk)). The groups' work on the trade campaign appears in the social networking and file sharing sites used by groups to promote WDM's campaigns locally (see Chapter 7 for an analysis of perceptions and uses of popular online spaces in WDM groups). In addition to its main online presence in the organisational website, the main part of WDM's trade campaign – developed by HQ staff – also appears in a number of popular online spaces.

#### **6.2.1.2 WDM's trade campaign in popular online spaces**

The popular online spaces in which the main part of WDM's trade campaign appears are Facebook, Flickr, YouTube Twitter and MySpace. In the following, the analysis takes as its focus WDM's uses of these spaces. However, within this practice-oriented focus, the main features of the formats of these sites will very briefly be outlined successively as an integrated part of the analysis.

#### 6.2.1.2.1 WDM's Facebook presences

On the social networking site Facebook, WDM has a fan page as well as a group profile, but the WDM website only links to the fan page.

A Facebook fan page allows “organizations, businesses, celebrities, and bands to broadcast great information to fans in an official, public manner” (Facebook help center, 2009). The terms ‘fan’ and ‘products’, and the juxtaposition of organisations, businesses and celebrities suggest that fan page practices operate along logics of consumer culture (Fenton, 2009). This can be seen as contributing to a commercialisation and commodification of WDM’s discourse. WDM primarily uses this ‘fan page’ to promote offline events and disseminate news. In January 2010, the fan page had 1,415 ‘fans’. The trade campaign is not featured prominently on the fan page. However, it does include a link to a November 2008 viewing of the animation video *The Great Trade Robbery* (see also the section on YouTube below for a brief analysis of the video).

WDM also has a Facebook group profile. However, there is no link from the organisational website to this profile. Group profiles “... are meant to foster group discussion around a particular topic area while Pages allow entities such as public figures and organizations to broadcast information to their fans”.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in the case of the main WDM Group<sup>25</sup> possibilities for discussion remain unexploited: on 30 January 2010 the discussion board included a total of 13 topics. More than half of these are single posts with no responses. Moreover, Group activities do not appear in group members’ news feeds unless they are posted by a user who is your ‘friend’ (unlike friends’ profile updates), so often group members have to actively visit the Group page to get updates (Facebook blog, 2009)<sup>26</sup>. The lack of interaction in terms of discussion

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<sup>24</sup> [www.facebook.com/help/?faq=16140](http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=16140) retrieved December 29, 2009

<sup>25</sup> Several of the local WDM groups have a Facebook Group. These will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7 which addresses members’ perceptions of the role of online spaces in relation to their political engagement and sense of political identity

<sup>26</sup> [blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=156031977130](http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=156031977130)

and the absence of Group activities from news feeds have brought about comparisons to identity badges (boyd and Ellison, 2007). As in the WDM fan page, the trade campaign does not figure prominently in the Group profile. The link to the November 2008 viewing of *The Great Trade Robbery* is also posted here as one of the few references to the trade campaign. Further, the trade campaign is only featured in five of the 31 photos uploaded to the Group.

#### **Aesthetic qualities in WDM's Facebook Group profile: identifying villains visually**

The five photos in WDM's Group profile have been added by the WDM web officer, and two of them are graphically modified campaign photos, including the one featured in the SMO website. The other modified campaign photo shows four of the G8 leaders who were present at the summit in 2004. Bush, Chirac, Blair and Putin are represented with digitally enhanced noses so as to resemble the lying Pinocchio.



Figure 5: WDM campaign image featured in WDM's group profile

([www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2318628421&ref=ts#!/group.php?gid=2318628421](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2318628421&ref=ts#!/group.php?gid=2318628421))

This intertextual reference casts G8 leaders in the roles of the enemy, pointing to their failure to keep their promises of unconditional debt relief and not to force through trade deals to rapidly open up the developing countries' markets. It further creates an intertextual link to the text in WDM's website which constructs the EU's trade policies as an attempt on the part of European officials and corporate companies having cooked up a strategy for reaping profits at the expense of developing countries ([www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign](http://www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign), WDM, 2009).

The other three photos in WDM's main Group are all from an offline event, related to the World Social Forum day of action, to protest against the EU's trade deals with developing countries. The event took place outside the EU's representation in London. The promotion of offline events in the Group and the photos both testify to an understanding of offline action events as central to WDM's contestatory practices and



**Figure 6: WDM trade campaign protest featured in WDM's Facebook Group profile**

in fostering identification with WDM. Titles or explanatory texts have not been added to the photos, but the banners that WDM protesters are holding clearly indicate the issue at stake to broader publics: 'Stop Europe's unfair trade deals' constructs the EU as an adversary and negotiating strategies adopted by the EU towards developing countries as 'unfair'. This echoes the use of 'justice' in the introductory campaign image. Although 'justice' as a recurring signifier fades and is replaced by 'unfair' once the

campaign text moves beyond the introductory image, signifiers that invoke construals



of justice, such as ‘unfair’, pop up in material from the trade campaign displayed in different popular online spaces.

All three photos are also visual representations of the chains of equivalence that WDM staff recounted as obvious alignment constellations in Chapter 5. While WDM protesters are the focus of the photos, they can be seen demonstrating alongside activists from War on Want and Friends of the Earth UK. In this way, the photos reiterate the contradictory relationship between constructing chains of equivalence to gain momentum in the political domain and promoting their own SMO to gain members and financial support for a particular perspective on trade and globalisation issues (Griggs and Howarth, 2002; Mouffe, 1992).

#### 6.2.1.2.2 WDM’s Flickr presences: visual representations of street protests

Possibilities for promoting visual self-representations are also provided in Flickr. The file-sharing site allows users to share video and photos. On 30 January 2010 WDM’s Flickr profile included 948 photos organised into 27 sets. Five of these sets have titles specifically linking them to the trade campaign. These are: *The Great Trade Robbery*; Peter Mandelson returns to the UK; World Social Forum day of action; and Trade Justice Movement: Stop Europe’s unfair trade deals. These include a total of 126 photos, dating from April 2007 to November 2009. No more photos have been tagged ‘trade’. *The Great Trade Robbery* set features still photos from a short animation video produced by WDM as a part of the trade campaign. Apart from the Great Trade Robbery set, all the photos related to the trade campaign are from offline events, including the protest against the EU’s trade deals depicted in WDM’s Facebook Group. This further constructs offline engagement as key to political identity building – the majority of WDM’s online activity is dedicated to the promotion of offline activities.

The use of complementary text in WDM’s Flickr profile is scarce, and only the photos in the WTO ministerial conference set are accompanied by individual texts. Most of the text that does accompany photos related to the trade campaign serves as explanatory

backdrops to the offline events. For example, the following text accompanies several of the photos of the street demonstration:

*During the WTO ministerial conference 2009, over 100 activists and trade campaigners from around the world came together to tour three venues of agricultural crime against the poor: Bunge, Cargill and Migros.*

This works to contextualise the demonstration and points to the WTO as well as specific multinational businesses as adversaries and ‘the poor’ as part of the WDM ingroup. It does so by articulating agribusiness companies Bunge, Cargill and Migros as “venues of agricultural crime”. The use of the signifier ‘crime’ extends the intertextual link between ‘cooked up’ (the WDM website), ‘justice’ (WDM’s website, Facebook) and the growing Pinocchio noses of the 2004 G8 leaders (WDM’s group profile, Facebook), inscribing the identification of adversaries into a discourse of justice.



Figure 7 WDM, War on Want and FoE outside the London EU office

The Flickr site provides possibilities for posting comments to individual photos or to sets. However, among the photos related to the trade campaign, only one photo has received a comment. This is a photo from the ‘World Social Forum day of action’ set from January 2008. It shows WDM, War on Want and Friends of the Earth UK protesters outside the London EU office holding banners with their respective SMO logos and a shared banner asking EU trade negotiators not to “...lock Africa into poverty”. Also represented in WDM’s main Facebook Group, this event can be seen as

important to WDM's construction of chains of equivalence within the GJM, promoting a common diagnostic frame outside the offices of a common adversary. The comment that has been posted to the photo refers to the War on Want banner, and remarks that "The "war" language seems inappropriate".<sup>27</sup> While this single comment is by no means representative of any perceptions of WDM's uploaded photos, it does suggest that the GJM should be seen as rooted in local spheres; the alliances into which WDM enters do not invoke resonance among users unfamiliar with the UK scene of activism, as this misconstrual of War on Want's logo and raison d'être indicates.

#### 6.2.1.2.3 WDM's YouTube channel: aesthetics of parody

WDM's YouTube channel features the trade campaign in five videos categorised as part of the trade campaign. The videos include *The Great Trade Robbery* from which still photos constitute one of WDM's Flickr sets. The other videos categorised as a part of the trade campaign are the 2008 silent movie *The Trade Dictator*, a documentary-style critique of transnational banks and their the lending policies in the developing world, and two videos centred around offline events. One is the *Bangladesh Mine – Barclays Bank* video that shows the co-director from the International Accountability Project<sup>28</sup> reporting after having attended Barclays' AGM with WDM policy officer Tim Jones. The other offline-centred video is from the World Social Forum day of action demonstration that is also featured in WDM's main Facebook Group and Flickr profile.

'*The Trade Dictator*', '*The Great Trade Robbery*' and the video from the World Social Forum (WSF) demonstration all address EU trade policy in relation to developing countries:

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<sup>27</sup> The comment has been posted approximately a year after the photo was uploaded, in January 2009, by Flickr user 'Toban Black' who identifies himself as a Canadian PhD student based in London

<sup>28</sup> The International Accountability Project is a San Francisco based non-profit organisation

*'The Trade Dictator'* is a five minute black and white silent movie that shows a caricatured then European Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson conjuring up strategies for "...get[ting] what we want from poor countries in the global trade talks...". The title is an intertextual reference to Chaplin's film *'The Great Dictator'* about Hitler. The Mandelson character then executes these strategies by "bullying poor countries" into having their "markets opened for big business to exploit". The "poor countries" are represented by a man reading a newspaper in a park. Mandelson's "bullying" is aesthetically represented as the caricature character beats the man with a club until he surrenders.



Figure 8: Stills from WDM's *The Trade Dictator* video

The aesthetic properties of the clip, the multimodal juxtaposition of black and white, muted gestures, and dialogue displayed as text, are properties of the silent film genre. This further emphasises the intertextual reference to Chaplin's 1940 (partly) silent film about Hitler. This visual appropriation resonates the other trade texts in trying to destabilise dominant understandings of trade as necessarily entailing free, open markets. It suggests the possibility of an alternative approach to trade that is not based on unfettered global markets but allows the 'Global South' to "defend their own

interests”.<sup>29</sup> It also distinctly positions policy makers and the corporate world as a constitutive outside to WDM’s self-representation. Moreover, conniving (sarcastically referred to as employing “tact, diplomacy, subtlety”) and club in hand, Mandelson is cast in the role of the villain. Alluding to Chaplin’s satirical portrayal of Hitler, this serves to suggest that Mandelson conducts politics in a dictatorial, undemocratic, ruthless manner. Nonetheless, this antagonistic representation is seasoned by the “tongue in cheek” style of the video (WDM, 2008a), suggesting a willingness to turn antagonism into agonism. In other words, the parodic slant created by the explicit mention of a “tongue-in-cheek” tone, and the use of an oversized inflatable club indicate a deliberate attempt at exaggeration. This indicates that the comparison between Mandelson and Hitler is meant as an exaggeration. What might have been the identification of Mandelson as an enemy is tempered by the parodic properties of the clip and thus modifies this to identify Mandelson as an adversary.

While *‘The Trade Dictator’* video addresses an issue that is pertinent at the EU level, the focus on Mandelson – a central figure in UK politics – repositions the issue of EU



Figure 9: Stills from WDM’S *The Trade Dictator* video

trade deals at a local UK level. This reflects della Porta and Tarrow’s (2005) notion of rooted cosmopolitanism, developed to capture the tendency for GJM groups to be

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<sup>29</sup> [www.youtube.com/user/wdmuk#p/a/E2D63FDB14174FA5/0/FGsNf8chgnc](http://www.youtube.com/user/wdmuk#p/a/E2D63FDB14174FA5/0/FGsNf8chgnc)

rooted in local environments, while they are also connected to transnational systems and issues. Also, the video addresses the 'dictatorial' Mandelson's role in promoting the centrist approach that underpins New Labour's third way politics – the approach that can be seen as underpinned by an understanding of politics as striving for consensus and, in so doing, eradicating the conflictual dimension of the political (Mouffe, 2005). In this way, the video connects the mid-1990s reinvention of the Labour Party to the hegemony of a neo-liberal discourse that connects trade to free markets, a hegemony that eliminates possibilities of other approaches to trade. By linking New Labour's Third Way politics to neoliberal trade regimes, *The Trade Dictator* video makes this connection visible. Rendering visible discursive connections that we have come to take for granted contributes to destabilising their naturalisation (Mouffe, 2005).

With its five minutes, the video borders the threshold of the length of popular YouTube videos (Abhari and Soraya, 2009). Indeed, '*The Trade Dictator*' was not produced for YouTube; it was produced as a multimodal introductory presentation for debate at offline events (Katharine, interview, April 2009).

Similarly, with its seven minutes '*The Great Trade Robbery*' was also produced for offline discussion events (Katharine, interview, April 2009). The aesthetic properties of the video are a multimodal juxtaposition of animation and photo-based representations of real-life personalities and humanised animals. The setting is a 'mock' theatre. This aesthetic juxtaposition works to uncover power relations of trade negotiations as a charade. In addition, it suggests an educational purpose, as the video explains complex processes in entertaining packaging (Chouliaraki, 2010).



Figure 10: Stills from WDM's *The Great Trade Robbery* video

In addition to length, the video shares a number of common traits with *The Trade Dictator*. First, the video addresses the issue of EU trade deals from the perspective of an imaginary EU policy maker, represented as a wolf. The wolf addresses an assembly mainly consisting of sheep representing “the major players in international business”, but also including suit-clad, animation versions of political despots ranging from Lenin and Hitler to Mao. As in *The Great Trade Dictator*, portraying these characters together serves to suggest that international businesses operate in a dictatorial, undemocratic manner. The main story relayed by the wolf represents the US, EU and Japan as sharks hunting for “fresh markets, after all this is the era of globalisation”. Representing the trading powers as sharks serves to construct them as predators. This construction of the US, EU and Japan as predators and three of the major trading powers identifies the US, EU and Japan as enemies. The title of the clip is an allusion to the 1963 train robbery on the Glasgow/London connection that became known as *The Great Train Robbery*<sup>30</sup>. This constructs the EU as robbers, emphasising their role as the villain. The comparison to robbers portrays the US, EU and Japan as unfair players, gesturing towards a role as enemies rather than adversaries. Yet, as the aesthetics of the silent

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<sup>30</sup> [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1310271.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1310271.stm)

movie parody, the animation qualities of *The Great Trade Robbery* also serve to moderate this construction to one grounded in an understanding of the US, EU and Japan as adversaries.

The video problematises the relationship between European businesses and the EU, as the wolf declares that “...we need global market access for our companies...I want to remove import taxes on both manufactured and agricultural goods...did I mention I want to open up services [in developing countries] for international competition as well”. In this way, the issues articulated as problems in the video feed into the diagnostic frame that guides WDM’s overall trade discourse. This is emphasised by the wolf’s sidekick, the sheep, as he perpetually interrupts to elaborate with specific examples of western trade deals with Mexico and South Africa. In doing so, the sheep also plays a central role in positioning the diagnostic frame within a discourse of justice:

*...even I can spot injustice when it comes to EU’s proposed trade agreements. They are simply unfair...Trade can help lift millions of people out of poverty, but unfair trade rules are ripping off the poor and filling the pockets of the rich.*

Reiterating the use of justice in WDM’s campaign title, the sheep construes an organisation of trade based on market principles as favouring the corporate world and values of inequality. However, neither the sheep nor any other character in the video proposes any specific alternative. As such, proposals for an alternative imaginary remain absent from the video. Failing to provide alternatives could render difficult possibilities for moving beyond resistance to providing a sense of agency that can help motivate political engagement. Thus, *The Great Trade Robbery* video is mainly concerned with the construction of adversaries. Comparing European businesses and the EU to political leaders responsible for the deaths of millions of people, this adversary identification resonates the ‘dictator’ signifier in *The Trade Dictator* video. The portrayal of the EU as a wolf and the voice of WDM and “the poor” as a sheep



draws on classic fable and fairy-tale representations of the wolf as a greedy, conniving tyrant and the sheep as an innocent victim (Patterson, 1991). This tyrant/innocent distinction supports the identification of the EU as an adversary and further stresses the EU as a constitutive outside to WDM.

The video from the **WSF Day of Action** shows an unedited shot from the offline event outside the European Commission's offices in London. In the clip a WDM member wearing a WDM t-shirt talks to the camera, explaining that they are there "to protest against the unfair trade deals that Europe are pushing across the developing world".<sup>31</sup> Although the SMOs Friends of the Earth and War on Want are not visible in the shot, the WDM member tells the camera that they are part of the event. The combination of the visual representation of WDM and the verbal reference to the two SMOs yet again demonstrates the contradictory relationship between promoting WDM and



Figure 11: Stills from WDM's WSF Day of Action video in YouTube

constructing chains of equivalence with ally SMOs: the creation of equivalences between SMOs potentially dilutes the brand and the particular perspective of the single SMO (Griggs and Howarth, 2004).

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<sup>31</sup> [www.youtube.com/user/wdmuk#p/a/E2D63FDB14174FA5/2/0zzzs2mNtxM](http://www.youtube.com/user/wdmuk#p/a/E2D63FDB14174FA5/2/0zzzs2mNtxM)

Another recurring issue is the absence of an alternative. The 28-second video also points to the importance attached to offline events as sites for political expression. Showing reporting from offline action may serve to evoke a sense of agency by representing local possibilities for action. The video thus offers subject positions of civic involvement by inviting users to identify with citizens protesting against the practices of corporate and institutional politics. This suggests a tension between the technologisation of action and direct action. Online actions enable instant participation (Chouliaraki, 2010). But possibilities for low-intensity modes of action tend to foster low-intensity political engagement (Cammaerts, 2007; Chouliaraki, 2010). The efforts of involvement and collective experiences of direct action hold more potential for fostering a mode of political engagement that resembles Mouffe's (1992) notion of radical citizenship as political identity. Thus, the video from a demonstration also serves as an archival moment that can help sustain existing members' sense of commitment, as they view the video to remember their own participation in WDM's event at the WSF day of action. Neither *The Trade Dictator* nor *The Great Trade Robbery* includes explicit calls to action, online or offline. these playful and provocative attempts at subverting popular culture through media tropes of parody serve to tell us that "Things are not as they should be" (Harold, 2004: 192; Chouliaraki, 2010). The primacy of parody as a discursive strategy for moral and socio-political education at the expense of calls for action invites us to understand rather than act (Harold, 2004; Vestergaard, 2008). The videos offer subject positions of viewers and students rather than activists. While an aesthetics of educational parody may not call for immediate action, it can be seen as an important step in fostering political reflexivity. In this light, *The Trade Dictator* and *The Great Trade Robbery* serve to mobilise bystanders and potential allies among broader publics rather than existing members.

#### 6.2.1.2.4 WDM's Twitter profiles

The 'Trade' campaign has been mentioned in 54 tweets on WDM's main Twitter profile<sup>32</sup> and seven on the WDM's director's Twitter profile,<sup>33</sup> including four attempts at promoting *The Great Trade Robbery* and five references to or retweets from WDM's additional Twitter profile specifically dedicated to the trade campaign, 'tradetweeting'. Managed by one of the trade campaigners, 'tradetweeting' had 33 tweets on 30 January 2010. These are all related to the WTO ministerial conference on 30 November to 2 December 2009 in Geneva, and date from 23 November 2009 to 2 December 2009. Reporting from the event, the tweets are mainly clustered around two themes: one is accounts of events taking place such as "Some groups clashing w police at front of demo. We r at bk and now stopping".<sup>34</sup> The other is references to posts in two other sites: posts to a blog specifically dedicated to the WDM's WTO activities by WDM's organisational website, and photos to WDM's Flickr profile. Twitter's 140 character limit restricts possibilities for elaborate textual and multimodal critiques of trade regimes. Indeed, the majority of tradetweeting's tweets appear factual rather than attempting to ascribe certain meanings to trade. Yet, event-centred tweets inspire a strong sense of agency. By providing real-time textually represented experiences from offline demonstrations and events, the tweets portray the excitement, frustration and sense of making a difference that is part and parcel of direct action. These feelings of excitement and frustration forge the allegiances that form a crucial part of political identity formation (Juris, 2008). While their 140 character representations by no means substitute the experience of participating in offline demonstrations and events, they may help inspire participation and also evoke a sense of urgency. Indirectly, this is

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<sup>32</sup> On 30 January 2010 WDM's main Twitter profile had a total of 534 tweets, including 54 tweets and retweets related to the trade campaign. The 54 trade-related tweets include 28 retweets from WDM's tradetweeting.

<sup>33</sup> On 30 January 2010 WDM's director Deborah Doane's Twitter profile (globaljusticeuk) had a total of 134 tweets, including 9 tweets and 14 retweets directly related to the trade campaign.

<sup>34</sup> 6.21pm 28 November 2009

a form of technologisation of action that is not reduced to effortless immediacy, as we have seen it in humanitarian campaigns (Chouliaraki, 2010).

#### 6.2.1.2.5 WDM's MySpace profile

Finally, WDM's MySpace profile deserves brief mention. There is no link from WDM's website to the profile, and on 2 January 2010 the last log in to the profile was 22 May 2008. WDM no longer uses the MySpace profile, but it is interesting as an example of the fleeting fashions of online media. Indeed, the perceptions of bleak prospects of some social networking sites that WDM's web officer expressed in Chapter 5 are linked to such fleeting fashions:

*I think websites like this, there is always initially a lot of excitement. I mean Facebook is an example, and MySpace before it...I think there is a danger for there kind of being a user fatigue with Facebook. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

WDM's MySpace profile served many of the same purposes as WDM's Facebook Page, taking as its focus the display of representations from offline events, including WDM's trajectory of trade related coalitions. In this way, WDM's MySpace profile works as a stage for the display of chains of equivalences. These include the Fairtrade Foundation, Jubilee 2000, Make Poverty History and the Trade Justice Movement. However, the rise in Facebook users in the UK since 2007 (Livingstone, 2008) has led WDM to focus its online efforts in sites other than MySpace.

### 6.2.2 Summing up

WDM's trade campaign tries to subvert dominant discourses on globalisation that take for granted a neoliberal approach as the only feasible model by calling for a model that is based on 'justice'. However, the campaign does not specify what 'justice' entails. This ties in with the very vague contours of an alternative model provided by the

campaign. Failing to provide subject positions with which existing and potential members can identify impedes the formation of political identities that enables moving from resistance to advocating a political project.

Another three central themes dominate WDM's trade campaign as it appears in different online sites: the construction and promotion of alliances, the importance of offline events, and parody as a discursive strategy. Although mostly articulated visually, alliances are granted a prominent role in campaign material across sites, promoting WDM, War on Want and Friends of the Earth UK as parts of an equivalential chain at the moderately radical end of the GJM spectrum. Linking SMO agendas also entails constructing common fronts in relation to a constitutive outside. Here, the identification of the corporate world, transnational institutions and UK politicians as adversaries in WDM's trade campaign places WDM at the radical end of the GJM. This is in contrast to humanitarian and relief organisations that refrain from addressing the role of UK and European policies in keeping third world countries in poverty.

The second central theme is the prominent presence of offline events in campaign material across online platforms. This creates a strong sense of agency through the portrayal of engaged members trying to make a difference. In so doing, it promises possibilities for forging political identities if we leave our screens and take the step to engage offline. It follows that it also suggests that online activism is insufficient as political engagement.

A final major theme that emerges from WDM's campaign appearances is the use of parody. The use of irony and parody in triggering a political consciousness is time-honoured and familiar among researchers and activists alike (Cammaerts, 2009; Dahlgren, 2007; Harold, 2004; Pickerill and Webster, 2006). In WDM's trade campaign it provides subject positions that asks supporters to identify themselves as sometimes quirky and 'tongue-in-cheek' in their approach. Moreover, in contrast to visual, textual and multimodal reports from offline events, it privileges an educational purpose over calls for action. In WDM's trade campaign the use of parody serves two main purposes.

First, by invoking the long history of the use of parody in the subversion of dominant discourses in political and corporate communication it inscribes the trade campaign into a wider discourse of protest and suggests an allegiance with other social movement voices within this discourse (Cammaerts, 2007; Harold, 2004; Juris, 2008). Second, it tempers the intertextual references to political dictators, translating enemy constructions into adversary constructions.

### 6.3 War on Want: trade justice

As Chapter 5 showed, War on Want's overall agenda is anchored in struggles to assign meaning to trade and globalisation as floating signifiers around the nodal point of poverty and, in doing so, destabilise the model of neoliberalism which is often taken for granted as the only possible approach to globalisation (Fenton, 2008b).

Representations of War on Want's trade justice campaign positions the SMO as political rather than relief or development-centred in its approach. The campaign shows War on Want as refusing to compromise and adopt a courteous tone with policy makers, transnational institutions, governments, or corporations. While WDM's trade campaign adopts a similar outlook, the political edge appears more overt in War on Want's campaign.

Before unpacking the appearances of the trade justice campaign in the various popular spaces employed by War on Want, the analysis first turns to the War on Want's website, which was re-launched in January 2009 (Tucker, interview, May 2009).

#### 6.3.1 War on Want's trade justice campaign: targeting policy makers

War on Want has been campaigning on trade related issues since it was first set up in 1959. With campaigns such as the promotion of corporate accountability in the early 2000s and its central role in the Trade Justice Movement formed at the end of 2000, trade has more recently been granted a more central role in War on Want's

campaigning. War on Want's roots in the labour movement can be traced in the ways in which its trade justice campaign goes beyond connecting free trade to poverty, focusing on its role in bringing about and sustaining poor working conditions in developing countries.

#### **6.3.1.1 The trade justice campaign in War on Want's website**

*The new corporate trade attack. (War on Want, 2010)*

The introduction to the trade justice campaign in War on Want's website attempts to reveal current UK and international trade policies as guided by neo-liberal and corporate interests of growth and profit. In this vein, it connects free trade to the signifiers 'exploitation' and 'profit'. It focuses on the UK and the EU, but also indicates an orientation towards transregional horizons. This vague critique draws on a diagnostic frame that broadly identifies the problem as "International trade rules" which "have condemned millions of people to poverty". The villains that are identified as contributing to these "devastating trade policies" are primarily "the European Union", including "the UK and other members". However, "Giant multinational companies" are also constructed as a part of War on Want's outgroup, although not as directly responsible for the structures that send people into poverty. Rather, they are cast as the actors favoured by the policies. The campaign also identifies allies and begins to create chains of equivalences. Here, "activists, trade unionists, small farmers and working people across the world" are represented as the actors with who War on Want align their causes and on whose behalf the SMO advocates. The introductory campaign text further gestures towards an alternative imaginary by proposing the idea of trade as linked to the signifiers "justice, equity and rights". Connecting trade to rights, the articulation indicates the importance of anchoring trade related practices in a regulatory framework rather than on letting companies rely on voluntary codes of conduct. Yet, "justice, equity and rights" are empty signifiers (Griggs and Howarth, 2004). The gesture towards an alternative thus remains a vague hint. Despite this

vagueness, this part of the campaign suggests the contours of a prominent discourse of urgency. In this way, the argument that “With the consensus on free trade crumbling, now is the time we can make it happen” articulates the present state of free trade as opening up an exceptional possibility to bring about change.

The photo that serves as the aesthetic anchor point of War on Want’s trade justice campaign shows a group of people walking in a demonstration. Even without prior knowledge of the origins of the photo, the banner that forms the focal point of the image facilitates a construal that places the event in South America; first of all, the text in the banner is in Spanish. Second, the assertion that “TLC destruye la vida” [NAFTA destroys life] locates the event within the remit of NAFTA, and the on-going attempts by North America to expand the trade agreement further south that have generated numerous protests among the GJM. The central position of the photo in this introductory context serves to create equivalential linkages between War on Want’s agenda and social movements in Central and South America. The prominent position of the photo signals solidarity with people affected by trade related issues. In terms of indications of propositions for an alternative imaginary in the image, the use of the slogan of the World Social Forum in the banner – ‘Otro mundo es posible’ [Another world is possible] – indicates concerns with suggesting an alternative. But any specificities of such an alternative are not provided in this context.

Moving beyond the introductory campaign text, the campaign is organised around three themes: Global Europe, Food Crisis, and Economic Partnership Agreements.

The **Global Europe** sub-section articulates the EU’s trade strategy as promoting a trade regime that favours EU member countries at the expense of poorer countries, connecting free trade to poverty. It compares the EU to the WTO. In doing so, this articulation also identifies both the EU and the WTO as villains. At the same time, the text states that War on Want are “calling on Members of the European Parliament to reject Global Europe and to force a review of the strategy”. In this way, the text identifies the EU as a legitimate opponent and suggests possibilities for finding



common ground. The EU is constructed as an adversary rather than an enemy to be destroyed. A personalisation of this construction of adversaries is provided by a quote from former EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson. In the quote he argues for the EU's approach to trade as "a clear programme of measures to maximise the competitiveness of European companies ... our prosperity is directly linked to the openness of the markets we try to sell to". While the personalisation serves to provide an emotional appeal to the campaign, Mandelson's reputation as a shrewd Labour politician in UK politics also anchors the campaign in a local, national setting. This national focus is a striking contrast to the photo from the NAFTA protest in the introductory section to the trade campaign. Yet a quote from a delegate from the Korean Peasants League saying that "Free Trade Agreements and farmers cannot live under the same sky" serves to construct an equivalential chain between the demands of farmers across the globe and the demands of War on Want. The use of signifiers such as 'bully', 'wreck', and 'devastating' provides an affective appeal as well as a sense of urgency. Yet, War on Want's contention does not provide specificities of an alternative imaginary; it does not go beyond aiming to disrupt the EU's "support for these devastating trade policies".<sup>35</sup>

Aesthetically, this sub-section of the campaign presents us with a photo from a demonstration outside the European Parliament. As the linguistic properties, the photo also construes the EU and the corporate world as adversaries. This is explicated in the banner calling for MEPs to 'Stop the EU's corporate trade agenda'. Demonstrators holding War on Want banners are represented alongside demonstrators from Friends of the Earth UK. This ties in with the chain of equivalences pursued by both WDM and War on Want, as they compare their SMOs to each other as well as Friends of the Earth UK as the SMOs that constitute the radical end of a social movement spectrum in the UK (see also Chapter 5). Finally, once again, the

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<sup>35</sup> [waronwant.org/campaigns/trade-justice/global-europe](http://waronwant.org/campaigns/trade-justice/global-europe)

importance attached to offline events is emphasised by the offline setting portrayed in the photo.

The **Food crisis** sub-section builds on the understanding of free trade as corroding living standards for farmers and farming communities in developed and developing countries. Again, a construction of the WTO, IMF and the EU as adversaries is grounded in their promotion of free trade agreements. The War on Want's allies are constructed through a quote from the transnational and interregional peasant movement Via Campesina, saying that "The time for food sovereignty has come!". In addition to suggesting a sense of urgency that indirectly asks us to take action, this also serves to link War on Want's cause to small, local farmers across the northern and southern hemisphere. In this vein, farming for local markets is proposed as a solution that is "better for everyone", drawing the contours of an alternative imaginary. Building on this, the Food crisis sub-section goes on and begins to flesh out some of the specificities that War on Want proposes as viable solutions for an alternative. Suggesting that "we need to provide money to buy food where it is urgently needed and to invest immediately in small-scale agriculture", the text calls for development programmes. Even more attention is given to elaborating a need to "ensure that poor countries are able to support local food production and protect smallholder agriculture", and the "new trade rules" that this would require. In this way, an alternative imaginary in which trade policy changes are construed as a central part of the solution to third world poverty begins to take shape.

Visually, the sub-theme is represented by a photo of banana farmers harvesting. This photo serves three purposes. First, it adds an element of personalisation to the campaign. Second, it serves to construct small farmers affected by free trade schemes as a part of War on Want's ingroup. Third, the choice of banana farmers connects the concerns of distant farmers to the everyday consumption practices of the user, as bananas are a consumer staple in many UK households. Along with the focus on Mandelson, this local resonance signals a cosmopolitan orientation rooted in a domestic setting. Drawing on Cohen's idea of "rooted cosmopolitanism" which argues

for the possibility of a cosmopolitan orientation rooted in multiple locales and loyalties, della Porta and Tarrow (2005) argue that a local focus does not exclude possibilities for transnational solidarity. Rather, “rooted” should be understood as drawing on local experiences, opportunities and resources (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). This also chimes in with the coexistence of multiple political identities that make up the radical democratic citizen (Mouffe, 2000). In this light, the dialectical focus on the local and the transnational that runs through War on Want’s trade campaign provides a sense of agency by drawing on local experiences (the bananas we eat) and providing local possibilities for tackling transnational issues (demonstrating against UK politicians such as Mandelson). The use of personalisation in the construction of a chain of equivalences focuses this call for solidarity on distinct individuals as villains and victims. In terms of Mandelson’s role as a villain, this feeds into the construction of agency. In terms of the banana farmers’ role as victims, this presents them as a cause worthy of our emotion and action by giving them a face (Chouliaraki, 2008). This reminds us that the internet’s possibilities for bypassing mass media gatekeepers does not rescue activists’ self-representations from dominant mass media logics that favour the spectacular and personal (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). Yet, as we shall see, in the case of War on Want discourses of personalisation are combined with in-depth information on historical developments and policy analyses.

The subsection on **Economic Partnership Agreements** echoes both the Global Europe and the Food crisis subsections, as it promotes the EU’s trade agenda in relation to developing countries as detrimental to small-scale producers. Again, the WTO and EU are constructed as adversaries. Yet, the WTO is constructed as an adversary of the past. The EU is constructed as the adversary that has now taken over this role by trying to “force [developing countries] to accept damaging new agreements on investment, competition policy and government procurement”.

Visually, the sub-section features a close-up photo of a man and a crop of maize. Echoing the other subsections of the trade justice campaign, this visual focus serves to

signal an orientation towards small-scale farmers in developing countries. Again, this signals a cosmopolitan orientation rooted in a domestic setting, as discussed above.

In this way, the somewhat vague articulations of the introduction to the trade justice campaign are fleshed out in the three subthemes. This elaboration is given further depth in a series of resource sections.

In addition to the thematic subsections, the representation of the trade justice campaign in War on Want's website also includes an online petition, a press release news feed, in-depth information such as pdf versions of briefings and reports published by War on Want, a YouTube video feed, and a link to a description of War on Want's overseas work in relation to the "food crisis". In many ways these additional resource sections resonate the overall themes outlined in the campaign. For example, the call for action that invites users to sign an online petition to their local MEP stresses the importance of challenging trade relations at a policy level and also links the role of the EU to a local setting. The 2009 report on the relationship between free trade and working conditions in the South is in Spanish. It thus provides a dual gesture (in terms of language and thematic critique) towards War on Want's interregional orientation.

Finally, the trade justice campaign is represented in the 'Take action'<sup>36</sup> subsection and the 'Act now' section. In the former, a past petition asks users to send an email to their local MEP, "urging them to commit to a rethink before the end of 2009". The petition follows a spring 2009 petition from the run-up to the MEP elections, and is anchored in an articulation of the EU's trade policies as 'corporate-driven'. The other trade justice campaign sections in the website construe the corporate world as adversaries alongside policy makers, the WTO and EU. Yet, corporate lobbyists are cast prominently as adversaries, while MEPs are treated as a heterogeneous group. In this way, some MEPs are represented as "MEPs that support us", while "far-right parties

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<sup>36</sup> [www.waronwant.org/campaigns/trade-justice/more/action/16606-get-your-new-meps-to-fight-for-trade-justice-](http://www.waronwant.org/campaigns/trade-justice/more/action/16606-get-your-new-meps-to-fight-for-trade-justice-)

such as the BNP in Britain” are represented as a part of War on Want’s outgroup contrasted to “progressive parties”. This apparent reluctance to identify all MEPs as antagonists is arguably to do with the petition’s aim to place MEPs in the role of mediators of War on Want’s agenda. The identification of antagonists and/or adversaries is important because they come to work as a constitutive outside against which the political identity of War on Want is constructed (Mouffe, 2005). This shows that the articulation of adversaries as part of the constitutive outside requires a nuanced approach. Who forms the constitutive outside is a contingent construct that can vary between texts even within one campaign. Constructing MEPs as potential (temporary) allies who can fight for War on Want’s political demands is a strategic attempt at influencing the regulatory framework that governs EU trade practices from within. As such, a chain of equivalences is constructed. Thus, the enemies and adversaries that make up the constitutive outside to chains of equivalences are not discreet categories, but fluid, contingent constructs with numerous ambiguous zones and roles. Because this chapter is interested in the strategic promotion of SMO campaigns, Snow and colleagues’ (1986) concept of frame alignment holds the potential to help capture aspects of these ambiguous zones and roles (see also Benford and Snow, 2000). One of the main purposes of frame alignment is to link together “ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames” (Benford and Snow, 2000: 624). While this echoes the processes at play in the concept of chains of equivalences, frame alignment focuses on strategic linkages (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Snow et al., 1986). Frame alignment thus holds the potential to help account for strategic alliances that are not grounded in personal ties, long-standing cooperation or similar demands. Taken together, chains of equivalences and frame alignment help account for the alignment of War on Want’s trade campaign with MEPs in the email petitions as a strategic move that does not foreclose the role of MEPs as adversaries; MEPs work as temporary allies whose interests are ‘congruent’ with those articulated in War on Want’s email petition. Yet, they remain adversaries. The MEPs occupy an ambiguous role of adversaries and strategic allies. This does not eliminate the political

frontier between War on Want and MEPs. Rather, it temporarily places MEPs in an ambiguous zone further from War on Want's enemies and closer to their allies.

The technologisation of action that the email petitions in War on Want's website represent does not explicitly invite involvement beyond the petition. Linguistically it tries to incite a sense of agency by mentioning that "Resistance to this exploitation [from European companies] continues to grow ... partly due to mass protests by ordinary people". Telling us that the efforts of 'ordinary people' can make a difference works to show us that our participation matters. Yet this is followed by 'ACT NOW: choose your region from the box above' in bold types. 'The region above' links to a pre-drafted email petition to the selected MEP. Connecting 'protests by ordinary people' to the email petition reduces possibilities for action to this brief mode of engagement. Cases of resistance in Peru, India, South America and parts of Africa also work to reiterate War on Want's interregional orientation and solidarity with social movements across the globe. This construction of equivalences is further highlighted by War on Want's pledge to "continue to stand in solidarity with those whose lives and hopes are blighted by free trade".



Figure 12: Photo from War on Want's Get your new MEPs to fight for trade justice petition

Visually, the casting of corporate lobbyists as adversaries is reinforced by a cartoon image representing corpulent corporate lobbyists above the globe, greedily grabbing for regions in the South, conjuring up notions of the stereotypical corporate 'fat cat'. This identifies them as adversaries. As in WDM's trade campaign, the corporate lobbyists are represented as proportionally oversized compared to the people whose lives they influence. This serves to illustrate the unequal power relations between EU citizens and War on Want on the one hand, and the corporate world on the other. Yellow stars against a blue background behind them indicates the role of the EU in this trade struggle, but the central and personified position granted the corporate puppeteers contributes to their role as the adversary. By omitting personalised representations of MEPs, it leaves open possibilities for the dual construction of MEPs as adversaries and strategic allies.

The 'Act now' section<sup>37</sup> includes a call for action that follows up on the petition in the 'Take action' subsection. It calls on MEPs to ask the new European Trade Commissioner about his intentions in relation to policy-making on trade issues. Orchestrated within the remit of the trade justice campaign's Global Europe sub-theme, the questions proposed in the petition contest growth as a nodal point in an articulation of free trade as a means for countering economic crises and poverty.

Visually, the petition extends this articulation to an understanding of free trade as bringing about a 'global crisis' rather than holding the potential to counteract an economic crisis. The photo that accompanies the petition is from a demonstration within the remit of the trade justice campaign's Global Europe sub-theme, gesturing towards the importance of offline events in gaining visibility and showing other people's involvement. The display of other people's involvement provides the user with a sense of agency by showing possibilities for political impact through vast numbers. In contrast to the previous MEP petition, the visual representation of an offline protest event implicitly invites action beyond the point-and-click activism of the

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<sup>37</sup> [www.waronwant.org/Action3A20Call20Time20on20Global20Greed2020%2016607.twl](http://www.waronwant.org/Action3A20Call20Time20on20Global20Greed2020%2016607.twl)

email petition. The sense of agency invoked by the image is complemented by a reference to the principles of representative democracy that underpins the EU, stressing that “There are several UK MEPs on that committee who represent YOU”. The capitalisation of ‘YOU’ works to provide a sense of indignation and personal responsibility.

### **6.3.1.2 War on Want’s trade justice campaign in popular online spaces**

In addition to an online presence in the organisational website, War on Want’s trade justice campaign is represented in several popular online spaces. These are Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter. The following analysis takes as its focus War on Want’s uses of these spaces. Some of the main features of the formats of these sites directly related to War on Want’s practices in relation to the trade justice campaign will also be sketched.

As in WDM’s case, War on Want also uses a popular online platform that is not mentioned in their organisational website. In War on Want’s case, this platform is photo-sharing site Flickr. But whereas WDM no longer updates their MySpace profile, War on Want still uses and updates their Flickr profile.

#### **6.3.1.2.1 War on Want’s Facebook presences**

On social networking site Facebook War on Want has a main Group profile, two student society groups, SOAS and Sussex<sup>38</sup> and a fan page. Yet War on Want’s website only provides a link to the main Group profile. As in WDM’s case, the main War on Want Group profile does not feature abundant discussion. The discussion board in War on Want’s Group profile has nine topics. Only two of these have developed into a

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<sup>38</sup> War on Want’s two university society groups run by volunteer activists will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7 which addresses members’ perceptions of the role of online spaces in relation to their political engagement and sense of collective identity.



thread with more than one post (two and three posts, respectively). None of the topics are directly related to trade. Similarly, there are no wall posts directly related to the trade justice campaign. Of the 89 wall posts that had been made to War on Want's Group on 29 January 2010, only four posts by individuals who are not War on Want staff address trade issues. The 'Information' section in War on Want's Group profile connects poverty to the role of regulatory frameworks. It further states that these can mean the "life or death for people in developing countries".<sup>39</sup> This reiterates articulations in the website. The 'Information' text only implicitly addresses the trade justice campaign in a continuum outlining War on Want's agenda as ranging "From trade rules rigged in favour of rich countries and their multinational companies to poverty in Palestine".

The War on Want Group profile includes 25 photos. With one exception, these are all from offline events. Most of the photos show demonstrators holding War on Want banners, cementing offline events as central to War on Want's work. One photo, from a demonstration within the remit of the Jubilee Debt Campaign, shows demonstrators in WDM t-shirts and holding WDM banners. No War on Want logos are represented in that photo, suggesting that it is an intentional signalling of a chain of equivalences linking War on Want's and WDM's causes. Although several of the photos are related to demonstrations that have included trade concerns – such as those organised under the auspices of the infamous Make Poverty History coalitions - none of the photos explicitly represents the trade justice campaign.

The Group profile also includes videos generated from War on Want's YouTube channel, but none of these are related to the trade justice campaign. Similarly, none of the 20 links in the Group profile's 'Links' section or the ten future and past events are related to the campaign.

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<sup>39</sup> [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2391153004&ref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2391153004&ref=ts)

Although neither War on Want's website nor their Facebook Group mention a Facebook fan page, War on Want does have such a profile, with 1,372 fans – some 250 fewer members than the Facebook Group. As discussed in the section on WDM's uses of Facebook spaces, the logics of consumer culture within which the Page format arguably operates can be seen as contributing to a commercialisation of the SMO's discourse. Indeed, the two albums in the Page are centred on War on Want's celebrity-dense Love Fashion Hate Sweatshops campaign. In this campaign merchandise plays a central role, making it an example of a critique of consumer culture that plays to the rules of precisely the logics that underpin consumer culture. In a similar vein, the Facebook Page format only allows the organisation behind the Page to post on the wall. 'Fans' cannot post. War on Want's Page has 46 posts, starting in September 2009. The vast majority of these are related to the Love Fashion Hate Sweatshops campaign. On 30 January 2010 only one post was directly related to the trade justice campaign. Dated 6 January 2009, this is a link to the online petition in the website's 'Act now' section.

#### 6.3.1.2.2 War on Want's MySpace profile

War on Want's MySpace profile does not mention the trade justice campaign explicitly. Nonetheless, the site deserves a cursory mention. While images, videos and links to campaigns and events related to sweatshops and corporations operating for profit in conflict zones are featured, the only references to trade issues appear in the 'About me' section. In this section, trade is articulated as one end in a continuum of the issues that comprise War on Want's agenda: "From trade rules rigged in favour of rich countries and their multinational companies to poverty in Palestine". Here, there is no mention of the transnational and interregional structures of governance that the EU and WTO brought to bear on other articulations of trade within the remit of the trade justice campaign. Nonetheless, the corporate world is still identified as an adversary. Implicitly, trade issues are linked to globalisation, as War on Want proclaim their "...solidarity with people affected by globalisation". This further serves to ascribe new

meaning to globalisation by attaching it to the recurring nodal points ‘poverty’, ‘inequality’ and ‘injustice’.

#### 6.3.1.2.3 War on Want’s YouTube channel

War on Want’s YouTube channel includes a total of 45 videos. Three of these are directly related to the trade justice campaign: “Bangladesh trade union leader on sweatshops”, “Why it is so important to lobby your MEP”, “World Social Forum day of action”, and “Down Down WTO”. The 2009 “Bangladesh trade union leader on sweatshops” features an interview with a Bangladesh trade union leader.<sup>40</sup> Here, he talks to an off-camera interviewer about sweatshops. This creates an equivalential chain between War on Want’s causes and the demands and interests of NGWF and other local trade unions across regions and in developing countries. The text edited into the video saying that “War on Want is calling on the UK government to regulate British companies that are supplied by factories in developing countries – and enact legislation allowing overseas workers who suffer from exploitive buying practices to seek justice in the UK” takes a local UK focus. Further, it calls for legislative changes rather than voluntary CSR initiatives or pressure on companies through political consumerism.



Figure 13: Stills from Bangladesh trade union leader on sweatshops video

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<sup>40</sup> National Garments Workers Federation

The video does not include an invitation to take action. Staged as a 3.08 minute monologue on working conditions in Bangladesh, the video serves to provide background information rather than a call for action. Moreover, providing this information from the perspective of a Bangladesh trade union leader shows War on Want as giving a voice to people often excluded from the mainstream debate. Importantly, it also serves to show us that War on Want listens to and works in partnership with local ally experts.

The video “Why it is so important to lobby your MEP” is from the launch of the petition calling on MEPs to pledge opposition to the EU’s “unfair trade deals” prior to the June 2009 MEP elections. In the two minute video Dave Tucker, the trade justice campaign officer, talks to the camera about War on Want’s view on the EU’s current approach to trade. War on Want’s view “is based on a strong belief in free trade worldwide will massively increase poverty and injustice in the world”. In this way, the verbal/linguistic properties of the clip connect free trade to injustice and poverty. This reiterates the connections in the texts that accompany the email petitions in the SMO’s website. Visually, the video juxtaposes an office setting with natural sunlight and no added postproduction effects or graphics. This creates an amateurish aesthetic which breaks with the streamlined look of War on Want’s website that has been created as War on Want in recent years has employed professional agencies to assist with its communication strategies to produce a clear and consistent visual profile (Hilary, interview, July 2009). This indicates to the user that War on Want does not spend money from its supporters on expensive professional campaign formats. It aesthetically distinguishes War on Want from NGOs such as Oxfam and ActionAid whose campaigns give them a professional, coherent image (see Vestergaard, 2010 for a discussion of NGO branding). It is similar to some of WDM’s videos. Yet, whereas WDM’s trade campaign includes edited and modified videos, with a single exception all War on Want’s trade-related videos rely on unedited aesthetics. Dave Tucker’s unedited talk to the camera personalises the call for action in the video, giving War on Want a human face.



Figure 14: Dave Tucker in the 'Why it is so important to lobby your MEP' video

As an unedited and unmodified clip, the video does not include any graphics that guide the user to War on Want's MEP petition or 'Take action' sub-section. The possibilities for action that the video outlines are all part of Dave Tucker's talk. He invokes a strong sense of agency as well as urgency as he tells the user that she can help challenge the unjust approach to trade that free trade is: "Your help is critical to getting justice for hundreds of millions of people". More specifically, he encourages people to "send emails and letters". However, he continues to say that to "go and meet [the MEP candidates] in person...is a lot more effective". This gestures towards an understanding of offline action as not only pertaining to fostering political identities and commitment, but also as the space where political protest and action gains leverage. The "Why it is so important to lobby your MEP" video partly counters the technologisation of action that online spaces such as YouTube unlock through its aesthetic qualities and its call for action.

The 'WSF day of action' video is an interview with War on Want director John Hilary at a 2008 event outside the local EU offices in London. It reports from the same event that is featured in, for example, WDM's Flickr profile and YouTube channel. Hilary talks to the camera about the bilateral trade deals that the EU had started proposing at the



Figure 15: Director John Hilary at the WSF day of action

time. While Hilary is the main focus of the video, it also works to contribute to the construction of a chain of equivalences that comprises War on Want, WDM and Friends of the Earth UK: Hilary is positioned against a background of WDM and Friends of the Earth UK activists holding banners and wearing t-shirts with the SMOs' logos on them.

The joint frontier of the chain is further highlighted as Hilary identifies the EU as a common adversary. The common cause of the SMOs to challenge the EU's attempts at pushing through free trade agreements is promoted as one that puts at the fore "the environment, workers' rights, people...the whole sustainable development programme" and not just "pampering to corporate interests". In this way, Hilary conveys an understanding of the injustices brought about by free trade as transcending War on Want's particular agenda. It becomes a more universal chain of equivalential demands that includes the environmental issues normally associated

with Friends of the Earth. The juxtaposition of the offline setting and unmodified “amateurish aesthetics” echoes the “Why it is so important to lobby your MEP” video as a riposte to the effortless engagement of online action.

The aesthetic properties of the “Down Down WTO” video contrast images of farming communities in developing countries with images of trade talks in privileged locations, secluded and patrolled by police, far from many of the people they affect. This serves to show WTO negotiations as detached from the people whose lives are affected by them. This construal of detachment is further extended to an argument of the undemocratic structure that underpins the WTO. To this end, the voice-over explains that “...the WTO has never held a vote. Instead, it allows the world’s most powerful trading blocks...to bully poor countries into submission behind closed doors” and asks “Whose interests does the WTO really serve?...it acts primarily in the interest of big business”. In this way, the WTO as well as corporations are identified as enemies. The antagonistic ambience of the title and the discourse of urgency in the video suggest that this villainous role is not one that is readily turned into a role of adversaries.



Figure 16: Down Down WTO video featured in War on Want's YouTube channel

This juxtaposition of antagonism and urgency feeds into the call for action made in the video. The video ends with footage from a demonstration organised under the

auspices of the 'Our World is Not For Sale' network, showing a banner with the network's name, logo and 'STOP corporate globalization' tagline. This shows that numerous people have already been mobilised to protest against the WTO, and a voiceover emphasises this strength by numbers by urging viewers to "join the fights against the WTO and its damaging free trade agenda together we can build a better world". The final frame shows War on Want's logo and a link to the trade justice campaign: [waronwant.org/trade](http://waronwant.org/trade). While this link suggests online possibilities for getting involved, the footage from the demonstration conveys offline possibilities for involvement. The subject positions of engaged supporters offered in the video thus suggest a combination of online and offline involvement. Apart from a shot of a big War on Want banner at the demonstration and the final frame that guides us to War on Want's trade justice campaign, the video includes no mention of War on Want. In this light, the video also works to create an equivalential chain that links War on Want to a larger network of allied SMOs.

In addition to the appearances in War on Want's YouTube channel, the trade justice campaign is also represented in the Seattle to Brussels Network's (the S2B) channel.<sup>41</sup>



Figure 17: John Hilary on S2B's YouTube channel

The S2B channel features two videos to which War on Want's trade justice campaign section links. The video is from a public workshop for trade unions and NGOs called 'Trade, employment & Global Europe looking beyond a social clause'. In terms of its aesthetic qualities, the video resembles War on Want's own

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<sup>41</sup> S2B is a Belgium-based network established in the wake of the infamous Seattle protests against the WTO, contesting "the corporate-driven agenda of the European Union". It consists of civil society organisations such as Attac France and Friends of the Earth Europe ([www.s2bnetwork.org/](http://www.s2bnetwork.org/)).



unedited clips of War on Want HQ staff explaining issues and events to the camera. As the amateur aesthetics, this use of talking heads that characterises most of War on Want's videos differs from WDM's videos that have been edited and gone through postproduction as well as their use of parody.

In the five and seven minute videos War on Want's director John Hilary talks about the direction of the EU's trade policy under the heading "Trading our jobs away". Here, Hilary addresses the interface between trade and labour conditions. The topic of his talk and his participation in the panel sustains the time-honoured construction of War on Want's demands and interests as equivalent with those of the trade unions. The trade union alliance is further unfolded, as Hilary links trade to labour conditions as a common cause shared by War on Want and the labour unions: "it's also enabled us to come together around a much more common agenda, trying to fight back against the model itself". In drawing up this common horizon, he also identifies the WTO and EU as common adversaries: "the EU, both of the WTO and the bilateral negotiations, that trade strategy is a key focus for our common resistance". This construction of a chain of equivalences that links together War on Want and the unions importantly distinguishes War on Want from its usual allies in the UK GJM by bringing into focus War on Want's labour union background. This difference is supported by the unedited aesthetics of War on Want's videos. Yet, the promotion of War on Want's labour union allegiances does not disturb the chain of equivalences that links together War on Want, WDM and Friends of the Earth. By identifying the EU and WTO as adversaries that form the constitutive outside to War on Want's equivalential chain with the unions, both chains can co-exist without one contradicting the other (see Howarth and Griggs, 2006, for a discussion of the dynamics of chains of equivalences).

#### 6.3.1.2.4 War on Want's Flickr profile

There is no link from War on Want's website to the SMO's Flickr profile. Nonetheless, the War on Want Flickr profile includes a large number of photos. On 20 January 2009

the War on Want Flickr profile comprised a total of 1364 photos. These were organised



Figure 18: B. Hayes CWU in the Flickr TUC set

into four collections: 'Love Fashion Hate Sweatshops', 'Demonstrations', 'Overseas Work' and 'Events & Festivals'. The collections were further organised into 35 sets. Only two sets explicitly address trade issues. Similarly, while there is no trade tag, two tags are trade-related: 'tradesunionsconference' and 'tuc'. These are used for all the photos in one of the trade related sets, the 'TUC 2009' set. This includes 159 photos. These all focus on the 'Love Fashion Hate Sweatshops' campaign, portraying representatives from TUC

member organisations holding banners from the campaign. This points to some of the many ways in which War on Want's campaigns intersect. In a similar vein, the other set that has an explicit trade related reference is the 'TUC General Council Women's Committee' set. Similar to the 'TUC 2009' set, this includes two photos from the Committee's 2009 annual meeting, showing members holding Love Fashion Hate Sweatshops posters. While the interrelationship between many of the focuses of War on Want's campaigns is important, representations portrayed as specifically trade related serve to bring attention to the trade justice campaign. In this respect, Flickr is not used as a central site for the trade justice campaign. Visual representations of the campaign do figure prominently in other online spaces employed by War on Want, but these are not featured in War on Want's Flickr profile. Many of War on Want's other Flickr sets function as archives of photos from offline demonstrations and events such as festivals. The focus is thus on possibilities for involvement rather than the articulation of demands and enemies. These visual representations of possibilities for

involvement provide multiple subject positions for users to identify with. However, further analysis of these is beyond the scope of this study's focus on the trade justice campaign.

#### 6.3.1.2.5 War on Want's Twitter profile

Two Twitter profiles are affiliated with War on Want: the SMO's main profile, 'WarOnWant', and War on Want's director's profile, 'jhilary'. John Hilary's profile started on 2 April 2009. On 30 January 2010 it only included 27 tweets, and none of these were directly related to the trade justice campaign. Starting February 2009, the 433 tweets featured on the WarOnWant profile on 30 January 2009 included 26 tweets referring to the trade justice campaign. Some of these are links to the campaign's online petitions. Others are links to the trade-related videos uploaded to War on Want's YouTube channel. The third major category that characterises War on Want's tweets on trade is links to recently published War on Want material on trade. In this way, the 'WarOnWant' profile mainly provides links to the trade justice campaign in War on Want's other online platforms. The text accompanying these links echoes articulations in the website, connecting free trade to "poverty for the benefit of big business"; the identification of problems and adversaries are similar. However, the promotion of alliances with WDM and Friends of the Earth UK remain absent from trade-related tweets. This combination of tweets invites both effortless and in-depth online involvement. Finally, the trade-related tweets also include live tweets from a single offline event: the demonstrations against the WTO in Geneva in November 2009. With regular updates such as "Oops tear gas! Nearly got hit. They have forced us back to the park. Where next?", these tweets convey feelings of excitement and frustration. In the Geneva tweets, the tweeting participant's exclamations of surprise and uncertainty offer positions of identification with her experience of the direct action event.

Sharing such experiences forge the personal bonds that are key to political identity formation (Graeber, 2009; Juris, 2008). However, by no means can this replace offline participation. While tweets from tear gas attacks may seem turbulent to wider publics as well as many War on Want supporters, the Geneva tweets also work to position War on Want as a non-violent GJM actor. This ties in with the trade campaign's general representation of War on Want as radical in its call for political and social change rather than aid and humanitarian relief, but moderate in its modes of action (see also Chapters 2 and 5 for discussions of War on Want and WDM's positions in the GJM).

The tweet "Ok we have a new direction to go in. The black bloc are mostly trapped inside a police cordon" nuances the chain of equivalences that connects the protesters in Geneva. It does so by distinguishing the black bloc from War on Want. Notorious for its radical and often violent approach to direct action, the black bloc here work as a constitutive outside to War on Want's more moderate modes of action (Juris, 2005). The subject positions offered in the direct action tweets from Geneva are thus not inherently tied to acts of dissent. More broadly, the combination of the tweets that link to online possibilities for in-depth information, petitions and the Geneva tweets provide a patchwork of multiple identification points. Together these enable identification with a reformist approach to trade in globalised societies, linking to several online platforms used by War on Want.

## 6.4 Chapter conclusions

The aim of this chapter has been to explore and unfold the ways in which WDM and War on Want use different online spaces to promote their causes. To this end, the two SMOs' trade campaigns as they appear in different sites have been analysed, taking into account their discursive strategies, the technological aspects of their proposals for action, and their aesthetic qualities.

The appearances of WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns are clustered around four dimensions that all feed into the construction of political identities of the SMOs

and the subject positions they offer: (1) the first dimension is the identification of the problem, the diagnostic framing; (2) the second is the positioning of the SMO and the identification of its enemies and adversaries; (3) the third is the positioning of the SMO in relation to the movement, including construction of chains of equivalences; and (4) the fourth is the modes and aesthetics of their self-representations.

The chapter has showed that WDM and War on Want are similar in terms of the online spaces they employ. In relation to the four dimensions outlined above, they are similar in terms of (1) the articulation of demands and interests, that is, their diagnostic framing; and (2) the identification of adversaries and enemies. While they are also similar along the final two dimensions, significant differences emerge.

In terms of similarities, WDM and War on Want both use the same popular online spaces in addition to their organisational websites: Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter. Also, they both attempt to destabilise the dominant articulation of free trade as connected to growth and prosperity. A central strategy for doing so, is to assign free trade to nodal points such as poverty. Further, across online media platforms, both SMOs place this articulation within a discourse of justice. However, 'justice' is a floating signifier that does not in itself hold any specific meaning (Laclau, 1996). In WDM's trade campaigns 'justice' is linked to signifiers such as "people before profits", and a system that is "transparent, democratic and truly representative" (WDM, 2009). The vagueness of these qualifying signifiers is perhaps best summed up in the sheep's character from WDM's YouTube video *The Great Trade Robbery*: "...even I can spot injustice when it comes to EU's proposed trade agreements...They are simply unfair." What exactly 'injustice' entails in this respect is not specified beyond 'unfair'. War on Want's use of justice is primarily qualified through what it is not. In this way, 'justice' entails a system that is 'not devastating to', or functions 'at the expense of' poor people, or fosters 'inequality'. Both SMOs are thus similarly unclear in their explanations of what 'justice' means to them. This is related to the imprecision that characterises their attempts at imagining an alternative to the model they contest. The dominant neo-liberal discourse on globalisation serves precisely to

hegemonise and crowd out alternative discourses. This makes it all the more important to contest and suggest alternatives. But the online representations of WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns only begin to suggest the contours of such alternatives, leaving alternative imaginaries unspecified. It follows that the subject positions made available to existing and potential members centre on resistance rather than the vision and a means of a viable solution that is a political project. Providing possibilities for supporters to imagine alternatives is important because a political project requires a collective social and political imaginary (Fenton, 2008b). This again, requires political identities in relation to a collective disposition that can get people to commit to the proliferation of such a project.

WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns adopt a very similar approach in their identification of adversaries. They both identify transnational institutions such as the G8, WTO and EU as adversaries, questioning their credibility and legitimacy in negotiating trade agreements on behalf of citizens across regions. This is closely connected to the other group of adversaries: big corporations. These are portrayed as lobbying the WTO and EU to push through agreements that favour the interests of the corporate world. Overall, the identification of the corporate world as adversaries tends towards a more antagonistic approach than the more moderate construction of transnational institutions as adversaries. This has been identified as a general trend in anti-capitalist and GJMs (Deluca and Peebles, 2002). In both WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns especially the EU figures as an adversary that is respected as a legitimate opponent (Mouffe, 2005). In some contexts, MEPs are even articulated as potential allies for strategic purposes. This has shown that the articulation of adversaries requires a nuanced approach. Enemies and adversaries are not discreet categories, but fluid, contingent constructs with numerous ambiguous zones and roles. In other words, the distinction between enemies and adversaries is not always clear cut. Indeed, the distinction between adversaries and strategic allies is sometimes permeable. Here, the concept of frame alignment (Benford and Snow, 2000) holds the potential to help account for strategic alliances that do not go as far as to constitute

chains of equivalences. The construction of a chain of equivalences relies on a constitutive outside, and as such, would prevent the identification of MEPs as adversaries. The category of frame alignment does not foreclose the role of the MEPs as adversaries; MEPs work as temporary allies whose interests are 'congruent' with those articulated in a specific context such as an email petition. This does not eliminate the political frontier between WDM and War on Want and their adversaries. Rather, it temporarily places MEPs in an ambiguous zone further from the SMO's enemies and closer to its allies without transcending the political frontier that is crucial to both WDM and War on Want's positions at the radical end of the GJM spectrum.

The overall identification of transnational institutions and the corporate world as adversaries rather than enemies is related to the ties to the radical end of the GJM spectrum that both campaigns portray. Paradoxically, at this radical end, WDM and War on Want both construct themselves as reformist rather than radical. Their position at the radical end of the GJM spectrum is related to their approach to trade and globalisation issues as political rather than just technical issues to be solved by experts (Mouffe, 2007). Their reformist stance at this radical end emerges from WDM and War on Want's construction of antagonists as adversaries rather than enemies. It also emerges from the modes of action that the two SMOs represent and encourage in their online spaces: online petitions and offline peaceful demonstrations. These modes of action are distinct from the confrontational direct action promoted by radical groups of activists such as the black bloc. In this light, the online appearances of the two trade campaigns can be seen as attempts at reaching broader publics.

In both campaigns, Friends of the Earth UK, War on Want and WDM are portrayed as comprising a small, reformist equivalential chain at this radical end of the movement field. This alliance is promoted implicitly, primarily through visual representations, whereas ties with groups – unions and social movements – in developing countries are promoted explicitly, in texts, photos and videos. While alliances with the latter are used by both SMOs to promote their transnational orientations, the alliance between WDM, War on Want and Friends of the Earth conditions how WDM and War on Want

define themselves as reformist SMOs at the radical end of the GJM spectrum in the UK. Here, the campaigns of both SMOs in many ways try to overcome the differences within the radical end of the GJM through the construction of a common adversary. Yet, they differ in terms of emphasis. WDM's campaign constructs a clear alliance between WDM, War on Want and Friends of the Earth UK. The alliance is also evident in War on Want's campaign. However, it is much more subtle than in WDM's campaign material. In other words, the promotion of the single SMO and its interests is more prominent in War on Want's trade campaign, while WDM's trade campaign foregrounds alliances. The potential tension between trying to generate political momentum as an alliance or informal coalition and promoting their single SMO as a separate entity towards broader publics emerges as relatively pronounced in War on Want's trade campaign. In a somewhat different manner, the stronger focus on alliances in WDM's trade campaign suggests a concern with also sustaining commitment among existing members, as these alliances are constructed through representations of cross-SMO interaction between members.

Both SMOs adopt a local focus that mainly works on a national and regional level. More specifically, they take as their focus the role of the UK policy makers in EU trade negotiations, identifying adversaries locally. Significantly, though, this is combined with a transnational orientation, especially towards the South; across platforms and multimodal and aesthetic qualities WDM and War on Want articulate their demands and interests as equivalent to those of people affected by trade policies in the South. This articulation of linkages between local particular demands into a more universal cause (Griggs and Howarth, 2004; Laclau, 1996) is an example of rooted cosmopolitanism (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). It produces a call for solidarity among WDM group members in relation to people in the South (Fenton, 2008a). This focus on solidarity with distant allies is further reinforced by the backgrounding of members in certain modes of representation. They are mainly only shown in photos and videos from offline demonstrations as a part of constructions of chains of equivalence. In this way, members are not the focus of the trade campaigns in online sites. This gestures



towards attempts at reaching broader publics rather than sustaining commitment among existing members. It thus adds ambiguity to the focus on members in WDM's trade campaign suggested by the focus on alliances and member interaction across SMOs.

In terms of the aesthetics of their self-representations, War on Want's campaign mainly relies on an unmodified amateur aesthetics. The unmodified visual representations of offline events balance the professionalised image that is invoked in the carefully produced appearances. In this light, the amateur aesthetics casts War on Want and WDM in a challenger role. In this way, the professionalised aesthetics of marketisation comes to work as a constitutive outside. In contrast, the aesthetic qualities put to play in WDM's campaign also rely on animation techniques. The multimodal properties and genres that WDM's videos and visual material draw on in their aesthetic construction of parody as a mode of critique are animation and the silent movie genre. These are carefully produced aesthetics. While this might provide a professionalised impression, more significantly, it inscribes WDM's trade campaign into a wider discourse of protest and suggests an allegiance with other social movement voices within this discourse by invoking the long history of the use of parody by activists in their subversion of dominant discourses in political and corporate communication (Cammaerts 2007b; Harold, 2004; Juris, 2008).

These attempts at invoking counter-hegemonic positions tie in with the use of popular online spaces and the question whether being caught up in the circuits of transnational capital and multinational power they seek to disrupt in any way undermines the message WDM and War on Want are trying to convey. This should be seen as a challenge rather than as a given problem: reinforcing and playing to power structures that are bound up with the marketised relations of power does not necessarily mean that the political message becomes subverted. Nonetheless, the compromise between promoting the SMO and gaining momentum for the cause through alliances testifies to the ways in which marketised relations of power permeate and condition the social movement field in which WDM and War on Want navigate.

This chapter has shown how SMO campaigns in popular online spaces promote the agendas of the SMOs and how they offer points of identification to members and broader publics. The next chapter looks at the ways in which SMO members identify with the promotion of these agendas in popular online spaces, and how they embrace, negotiate and reject the points of identification made available in them. It further analyses the ways in which members' identifications with the campaigns feed into their own online campaigning.

## 7 Negotiating political identities: Identifications with campaigns in popular online spaces

This chapter addresses the experiential dimension of political participation. Chapters 5 and 6 addressed the role of online spaces in processes of political identity formation from the perspectives of the rationales behind using online spaces for political contestation and the manifestations of these rationales across online spaces. This chapter turns to SMO members' identifications with these manifestations and the subject positions made available in the campaigns.

At the membership level in SMOs, the internet serves numerous purposes. Among many other things, it is a place for intra-SMO planning and organisation, a place for keeping updated, a place for self-representation and promotion of contestation (e.g. Atton, 2004; Bennett, 2003; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Fenton, 2008a; Kavada, 2009; Nash, 2008). This chapter focuses on the latter specifically in relation to SMO members: their experiences of and identifications with SMOs uses of online spaces for self-representation and promotion of counter-hegemonic politics.

Two themes are particularly central to the conditions for political collective identities at an SMO level. The first central theme is rooted in notions of multiple fluid identities (Fenton, 2008a; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that the over-determination of political identities renders them contingent and fluid. This entails possibilities for embracing different points of identification (Carpentier, 2005; Fenton, 2008b; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Melucci, 1996). Further, it means that individuals can encompass several group identities or memberships simultaneously (Dahlgren, 2007).

The other central theme relates to the tendency for people to engage with specific issues for short-term campaigns or events, often without permanently committing themselves to specific organisations (Bennett, 2003; Castells, 2001). This tendency may be amplified by the use of online media for political campaigning, including extra-

parliamentarian campaigning, as the ease of joining is matched by the ease of leaving online campaigns and groups (Bennett, 2003: 145; Dahlgren, 2009: 193). In this vein, Dahlgren argues that it becomes

*...difficult to maintain organisational control or coherent frames of collective identity. Also, the norms of openness and participation can result in the blunting of the direction, agendas and goals of the group. The very fluid nature of the groups means that groups and their memberships can unintentionally morph into something its original members had not intended, as transitory membership results in a new profile. (Dahlgren, 2009: 193)*

At the intersection of these two themes, SMOs face challenges relating to sustaining commitment among members. This can be understood in terms of SMOs offering subject positions with which members can identify. Mouffe (2005) theorises the social agent as constituted by multiple subject positions anchored in a multiplicity of social relations, memberships, allegiances and forms of participation. These subject positions are “constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation, but rather a constant movement of overdetermination and displacement” (Mouffe, 2005: 77). Political identities are forged through on-going processes of identification with a set of subject positions. It raises the questions of how they are embraced by members, and how they are adopted into members’ reservoirs of multiple political identities. In other words, SMOs face challenges to foster commitment beyond the instant agency of point-and-click activism (Chouliaraki, 2010; Schesser, 2006), and pivotal to these challenges are questions of how members identify with the political identities offered by SMOs and arrange these in fluid hierarchies of multiple subject positions.

Thus, online media may make the importance of building and sustaining relationships and forging collective identity rather than simply providing information even more pertinent (Hill and Hughes, 1998: 186).

Drawing on the articulations and the subject positions they provide in the representations of WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns analysed in Chapter 6, this chapter is driven by research sub-question three and asks *How do SMO members articulate the role of popular online spaces in fostering political identification and commitment at an organisational level in the Global Justice Movement, and how does this feed into their own uses of popular online spaces?*

To go about this task, the chapter draws on in-depth interviews with members from WDM and War on Want as well as participant observation at events such as WDM's annual Campaigner's Convention, seminars, and plenary sessions on the EU MEP elections organised by WDM members. The members interviewed are all group members, i.e. members who are involved in WDM and War on Want on a volunteer basis rather than merely fee paying 'passive' members. As discussed in Chapter 4, this allows exploring experiences of political engagement and commitment beyond passive or single-issue involvement. The interviewees are members from War on Want's SOAS student society group Pete and Eva, members from WDM's North London group Steve, Nicky, Veronica and Allison, and David from WDM Southwest London.

The following analysis is organised around three strands: (1) identifications in relation to the SMO and its uses of online spaces; (2) identifications in relation to the movement; and (3) online self-representations. In exploring the first two strands, the analysis focuses on the ways in which group members understand their political identities in relation to the SMOs' demands, enemies/adversaries and chains of equivalences. Exploring the third strand, the analysis focuses on the ways in which these identifications feed into group members' textual and multimodal constructions of the political identities of their groups and SMOs across online spaces. The extent to which group members appropriate and internalise the points of identification offered in the trade campaigns may be taken as an indication of their identifications with the SMOs.

Following the structure around the three strands outlined above, this chapter first analyses WDM group members' identifications, and then moves on to War on Want's group members' identifications.

The chapter shows that the role of member groups in the SMO is significant in conditioning group members' identification in relation to the SMO. A related finding at the SMO level shows that WDM group members embrace, reject, negotiate and reproduce the subject positions made available to them in the online appearances of WDM's trade campaign. In contrast, War on Want group members do not engage with the campaign appearances that HQ staff promote across online spaces. Consequently, online campaign appearances do not constitute points of identification for War on Want group members.

A major difference between WDM and War on Want that conditions members' perceptions of their uses of online spaces is their role in relation to the SMOs (see Chapter 2 for a detailed account of the WDM and War on Want's organisational make-up).

While War on Want had local groups across the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, these were restructured into a regional model in the 1970s. Following the financial crisis in the 1990s, War on Want was cut to the bone with no affiliated groups (Hilary, interview, July 2009; Luetchford and Burns, 2003). Today, War on Want has two student society groups at SOAS and Sussex University. However, they are not consulted on campaigns or any governance issues in the SMO, although they have been invited to provide feedback for the SMO's five year strategy due in 2010 (Hilary, interview, July 2009).

In contrast, local groups play a central role in WDM, with 60 local groups run on a voluntary basis (WDM, 2008). Based across the UK, the groups carry out local campaigning according to guidelines prepared by permanent staff in the London office. In addition to voting for the Council, WDM groups are also consulted on central

campaigns as well as the SMO's 10-year strategy (WDM, 2008b). Events such as the AGM and the annual Campaigner's Convention serve as forums for such feedback.

## 7.1 Political identities in WDM: intellectual, not 'fluffy' subjectivities

The WDM North London group is one of the oldest London groups (Steve, interview, March 2009). Their current member constellation has existed for five years. The group generally meets once a month (Steve, interview, March 2009). The WDM South West London group, which also meets once a month, has existed for about eight years. Its current members have been involved for between two and six years (David, interview, April 2009). WDM members regard London groups as transient, as people tend to move between areas (Steve, interview, March 2009).

A number of themes dominate WDM members' accounts of their experiences of WDM activism. Issues such as the importance of member involvement through the group constellations and offline events emerge as central. A key similarity to the HQ staff's accounts is a view of the possibilities of online spaces for reaching wider publics, but their inadequacy for fostering political engagement and commitment. However, the understanding of the promotion of the SMO and intra-movement alliances as a trade-off remains absent from members' accounts. Rather, members juggle multiple political identities as active and passive members of several SMOs. What emerges as important is the cause and personal ties rather than commitment to a specific SMO.

### 7.1.1 The SMO agenda: Identifying the problem and its perpetrators

WDM group members understand the SMO's demands as articulated around poverty. In this way, their understandings reflect those expressed by HQ staff (see Chapter 5) that also prevail in WDM's trade campaign in different online spaces (see Chapter 6). Crucially, poverty is understood as a political issue:

*...poverty is a political issue...we are proudly political I would say  
(David, interview, March 2009).*

WDM group members' understanding of poverty as political has implications for their constructions of antagonists who, accordingly, are identified as political institutions. The corporate world is also construed as antagonists. Nonetheless, while corporations are seen as accomplices, members' accounts focus responsibility on political institutions. This is captured by the following comment from North London group member, Veronica:

*It is people with power. They're the ones who are screwing everyone else. So whether it's corporations or government, ultimately, they're the ones making decisions. In lots of cases they do cross over. But the specifics of it may be different. Like in the trade campaigning we're targeting the EU, the European Commission. (Veronica, interview, March 2009)*

Here, the link between the corporate world and political institutions in the context of trade remains a little unclear beyond allusions to power structures. This is elaborated by South West London group coordinator, David, as he points to the importance of regulatory frameworks to holding businesses accountable:

*I think we kind of pride ourselves on pointing out when things are wrong basically, but...and, you know, stating those kinds of problems with corporate powers that is not being challenged by our governments whereas Oxfam seems to want to shy away from that.  
(David, interview, March 2009)*

In this way, he construes CSR and voluntary codes of conduct as unacceptable solutions. David's understanding also reflects more general notions of non-partisan, celebrity-driven NGO campaigns as facilitating consumers engaging in easy green belt tightening as part of their individual projects of image management. This co-optation



of the eco-consumer is seen as sustaining profit-driven growth and facilitating CSR practices that replace a regulatory framework that would hold corporations accountable for their operations rather than allowing them to promote selected schemes as socially responsible (Chatterton, 2009).

While stressing the importance of targeting political institutions – national, regional or transnational – David also begins to suggest ingroup/outgroup distinctions – although Oxfam is generally seen as part of the GJM, the NGO's impartial approach to poverty and focus on aid renders it a part of a constitutive outside to WDM members.

#### **7.1.1.1 Projecting the SMO agenda onto modes of self-representation:**

##### **Intellectual, not 'fluffy'**

Group members understand WDM as particularly intellectual in its approach, dealing with the complexities of transnational poverty issues. This is captured well in this remark by Steve:

*I like the intellectual rigour in WDM ...we try to affect change, which I often find sometimes you can have campaigns which are great, but it's fluffy stuff, like 'the orang-utan is dying', and if you look at why it's dying it's because of deforestation, but that's because of farmers getting subsidies from the EU, so you need to look at the root causes. I think the WDM does a root cause analysis, whereas I think you'll find a lot of the organisations will look at the nice orang-utan. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

This understanding of WDM as employing a distinct intellectual, in-depth approach is contrasted with perceptions of personified representations of poverty or the broader appeal of environmental problems. This is reflected in Nicky's perception of WDM's campaigns as 'dry':

*I think that sometimes why WDM campaigns will seem a little bit drier, because they try to get to the base root of who's actually involved, who's actually governing these things. Like a picture of your London MEP as opposed to a picture of an orang-utan, which one's going to generate a little bit more publicity, which one is going to get people more interested. That's why you can live on the surface, but when you've got a drier campaign...you can show that you've actually got a bit more substance. (Nicky, interview, March 2009)*

The perception of the in-depth analyses that inform WDM's trade campaign as 'dry' with 'more substance' and the ways in which it is contrasted with possibilities for publicity indicates that members identify with the intellectual elements that are provided in the campaign (see also Chapter 6). In doing so, WDM members understand themselves as intellectual subjects, committed to a serious, in-depth SMO. At the same time, WDM members seem reluctant to embrace the subject positions provided by the trade campaign's use of humour and 'tongue in cheek' style. A certain dissociation can be traced in Veronica's comment on *The Great Trade Dictator* video as representing a simplified account of the issues at stake:<sup>42</sup>

*The idea to simplify a complex issue isn't really good. People relate to them in different ways. I thought the Mandelson one was really well done, clever and putting quite a funny side to very serious issues and probably quite well received. (Veronica, interview, March 2009)*

A similar dissociation can be traced in Steve's comment on WDM's use of humour in videos more generally:

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<sup>42</sup> The video draws on the silent movie genre to represent Peter Mandelson's trade negotiations with developing countries when he was the European Trade Commissioner (see Chapter 6 for an analysis of the video).

*I think whatever they can do that might get people interested, that's quite cool...we don't do the nice soft and bubbly subjects. (Steve, interview, March 2009).*

In the case of WDM, the intellectual identities made available through the SMO's analytical approach to development and trade with long reports and analyses are challenged by subject positions provided by the short and sometimes entertainment-centred formats that characterises WDM's use of popular online spaces for its trade campaign. These subject positions enable identification with a light-hearted and witty approach – or “soft and bubbly” as indicated above by Steve – compared with the intellectual approach of WDM's analytical reports.

WDM members seem to dismiss identifying with these new subject positions. Rather, they point to the potentialities of popular online media for reaching new members among wider publics. In this way, they echo notions of the democratic potential of the internet in terms of reaching beyond what is often seen as the radical periphery of the internet (Dahlgren, 2009). This is captured nicely by Steve's comment on WDM's use of humour in videos uploaded to the SMO's YouTube channel:

*I think whatever they [WDM HQ] can do that might get people Interested, that's quite cool...anything we can do which helps draw people in is probably a good thing. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

This also begins to gesture towards members' views of WDM's use of popular spaces as geared towards reaching wider publics while inadequate for forging and sustaining collective identities among existing members. And in this vein, it suggests a perceived distinction between catering for intellectual subjects and wisdom, on the one hand, and emotional and spectacular framings as entertainment-centred consequences of marketisation on the other (see Vestergaard 2008, for a discussion on the marketisation of NGO discourses).

#### **7.1.1.2 Projecting the SMO agenda onto spaces of self-representation: popular online spaces as sites for youthful entertainment**

The overdetermination and contingency of identities render these vulnerable to destabilisation in new contexts. Contexts in which identities are threatened may require social actors to reconstruct their identities and rethink the subject positions that have been available to them to deal with this new situation (Griggs and Howarth, 2002). The incorporation of online media into their repertoire, for example, can alter political identity formations, because new possibilities for self-representation allow for the articulation of subject positions different from those provided in mass media representations. This point gains particular salience in the context of WDM's groups. To WDM group members the inadequacy of popular online spaces for engaging existing members is partly attributed to a perception of WDM's member base as comprising a significant segment of demographically old people. This is illustrated, as Veronica comments, by the potential of WDM's YouTube videos for reaching new, younger supporters:

*But also it's about a younger generation, because if you look at WDM's membership, they're old...I think it is really important that they're out there, that they're on YouTube and that they're making random films that are going to engage that audience. (Veronica, interview, March 2009)*

The issue here is not whether the demographics of WDM's membership base tend towards an older, more mature membership base. Rather, what is important is members' understanding of themselves as being a part of such a group. Indeed, members are aware of such misconceptions:

*There was a question relating to what's the percentage of members active in groups over the age of 40, and a bunch of us thought well about 60 or 70. And they go 'no, three'. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

This self-understanding of belonging to an older membership works as a distinguishing feature in relation to other SMOs:

*The thing about WDM is, we have a much older demographic than a lot of organisations. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

The perception of an older membership base dovetails on the articulation of the intellectual subject in the online representations of WDM's trade campaign. This suggests a sense of collective identity among WDM members that juxtaposes youth and visual-based emotional appeals with in-depth analysis and empirical rigour. It suggests an understanding of mainstream media as favouring sound-bite politics. It also suggests an understanding of young people as attracted by a sense of instant agency rather than detailed, ideological analyses. In this way, WDM group members mirror website producers' understandings from the spheres of party politics (Dahlgren and Olsson, 2007; Livingstone, 2007; Olsson, 2008). This also ties in with an understanding of popular online spaces as accommodating young people's preferences, and extends the perceived distinction between intellectual and spectacular framings or the use of parody to encompass popular online media practices as favouring the latter and appealing to young people. This may influence the ways in which group members conceive and stage their outbound self-representations (McCurdy, 2009). Indeed, as we shall see, it not only feeds into WDM group members' identifications with the subject positions offered in their online campaigns but can also be traced in their own attempts at promoting WDM at a group level.

WDM group members have come to understand WDM's uses of popular online spaces as directed towards potential supporters among younger users who are seen as appreciating visual modes of representation. This is illustrated by Veronica, as she reflects on WDM's use of YouTube:

*And I suppose film these days is really, you know, people need to be able to see stuff. (Veronica, interview, March 2009)*

Here, Veronica reiterates the understanding of young people as attracted by the visual (Olsson, 2008), and emphasises the perceived distinction between existing members and potential members; WDM's uses of YouTube are not seen as speaking to group members.

### **7.1.2 The movement agenda: Constructing 'root causes' as points of equivalences and differences in the ally camp**

Group members understand WDM in relation to other GJM SMOs. Recalling Steve's comment above, group members emphasise as important the 'root causes' of social and environmental problems. Against a perception that "WDM does a root cause analysis" (Steve, interview, March 2009), GJM allies are constructed as a constitutive outside. Here, a logic of difference works to distinguish WDM from other GJM NGOs who are seen as concerned with development and aid rather than the political decisions that have led to the perceived problem.

WDM members also construe WDM's agenda and its focus on poverty in relation to other issues, especially the environment:

*The focus is very much on tackling poverty rather than protecting the environment, although the two are very closely linked. (David, interview, March 2009)*

This understanding of a collective identity against a constitutive outside based on an issue is extended to an understanding of the environment as connected to other SMOs' agendas:

*Trade is so much our foundation and bread and butter of what we do. I think we were quite glad to get back to trade, because we did climate change for a while. But also there are a lot of other groups covering climate change. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

In this way, WDM members understand WDM's agenda as constructed around poverty and justice and in an oppositional constitutive relation to the environmental and development oriented SMOs in the GJM. This emerges as central to political identity formations at the SMO level. As this narcissism of small differences unfolds in members' accounts, it emerges from an articulation of poverty and justice in relation to other GJM SMOs, primarily focusing on their approaches to the environment and politics as the constitutive outside. The following comment from David captures WDM members' perceptions of other SMOs' focus on aid rather than the political structures that govern possibilities for reducing poverty:

*Our issues are quite complex and difficult to sell to people...people concerned about overseas poverty, they may just go to Oxfam and think well, you know, my money is going to help somebody, like directly, whereas without understanding any of the policy decisions, they are keeping people poor. (David, interview, March 2009)*

This narcissism of small differences gains increased significance, as WDM members also contrast WDM's agenda against Friends of the Earth. In other contexts WDM members consider Friends of the Earth a part of their ingroup at the radical end of the GJM spectrum.

At the discursive level, WDM members nuance this construction of a chain of equivalences between WDM and Friends of the Earth. They do so by stressing the centrality of "the human side" to globalisation issues, and linking this to justice:

*With us it's much more the human side. And I guess justice always comes out big to us. Whereas to Friends of the Earth, climate change is very scientific, and 'we need to do this or this will happen'. I guess with us it's 'these people will suffer in this way, and it's our responsibility to do something about it'. So we come from different angles. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

Similar distinctions are highlighted in relation to Greenpeace, and extended to include differences in repertoires for action:

*Veronica: [Greenpeace] do illegal stuff.*

*Steve: We haven't got any boats.*

The constitutive outside not only involves identifying adversaries (Mouffe, 2000), it also involves contrasting the SMO against allies within the chain of equivalences that connects WDM to other SMOs. These processes of compare and contrast need to be considered in relation to modes of direct action, the role of antagonism and agonism and issue orientation (Juris, 2005; Mueller, 2006). At the intersection of these three aspects, political identities are forged. For WDM group members the three aspects are about a moderate approach to direct action, an agonistic approach to policy-makers and the corporate world and a focus on “the human side of things”. The political identities and feelings of commitment that emerge at this intersection are captured in Steve’s comment on Friends of the Earth compared to WDM:

*What I love about the organisation you see, it is a movement, it is a lot of people who work together, trying to get something done much more than, I would say, Friends of the Earth, which I'm not knocking as an organisation, they're brilliant, but it's not what we are. There is one thing which is central, that's justice more than anything else.*  
*(Steve, interview, March 2009)*

Here Steve sums up the feelings of belonging that his identity as a WDM group member fosters. He talks about WDM as “we” and connects it to the discourse of justice that underpins WDM’s campaign.



#### **7.1.2.1 Constructing a chain of equivalences: managing multiple identities**

While other GJM SMOs in relation to a number of issues work as a constitutive outside to WDM members' sense of a collective identity, entering into coalitions with these SMOs is not seen as jeopardising this identity. This illustrates an important aspect of the complex interrelations and tensions between the SMOs and their aims (Cammaerts, 2007). In this way, concerns that such coalitions are a trade-off between publicity for the cause and publicity for WDM are not expressed by members. This is captured in the following comment from David:

*I think these coalitions are a good thing, really, locally, because we can hook up with people who are probably a bit more well-known than WDM. For one thing, we are a quite small organisation. Not many people have heard of us. (David, interview, March 2009)*

The strong identification with the intellectual elements provided in the trade campaign and the coupling with a perception of an older, more mature membership base is constituted against other GJM SMOs. Nonetheless, WDM members negotiate and manage a range of multiple identities that are connected to precisely the SMOs that also work as a constitutive outside in relation to WDM:

*Friends of the Earth. Veronica's Greenpeace. I also work for Greenpeace now and again. So there's usually a few people who are plugged into others. So I know all the Friends of the Earth. I don't really focus on climate issues in WDM, but I do campaign with Greenpeace, so it's very easy for me to make a phone call or drop an email. It just means we can get more done. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

WDM members' view of overdetermined identities as unproblematic enables linking causes into a chain of equivalence at an intra-movement level. In so doing, the pragmatic take on the multiplicity of their identities that WDM members demonstrate,

facilitates the publicity of causes rather than the publicity of the SMO. Extending coalitions such as Stop Climate Chaos to incorporate a growing number of differences, renders the content of nodal points more and more indeterminate, more and more empty, although never completely devoid of meaning (Griggs and Howarth, 2002; Laclau, 1996). In this sense, empty signifiers are means of representation that, as new elements are added to a chain of equivalences, become more abstract. While WDM group members stress the importance of promoting WDM's cause through coalitions, they take great care to emphasise their ability to juggle several GJM positions. Connecting the demands of WDM to those of other GJM SMOs does not entail an unstructured mishmash of political identities. Rather, WDM group members manage these multiple identities and arrange them into a hierarchy of identities that privileges WDM.

#### **7.1.2.2 Differences in the chain of equivalences: Group autonomy**

WDM members attach great importance to member involvement through the group constellations. The groups are granted autonomy within guidelines provided by HQs for specific campaigns. This is explained by Steve:

*WDM does the research; you get the campaign and the materials. Then what you do with them is very much up to each group to manipulate to the best way that they can. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

Possibilities for manoeuvring within the frames of the campaign material from HQs as well as processes that facilitate and invite feedback is seen as by group members as very democratic:

*It's very democratic. When we start a new campaign, whether it is trade or climate, they put it out to the members and we'll sit around*

*and put down the proposals and decide which ones and we'll vote for them. (Veronica, interview, March 2009)*

Further, groups are given a voice in the decision processes in choosing the governing bodies of WDM:

*We vote on all the council members. It's seriously democratic, especially compared to Greenpeace. (Veronica, interview, March 2009)*

This also captures another aspect of WDM members' understandings of their role in WDM in relation to other GJM SMOs – the autonomy and voice granted WDM members is seen as distinctively democratic to WDM. Non-hierarchical group structures are unusual in UK-based SMOs (see Chapter 2). Internally SMOs strive for some kind of consensus, often to some degree of collective identity (Dahlgren, 2005). This suggests that the inclusive element of SMOs should not be taken for granted. Further, members see this democratic configuration as transcending poverty/environment and political/aid distinctions as well as repertoires for action in relation to other SMOs as a constitutive outside. As Steve says:

*It's different to anywhere, because we are a movement so everyone gets a say and it's completely democratic. There is not one organisation which I've ever seen which has had this approach. (Steve, interview, March 2009)*

While adversaries, NGOs from what is perceived as the mainstream, non-partisan part of the GJM spectrum and SMOs from the radical end of the spectrum work in different ways as a constitutive outside to WDM members' sense of collective identity in WDM, the identification of WDM's ingroup also emerges as an element in members' self-understanding. People from southern regions are represented as WDM allies. WDM's orientation towards the South is seen as a defining aspect to WDM's agenda. This is reflected in Nicky's comment:

*For me, the thing with WDM is that they always try to bring it back to that development thing, to voices from the south, and alternative voices. (Nicky, interview, March 2009)*

In this understanding of WDM's chains of equivalences at the level of alliances the demands of War on Want are construed as equivalent to those of groups in southern regions. This extension of WDM's chain of equivalences produces a sense of solidarity among WDM group members. Fenton (2008a: 49) offers an understanding of social solidarity as "a morality of cooperation, the ability of individuals to identify with each other in a spirit of mutuality and reciprocity without individual advantage or compulsion". For WDM group members, this sense of solidarity works as to distinguish WDM from other GJM actors. It emerges as a sense of political solidarity that they understand in contrast to solidarity in terms of aid and development.

### **7.1.3 The WDM groups' online presences: The aesthetics of offline parody**

The WDM North London and the WDM South West London groups both have a Facebook Group and a Yahoo email group. Focusing on SMOs' uses of the different online spaces to promote their causes, and, more particularly in middle media such as blogs, organisation sites, e-zines and social networking sites (see Chapter 4 for a detailed outline of the distinctions between "political uses of the Net" and micro and middle media), the analysis does not attend to the Yahoo email groups.

#### **7.1.3.1 WDM North London online**

Set up in 2007, WDM North London's Facebook Group has 27 members. The Group profile was created by Facebook user Andras Marwol, the North London coordinator, Steve, and in addition has Alison, Vicky, Nicky and Veronica listed as 'admins' with

permission to approve members and content.<sup>43</sup> Whereas WDM's main Group profile categorises WDM as a 'non-profit organization', the North London group has opted for the 'volunteer organization' category, indicating the group's volunteer status affiliation with WDM. The description section provides a pastiche of WDM HQ campaign material as well as a few lines specifically on the North London group:

*The group is friendly and sociable, and looking to be increasingly active over the next 12 months. It also should be mentioned that its great fun! (WDM North London, Facebook)*

Here, the group represents itself as 'friendly', 'sociable', and 'great fun' to be a part of, gesturing towards an invitation for users to become actively engaged with the group. This is made explicit in the call for users to join the North London group that follows the group description and articulates 'justice' as a nodal point in WDM's and the group's cause:

*Join us, and help ensure we get justice for the world's poor. (WDM North London, Facebook)*

The Facebook Group only has two wall posts, one about an offline meeting, and one about an event. However, the 'Events' section has 31 events listed, and the 'Photos' section has 45 photos uploaded. The 31 events date from November 2007 to May 2009, and include issue-centred demonstrations on broad issues such as climate change as well as specific issues such as coal-fired power stations – both WDM-centred as well as coalition-based – monthly meetings and social events.

Four events are directly related to the trade campaign; the majority of these took place in Spring 2009 when the trade justice campaign, and the Global Europe trade strategy and MEP elections more specifically, were a focus in the North London group's work. The events were 'European Elections Hustings. Can Europe Deliver Global

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<sup>43</sup> [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7131786845&ref=ts#!/group.php?gid=7131786845](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7131786845&ref=ts#!/group.php?gid=7131786845)

Justice?', 'Europe's Trade Deals - Who Benefits. Public meeting with Mary Lou Malig, trade campaigner from the Philippines', and 'MEP Lobbying - Planning Meeting. Stop the EU's unfair trade deals'. In this way, the events focus on attempts to rearticulate dominant discourses on trade that surface in members' accounts of their understandings of WDM's causes.

The listed events also include a film and discussion event co-organised by the London WDM groups titled 'Framing Injustice' with the tagline 'Join us for an evening of short films, speakers and discussion on the topics of global trade and climate change'. The title explicitly articulates injustice as a floating signifier subject to discursive struggles over its meaning. The tagline connects this to global trade and climate change, promoting an understanding of dominant approaches to these as organised around models that foster injustice.

Among the 31 listed events, five events were centred round a social set-up such as a comedy night or a night club event. For example, the 'Wednesdays Do Matter II' was organised around comedy and live music. The event's tagline 'Getting better – have fun and join the fight for global justice' can be seen as serving to attract new members who will be actively engaged. In so doing, it provides subject positions that enable existing as well as new members to identify with tactics that use humour to challenge dominant discourses.

The 45 photos uploaded to the Facebook Group are all from offline events such as WDM demonstrations against a new airport runway and water privatisation. Several of these represent members from the North and South West London groups together. Also, photos from demonstrations organised as coalition events such as the Make Poverty History march and the G8 protests in Gleneagles in 2005 make up a significant part of the visual uploads. A significant part of the photos are from events that use humour and irony to protest against water privatisation and climate change. For example, 17 of the photos are from a protest against climate change and show WDM members in pirate costumes on Regent's Canal. This contradicts the reluctance that

emerges in members' accounts of their perceptions of the quirky aspects in HQ produced videos promoted on WDM's YouTube channel. Rather than embracing the tongue-in-cheek elements provided by the humorous elements of the videos, members expressed strong identification with the intellectual identities also provided in campaign material from HQ. In addition to identifying with these subject positions that are perceived as light-hearted in their offline activities, WDM members also promote humorous self-representations to attract new members. For example, one of the accompanying texts to the pirate photos says 'Being a pirate is fun! As is working for justice for the world's poor.' In this way, members seem to embrace the quirky identities as well as reify them through recruitment discourses. While this contradicts the self-portrayals that emerge in the interviews with group members, the role of play and creativity, including parody and satire, is central to staging subversive protest and mobilising the passion of participants (Juris, 2008).



WDM campaigners against climate change. Photo: Steve Huxton

Further, the staging of protest as playful mockery suggests an understanding among WDM group members of media logics as favouring the spectacular. The online

mediascape has been argued to reflect the market diktat that sutures the contemporary media logic more generally (Cammaerts, 2007; Dahlberg, 2007; Fenton, 2009), and such concerns also shape WDM members' use of online spaces.

Most of the photos include WDM banners, showing WDM as a central actor in different modes of protest against neo-liberal globalisation issues. However, several photos from coalition-based events do not represent WDM banners. Five of the photos



WDM North London and Friends of the Earth for fair-trade Fortnight in Kentish Town, London 2007. Photo: Steve Huxton

are directly related to trade. These are from the 'Fairtrade Fortnight' and the campaign to stop Europe's unfair trade deals. The 'Fairtrade Fortnight' photos are accompanied by the text 'NW London and Camden Friends of the Earth team up to promote Fairtrade Fortnight.' Here, the WDM

North London group (previously the North West London group) represent part of the chain of equivalence that members indicate in their accounts of intra-movement alliances. The decision to 'team up to promote' an issue suggests a perception of adding leverage to their voice by connecting common elements in their agendas to construct a common horizon of problem identification.

Unlike the photos from these events in WDM's HQ-managed Flickr profile, WDM North London's photos from this event do not include WDM banners. Instead, a Friends of the Earth banner can be discerned in the photo which is dominated by Friends of the Earth's logo colour, green. This choice echoes the experiences conveyed by members as giving primacy to the advantages of coalitions and background concerns about SMO publicity.



The photos from the campaign to stop Europe's unfair trade deals are from demonstrations organised under the auspices of the Trade Justice Movement coalition. Again, the photos do not include WDM banners, but focus on coalition banners identifying the event as aiming to 'Stop Europe's unfair trade deals'. This focus again points to the advantages ascribed to coalitions, and the minor role that concerns about SMO publicity play. Once again, here, notions of multiple identities and belongings are invoked (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005), suggesting that WDM group members navigate among a wide range of identification points and foreground personal ties rather than the publicity of WDM.

#### **7.1.3.2 WDM South West London online**

Set up in 2008, WDM South West London's Facebook Group has 29 members. The Group profile was created by Facebook user Lucy Hurn, and in addition has David Johnstone and Josh Cullimore listed as 'admins' with permission to approve members and content.<sup>44</sup> Whereas WDM's main Group profile categorises WDM as a 'non-profit organization', and the North London group as a 'volunteer organisation', the South West London group has chosen the 'advocacy organisations' category, stressing its role as a semi-autonomous group of resistance, rather than its volunteer status vis-à-vis WDM. Similarly to WDM North London, WDM South West London's description section here provides a pastiche of WDM HQ texts. In the texts that they have chosen to include, alliances with "people in the developing world who are standing up to injustice" are central. In this way, social movements in the South are positioned as an important agent in WDM South West London's ingroup. Moreover, injustice is placed at the heart of the group's diagnostic framing, echoing WDM North London members' connection of poverty to a vague, but central notion of injustice. A relatively large part of the description is dedicated to an introduction specifically related to WDM South

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<sup>44</sup> [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7131786845&ref=ts#!/group.php?gid=7131786845](https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7131786845&ref=ts#!/group.php?gid=7131786845)

West London. Here, the group highlights its current campaign focus, and its repertoire of forms of protest:

*The South West London group is currently campaigning on Climate Change, against water privatisation in the developing world and on related local campaigns. We organise events, lobby MPs, do street campaigning, and more....! (WDM South West London, Facebook)*

Here, the group represents itself as concerned with climate change and water privatisation, without explicitly identifying antagonists. It positions the 'developing world' as part of its ingroup. Also, a local focus on related issues in the developing world is included in the short snippet, echoing the emphasis granted a local focus in HQ campaigns material, such as the role of local MEPs in EU trade strategies towards poor countries. Especially in the group setting, the local focus feeds into motivational framing as it grants potential members a sense of possibilities for rearticulating approaches to poverty issues (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Nash, 2008).

The text also explicitly serves to attract new members. A central position is granted to details for possibilities to participate and join the group. Moreover, the text explicitly stresses an invitation to join or contact the group: 'All welcome! Give us a shout if you have any questions.'

In January 2010, WDM South West London's Facebook group had seven wall posts. Five of these were related to trade, including the film event and the 'Profit or Planet?' panel outlined below. A post inviting users to the 'European election hustings' provides a link for the 'Profit or Planet?' panel that included speakers running for the 2009 MEP elections. Another post encourages users to visit the local Wandsworth Fairtrade borough's campaign website. These four invitations were all posted by group members of WDM South West London. Finally, a post by a user who is not a group member invites users to an offline event, a fair trade tea party and art sale in South West London, 'ArTea Party'.

The events section has two events listed, both past 2009 events. One is a co-organised film festival ‘with topics including the future of food and farming, the hidden costs of economic growth, civil liberties and climate change, local economics’<sup>45</sup> (The Bigger Picture Festival of Interdependence, Facebook event). Event partners include War on Want and other GJM SMOs with disparate focuses such as Greenpeace, ActionAid, and the Jubilee Debt Campaign,<sup>46</sup> and thus suggests the contours of a, albeit temporary, alliance. WDM South West London promotes the theme of the event as addressing ‘how inequality leaves us all worse off’, extending the HQ-managed trade justice campaign’s linking of globalisation to poverty, inequality and injustice to local London spheres. In so doing, the representation of inequality as leaving ‘us all worse off’ serves to foster local engagement through motivational framing that connects the problems of the diagnostic framing to London-based supporters.

The other listed event, ‘Profit or Planet?’, juxtaposes marketisation to humanitarian and environmental concerns and addresses the EU’s responses to the “triple whammy” of ‘financial meltdown’, ‘climate catastrophe’ and ‘global energy crisis’, contributing to diagnostic framing by articulating these issues as systemic and political rather than inevitable fluctuations in a neo-liberal market economy and natural as well as motivational framing by articulating a sense of urgency (see Vestergaard, 2008, for a discussion on the marketisation of humanitarian communication).

WDM South West London’s Facebook Group’s ‘Photos’ section has 25 photos uploaded. All of these are from offline events. Four of the photos are related to the trade justice campaign. The majority of these are from events staged to protest against climate change, five are from a protest against the Kingsnorth coal power station, three are from an event staged to protest against an airport expansion, another three against water privatisation and one is from a Jubilee Debt Campaign demonstration.

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<sup>45</sup> [www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=150443137712&index=1](http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=150443137712&index=1)

<sup>46</sup> [thebiggerpicture2009.org/](http://thebiggerpicture2009.org/)

The Jubilee Debt Campaign demonstration is the only one representing a coalition-based event, all the other photos are from WDM-centred events.

All WDM South West London's trade related photos are from the same offline event,



WDM North London and Southwest London campaigners. Photo: David Johnstone 2009

staged in relation to the European trade hustings events and *The Great Trade Robbery* video promoted in WDM's YouTube channel. The photos represent South West as well as North London group members, foregrounding a WDM London alliance rather than inter-group distinctions. Drawing on the rhetorical strategies in *The Great Trade Robbery* video, the event portrayed in the photos uses humour and irony to draw attention to the problem it identifies.

WDM group members in the photos use props and pose to contest EU trade strategies. More specifically, the visual representation of the diagnostic framing of the ways in which WDM HQ connects the European trade hustings events and *The Great Trade Robbery* video to a protest against the EU's Global Europe trade strategy; the small-scale farmer that WDM's trade campaign identifies as the victim of the EU's trade policy plans is represented by a group member dressed in poncho and sombrero and holding a giant-sized sweet corn, stereotypically casting him as a South American farmer. The EU is represented by two group members dressed as Wild West robbers wearing EU stars on their scarves and posing to mimic the EU forcefully taking away

the farmer's crop, invoking notions of US liberalism. One of the photos from *The Trade Robbery* event is a black and white photo. In this way, beyond visually representing the video's diagnostic framing, it serves as an intertextual reference to the black and white silent movie genre that it mocks (see Chapter 6 for an analysis of *The Great Trade Robbery* video). Props and caricatures are employed in most of the 25 photos. This echoes the subject positions that seem to forge a sense of collective identity in WDM North London's online presences and also here suggests that humour and irony are central to the subject positions with which WDM South West London members identify, and that the dismissive position towards the caricatures in WDM's videos in YouTube that WDM members express does not entail a rejection of the use of humour on their own part to explain and promote their groups.

#### **7.1.4 Summing up**

Mouffe (2005) argues for the importance of the role of adversaries as a constitutive outside to a political identity. Yet, quasi-allies can also play this role. WDM members convey an understanding of their political identities as located at the radical, explicitly political end of a GJM spectrum and as particularly intellectual and democratic. Here, mainstream, supposedly non-partisan SMOs as well as other radical SMOs work as a constitutive outside. Nonetheless, WDM members primarily look to Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace for what I argue can be seen as identity construction through a narcissism of small differences – the construction of a political identity against similar SMOs as a constitutive outside within a chain of equivalences. A second point of incongruity is also related to the construction of chains of equivalence. Members do not express concerns about giving primacy to the promotion of coalitions at the expense of the promotion of WDM or their own local group, suggesting a concern with the cause rather than their affiliation with WDM or, indeed, their specific group. The latter may be related to a sense of collective identity around their London base which enables offline collaboration – precisely the context that all respondents stress as crucial to the formation of collective identities.

WDM group members seem to dismiss the subject positions provided by the humorous elements employed in videos in WDM's YouTube channel. While group members express an understanding of their collective identities as primarily intellectual and not 'nice, soft and bubbly', they describe themselves and their work as 'friendly', 'sociable', and 'great fun' in their online self-representations, and both groups grant humour and irony a central role in visual representations of their offline action repertoires. This contradiction also captures the emotional dimension to being political stressed by Fenton (2008b), as the interpersonal aspects of activism as well as the playful enactment of dissent both help forge affective solidarity (Juris, 2008).

WDM North London's use of Facebook is more elaborate than WDM South West London, especially in terms of the promotion of offline events. Yet both groups' uses of the platform mirror the difficulties and reluctance they express in their accounts of the potentialities of online spaces. More specifically, both Facebook Groups give the impression that the groups were not very active offline at the beginning of 2010.

## 7.2 Political identities in War on Want: Student society organisation:

### Ephemeral involvement

War on Want does not have a group structure with a network of groups campaigning on behalf of War on Want. Nonetheless, two groups do work within the remit of War on Want. These are student society groups based at SOAS and Sussex University.

The SOAS student society group has existed for approximately three years. With around seven members, it was set up by SOAS student Pete Chonka and mainly works to set up events at SOAS based on material provided by War on Want (Pete, interview, April 2009).

While affiliated with War on Want, the groups are not official War on Want groups (Pete, interview, April 2009; Nadia, interview, April 2009). As such, War on Want does

not consider the groups and their members representatives of the SMO. This is captured in War on Want outreach officer Nadia Idle's stipulation made clear in an email prior to an up-coming interview with Pete Chonka:

*Just wanted to make sure you were aware that Pete Chonka is an independent activist...who runs the War on Want group at SOAS, and his views may not represent the views of War on Want. (Nadia, email, April 2009)*

Nonetheless, the groups were invited to provide feedback for War on Want's 2010 strategy document, and War on Want provides campaign material and helps publicise events provided the SMO approves of the theme and the speakers.

A number of themes dominate War on Want's members' accounts of their experiences of War on Want student society activism. Particularly, the ephemera of student societies play a key role in group members' sense of collective identity and commitment in relation to War on Want.

Moreover, the role of offline events is granted primacy in War on Want group members' perceptions of student society activism. Here, the role of popular online spaces is even considered negligible in terms of organising offline events and reaching wider publics.

Group members portray War on Want's political approach to poverty as pivotal to the construction of chains of equivalences and their constitutive outside at a radical end of a GJM spectrum. Nonetheless, while group members in this way contrast War on Want against GJM SMOs such as Oxfam, the perceived role of WDM as a simultaneously similar and constitutively different radical SMO seems minor.

### 7.2.1 Student society organisations as a space for political involvement

The organisation of group activities in the War on Want SOAS group is characterised by the transitory associations of student societies as well as the ebbs and flows in extra-curricular activities brought about by exam periods. In this way, member involvement in the War on Want group at SOAS seems contingent on term time, as students get involved during their enrolment, and leave the group when they move on to work or to study elsewhere. This renders involvement in the group a short-term commitment, especially compared to WDM groups. Moreover, War on Want activities are granted a lower priority during exam periods. These fluctuations in activities and group member constellations are illustrated in the following comment from 2009 group organiser and SOAS student, Pete:

*...since the G20 we haven't really done anything...because it was Easter so everyone was away for like a month and now it's exams, and traditionally throughout the exam periods, you know people...And yeah, I haven't got quite so much time at the moment, I just want to get my Master's. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

The group's dormancy during, for example, exam periods is ascribed to its basis as a student society group. Further, the scattered occurrences of group meetings are portrayed as impeding possibilities for a sense of collective identity among group members. This is illustrated in SOAS student Eva's account of the day-to-day practices of the student society group:

*The group is not very active. But I only joined the student society. I think the UK War on Want is just in general more active than the student society. But here I never really in the SOAS War on Want group, I never really figured it out. I think I went to one or two meetings. But the meetings were very rare, because it was mainly Pete who was calling the meetings when he had time. And then in these meetings some ideas were discussed...I didn't really get to know*



*the other people who came to the meetings, because it was very fast and everybody dispersed. (Eva, interview, April, 2009)*

Student society groups hold a lot of potential as a space for political involvement. In the case of War on Want's SOAS student society group, the political involvement of members does not translate into political identification with War on Want. For some members political involvement also fails to translate into political identification with the student society group. Yet members still expressed a strong sense of political identity in relation to a specific chain of demands.

### **7.2.2 The SMO agenda. Identifying the problem and its perpetrators:**

#### **Poverty is political**

Group members express an understanding of War on Want's approach to poverty and trade as political. This extends to an understanding of War on Want as an agent that aims to influence political decisions, and challenge the ways in which a neo-liberal approach to globalisation has come to be taken for granted as a natural model. This is captured in Pete's comment on War on Want's focus on advocacy and the promotion of contestation rather than a development agenda:

*It is the idea that issues of poverty are linked to issues of global justice and War on Want takes an explicitly political approach to development problems, the idea that poverty is political.. So it is different in the sense that it is technically a development NGO but it is more of an advocacy group. It's more of a...sort of promoting issues. It is not about building schools and hospitals and toilets for people in, you know, in sub-Saharan Africa. It is about education, the realities in poverty and the political policy from the, you know, the developed world. And that is what appeals to me about it. It is explicitly political. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

In addition to highlighting a perception of a political grounding of War on Want's causes, this also points to an understanding of War on Want's link between poverty and an orientation towards the South as important. Yet, this interregional orientation is perceived as rooted in a local focus. As Eva explains:

*I think there is always a very strong UK focus...you can speak about, say, South Africa or Sudan, but you always make a connection to that British MP or that British company...some campaigns focused on, for example, a British company that is doing something bad in some other country. (Eva, interview, April 2009)*

The local focus that War on Want's campaigns adopt thus foster a sense of rooted cosmopolitanism (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). As argued in Chapter 6, in War on Want's trade campaign this local resonance is also promoted through a focus on local politicians and local events. This does not foreclose possibilities for transnational solidarity. Rather, it points towards local political solutions to transnational issues. It thus enables a sense of agency by suggesting local solutions to transnational problems, and local possibilities for action.

#### **7.2.2.1 Projecting the SMO agenda onto modes of self-representation:**

##### **Organisation, not reresentation**

The SOAS War on Want group members explain that, generally, they do not use the popular online spaces in which War on Want's trade campaign appears. Consequently, these spaces do not function as sites of political identification for SOAS group members. Respondents associate possibilities for identification in such spaces with large NGOs and branding. This is captured in Pete Chonka's comment on Facebook group profiles as 'identity badges':

*And that is always gonna happen when you have NGOs which brand themselves. Because NGOs, the NGO industry, they brand themselves,*

*they have to do it, and so this whole idea [of identity badges] I think is quite pervasive. And yeah people would click on this 'Yeah, I support Oxfam'. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

The association between using popular online spaces for outbound communication and branding serves as a constitutive outside. In this way, using popular online spaces comes to work as a constitutive outside as humanitarian and relief-centred NGOs are seen as a constitutive outside. The role of NGOs as a negative reference point is further stressed by Pete's use of the pronoun 'they', constructing a 'we/they' distinction. Moreover, Pete reveals an understanding of the media and NGOs' struggles for visibility as driven by the logics of the marketplace, as he explains that 'they [NGOs] brand themselves, they have to do it'. In other words, NGOs have no choice if they want to gain visibility and ensure membership fees. In addition to 'branding', he also uses another signifier from the corporate realm: 'the NGO industry'. The profit-driven logics of the mass media have contributed to the professionalisation of humanitarian discourses in western NGOs (Vestergaard, 2008). For SOAS War on Want group members, retaining a political identity entails putting into the background their uses of War on Want's popular online spaces.

#### **7.2.2.2 Projecting the SMO agenda onto spaces of self-representation: popular online spaces as sites for invitation and organisation**

The transformational potential of the incorporation of online spaces into an SMO's media repertoire is relatively modest in the context of the SOAS War on Want group compared to WDM groups as far as the formation of political identity is concerned. This is related to the relatively young demographics of the group members. Again here, the War on Want groups' roots in student societies has implications for member experiences and involvement practices; members and their student peers are familiar with social networking sites which in some ways is seen as an obvious means to reach people. This is nicely captured in Pete's comment on Facebook:

*...as long as I've been doing the SOAS War on Want stuff we have pretty much always been using the internet so I don't know what it was like before, before Facebook, to get people to come along. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

Yet, the ways in which Facebook as a communicative tool for non-institutional political activities is taken for granted does not necessarily gesture towards possibilities for reaching beyond the left-wing confines, precisely because the War on Want groups are located in a notoriously left-wing student society context, so the wider publics that can be reached through, for example, Facebook are likely to already know War on Want and be sympathetic to their causes.

Eva sees reaching wider publics as crucial to the social movement project. She points to the importance of being “where the mainstream is” in terms of communication, conjuring up notions of a mainstream public sphere that requires strategising for counter-discourses to gain access and be heard:

*Social movements still by definition, should be, like, wide and reach as many people as possible. So in that sense, from a strategic point of view, it's important to also be where the mainstream is, sort of in communication...if you isolate yourself completely from Facebook, then you might, like, not reach some people. (Eva, interview, April 2009)*

This view of Facebook as holding the potential to reach beyond the confines of people who are already politically engaged is tempered by accounts that construe the platform as a fad that many SMO and GJM groups and networks started to use because other groups in the movement were using it:

*I guess I've set the Facebook group up a year and a half ago when Facebook became this phenomenon that it is. We sort of jumped on that bandwagon. And we put on the Facebook group, and that was*

*just an easy way of sending messages to people who are more involved in organisation as opposed to people who might come to the events. So we've only got like 30 people in the Facebook group. So it is just a way of sending like 'Oh I need help with this' or 'someone else needs help with this, can someone do this', whereas the e-mail list would be for ...to give people information about when an event would be. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

This also suggests an understanding of Facebook as useful for organisation purposes rather than promoting offline events. Instead, the group's email list, which has more members registered than the Facebook group, is seen as more useful for disseminating information about events. The wider reach of the email list is ascribed to the role of offline events in recruiting members, for example at the annual introductory student society event:

*We have got stuff like a Facebook group and for the events we make a Facebook event...The SOAS War on Want Facebook group is like...I send messages to people I know asking them to join the group and to people that would be interested. The e-mail list is much wider. It is people who've put their names down at the Freshers' Fair. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

Overall, members express an understanding of offline events as 'effective' for discussing globalisation and poverty issues in a way that Facebook cannot facilitate. As Pete notes:

*...no matter how good your Facebook page is...the most effective thing is sitting in a room with someone who knows what they're talking about and does a talk and we have a discussion session. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

This view is connected to a view of the internet as fostering practices of uncommitted activism:

*[The internet] makes it easier for people just to...click something and think that they are actually doing something political when really they are just sort of browsing around on Facebook. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

Here, Pete echoes pessimistic accounts of the role of online media as a vehicle for a reinvigorated public sphere that suggest that online potentialities for political engagement translate into lazy politics and point-and-click activism (e.g. Cammaerts, 2007; Fenton, 2008a).

### **7.2.3 The movement agenda: Constructing 'poverty is political' as a point of equivalence and difference**

War on Want's promotion of poverty as political and the interregional orientation in particular are central elements in the constructions of chains of equivalences and their constitutive outside that group members express. Here, logics of difference operate within the chains of equivalences that comprises the GJM. For example, the non-partisan, development approach that they ascribe to Oxfam works as a constitutive outside to members' identification with War on Want:

*This isn't to say Oxfam don't push political issues, because they do, but often in a different way. That's not a focus. You know. Oxfam is a developmental organisation. They have projects and they have people who work on the ground in these countries. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

In addition to aid and development-oriented NGOs such as Oxfam, Oxfam's constitutive role as a negative identification point is also related to its liaisons with

policy makers and the corporate world. Yet, this constitutive outside is constructed without constructing Oxfam as an adversary:

*...[War on Want is] just more outspoken. And it is perhaps not so tied to the government. For example, Oxfam and many others, they have very closed lobbying relations and get probably finances from the government and stuff. So I think they always act in a certain manner, not to like piss off the government too much...And that is their way of working. To have good lobbying relations, whereas perhaps War on Want is just more, like, trying to be outside those power relations, to be able to criticise. (Eva, interview, April 2009)*

#### **7.2.3.1 Constructing a chain of equivalences: the ‘political’ as an equivalential link**

Although not a major theme in War on Want members’ accounts of the SMO and its role in the GJM, comparisons to WDM emphasise similarities between the two SMOs. War on Want members place War on Want and WDM at the radical end of a GJM spectrum, highlighting the SMOs’ articulation of political as a nodal point that construes poverty as grounded in regulatory frameworks and thus requiring political solutions rather than aid:

*I’d say WDM are similar in their perspective, and War on Want and WDM kind of stand out in that regard. They are about as radical as a mainstream NGO on issues of development...and I think the WDM, again with its emphasis on the political side of poverty and development and conflict, is quite similar. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

The articulation of the political as a nodal point creates a discursive link between the demands and interests of War on Want and WDM and creates a discursive chain of

equivalences between them. This discursive chain of equivalences created around political aspects of poverty holds the potential to feed into a chain of equivalences at the level of alliances. Linking together the demands and interests of War on Want and WDM it could construct an alliance between the two SMOs.

Yet, at the level of alliances SOAS War on Want members turn to the SOAS student society identity as a common link that produces an equivalential chain.

*We always try to...like with our events, we try to coordinate with other societies in SOAS. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

Generally, SOAS War on Want members are not concerned about diluting the demands of War on Want by foregrounding equivalences with other groups and actors. Rather, they stress possibilities for gaining momentum for the cause:

*It is a good, effective way of campaigning. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

This primacy of the cause over the organisation that emerges from SOAS War on Want members' accounts does not foreclose the possibility of enduring political identities. Instead, the premise of political identities is related to a specific movement field in which SMO actors are constructed as equivalent through the promotion of poverty as political. The subject positions that SOAS War on Want members seem to embrace are subject positions of the engaged citizen as one committed to a fight for social change rather than the particular demands promoted by a specific SMO. In this light, the online appearances of War on Want's campaign are less significant in conditioning the political identity of members than a mélange of sites beyond specific SMOs.



### **7.2.3.2 Differences in the chain of equivalences: Branding the student society**

SOAS War on Want members do not see putting the differences in the background in favour of making the demands of WDM and War on Want equivalent as problematic. Yet they do express reservations about coalitions and alliances connected to single, offline events rather than long-term issue coalitions around such as the Trade Justice Movement. This is reflected in Eva's comment on displaying SMO affiliations in demonstrations in general:

*...definitely there is a strive for...of course either to promote your own force and, anywhere you go, if you have a demonstration or some kind of event you always put the logo of the organisation on a poster or you have a flag of the organisation on posters you always remind the people that this is a War on Want event and if you want to join War on Want. (Eva, interview, April 2009)*

The moderate and somewhat unemotional accounts of the importance of promoting War on Want in the context of the GJM that members express can be seen as linked to the transitory involvement of student societies; members are only involved for short periods of time and do not identify with the subject positions offered by War on Want: "I don't have a War on Want identity" (Eva, interview, April 2009).

This dissociation from the political identity of War on Want is related to the disconnection between the construction of discursive chains of equivalences and chains of equivalences as alliances between SMOs (Howarth and Griggs, 2006). SOAS War on Want members express identification with a discursive chain that links together struggles against poverty as a political problem. At the alliance level, this discursive chain translates into an equivalential chain of student union societies at SOAS. The discursive chain does not translate into an alliance beyond the student society union. The student society form is a major factor that conditions this dissociation between the political identity of War on Want and members'

identification with the chain that discursively links together a series of issues of poverty. The distinction between being a student society member of War on Want and being a War on Want employee is seen as significant in conditioning possibilities for a sense of commitment. This is captured in Pete's comment on the promotion of the SMO – War on Want's 'brand' – as connected to possibilities for identification:

*I'm not so interested in the branding. I just like using the War on Want stuff to put on interesting events, having interesting speakers and people come and find out about the organisation that way. We don't really have time to sort of brand it as much. It is good within the union for people to know that War on Want is active and is putting on events, so that's important, and the internet is important in that kind of branding. But I mean I don't work for War on Want, we are just affiliated with them. And we call ourselves SOAS War on Want, so I guess, sort of branding within the union. (Pete, interview, April 2009)*

Here, identification with War on Want is equated with being a War on Want employee. Facilitating student society group members' identification with the SMO is the responsibility of War on Want HQ. Clearly, the possibilities for identification provided in War on Want's online appearances are not embraced by the SOAS student society group. In this light, identification would require cooperation between the SMO HQ and voluntary groups. As described above, this is minimal in the organisational practices of War on Want. Another point that emerges in Pete's comment is the notion of branding. Talking about branding, Pete introduces a discourse from the commercial realm into the social movement realm (Vestergaard, 2008). However, he does not reveal an understanding of War on Want or the SOAS group as operating along commercial logics.

#### 7.2.4 The War on Want group's online presences: Organising offline events

The role of different media in the SOAS War on Want group's work is mainly perceived by the 2007-09 coordinator, Pete Chonka, as centred on the promotion of offline events. The student society group uses three different media for the organisation and promotion of its events: posters, email and a Facebook Group (Pete, interview, April 2009). In this way, the only popular online site employed by the SOAS War on Want is Facebook.

SOAS War on Want's Facebook Group has existed since November 2007 and has 34 members. Whereas the main War on Want Facebook Group is categorised as a 'non-profit organization', the SOAS group is categorised as a 'political organization'. Pete Chonka is listed as the Group's 'admin', and Outreach Officer from War on Want's HQ, Nadia Idle, is listed as an 'officer'. The 'admin' controls the membership and content of a group, and is automatically listed as an 'admin' when creating the group. Officers are added by the 'admin' but have no additional possibilities for controlling content than regular members.<sup>47</sup> The description identifies the SOAS group as:

*...affiliated with the UK based NGO War on Want which 'fights poverty in developing countries in partnership and solidarity with people affected by globalisation. [they] campaign for workers' rights and against the root causes of global poverty, inequality and injustice'. (SOAS War on Want Facebook Group 'Description'48)*

In this way, the description quotes War on Want's 'about us' section on the SMO's website.<sup>49</sup> Along with the signifier 'affiliated' and the insertion of '[they]', quoting War on Want in this way works to reify SOAS War on Want as an organisational construct

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<sup>47</sup> [www.facebook.com/help/?ref=pf#!/help.php?page=826](http://www.facebook.com/help/?ref=pf#!/help.php?page=826)

<sup>48</sup> [www.facebook.com/#!/help.php?page=826](http://www.facebook.com/#!/help.php?page=826)

<sup>49</sup> [waronwant.org/about-us](http://waronwant.org/about-us)

that is both granted little autonomy, and not allowed to represent War on Want beyond the organisation and promotion of offline events featuring approved speakers.

On 20 January 2010, the SOAS War on Want Facebook Group had a total of 12 wall posts, dating from November 2007 to December 2009. These include eight posts by Nadia Idle, one by Pete Chonka and three by another group member. The posts are all promotions of offline events. None of these are directly related to the trade campaign, but include Gaza issues, workers' conditions in Kenya, and a G20 counter-conference. No posts have been made to the Facebook Group's discussion board. Also, no videos have been uploaded to the group profile, but three photos are featured. These all serve to represent oil companies' activities in conflict zones as profit-driven exploitation of political instability. Two offline events are listed in the events section. These are also both related to oil companies operating in conflict zones. This rather modest use of Facebook as a hive of activity testifies to the reservations and reluctance conveyed by SOAS War on Want members.

#### **7.2.5 Summing up**

The location of War on Want's groups in student societies has implications for members' demographics and the duration of their involvement as group members. Crucially, the ephemeral involvement that the student society affiliation entails means that the member constellations of the group change on an annual basis. In this vein, War on Want group members do not express a sense of collective identity in relation to War on Want as an SMO. Moreover, inter-group alliances are created within the remit of the university. Possibilities for creating alliances with WDM London groups beyond the scope of the student society are thus put in the background in member accounts. This gestures towards difficulties for WDM group members to build personal bonds with War on Want group members. This may help explain why the primacy granted mutual references by WDM and War on Want HQ staff are not reflected in their members' accounts; WDM London group members compare WDM to Friends of

the Earth and Greenpeace rather than War on Want. While the SOAS War on Want coordinator does express an understanding of War on Want as 'quite similar' to WDM in terms of their political approach to poverty, this discursive equivalential chain does not translate into a pragmatic chain of equivalences at the alliance level. While HQ staff in WDM and War on Want understand their SMOs in relation to each other through a narcissism of small differences on a strategic level, there is not a similarly strong inter-organisational identification or interaction and construction of pragmatic chains of equivalences among members. On the basis of Laclau and Mouffe's notion of chains of equivalences, Dahlgren (2007: 7) argues that "We-they boundaries are continuously being redrawn as new issues and conflicts arise". However, the cases of WDM and War on Want suggest that these processes of demarcation are not just about the surfacing of new issues and conflicts. The (re)drawing of we-they boundaries – or ingroup/outgroup distinctions – are also about the fluidity and contingency of alliances. Alliances are contextual constructs and as such encompass different constellations of social and institutional actors depending on the cause, campaign, event or protest being promoted. This is intrinsically related to the next point that emerges from the analysis in this chapter: the fluidity and contingency of the identification of antagonists and agonists.

### 7.3 Chapter conclusions

Group members' identifications of antagonists do not seem to build on the personifications provided in the SMOs' online representations of the trade campaigns. In the case of both WDM and War on Want group members, portrayals of their perceptions of antagonists are subdued. The realm of institutional politics and the corporate world are identified as antagonists. And these antagonists are regarded as agonists, respected as adversaries with differing agendas. In some cases, these agonists are even invited to collaborate: MEP Hustings events that saw WDM groups inviting local MEPs to join forces against the Global Europe trade strategy, regardless

of the party political affiliations. Finally, to the extent that mainstream NGOs in some contexts are assigned roles as antagonists, working as a constitutive outside, they are still regarded as agonists, and are as such seen as legitimate collaborators within the GJM, albeit lodged at the other, mainstream end of the GJM spectrum. For groups that subscribe to militant approaches to direct action the role of antagonism plays a key part in terms of modes of direct action as well as political positioning (Juris, 2008; Mueller, 2006). This suggests that WDM group members' self-understandings as placed at the radical end of the GJM are related to WDM's opposition to a politically moderate and centre-focused orientation and not modes of direct action. The theoretical implications of these processes of collective identity formation in relation to antagonists are that we need to consider the concepts of antagonism and agonism as contingent roles on a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive. As the example of the fluid roles of MEPs articulated by WDM group members, the boundaries between their roles as antagonists and agonists are contingent and fluid. While overall identified as antagonists whose influence should be eliminated, the set-up of the MEP Hustings events temporarily repositions MEPs as agonists whose opinions are respected in public spheres. In this way, outgroup members can occupy dual roles as agonists and antagonists with shifts in emphasis on one of the two varying across contexts. Also the boundaries between mainstream NGOs' roles as agonists and allies are unfixed and flexible. When entering into alliances around specific campaigns or events such as the G20 counter-summit, group members regard mainstream NGOs as agonists and collaborators at the same time. This means we need to pay attention to hegemonies within counter-hegemonic constellations and open up both agonist/antagonist and ally/agonist distinctions to logics of difference and equivalence. In this light, the construction of chains of equivalences is open to contextual differences. Chains of equivalences require the identification of a common enemy as a constitutive outside to reduce or overcome differences within the chain (Mouffe, 2000). The role of the constitutive outside is complicated as the duality of enemy and adversary empirically emerges as fluid constructs on a continuum of agonism and antagonism.

In the interviews, members from both SMOs stress what they see as a particularly intellectual approach that sutures WDM and War on Want's campaigns, while they dismiss the use of humour and personalisation as 'fluffy'. Nonetheless, WDM groups' online self-representations, textual and visual, of their protests against current models of globalisation employs an extensive use of humour, suggesting a sense of collective identification around this approach which may serve to tie them to WDM and its cause, while they manage other SMO identities at the periphery.

Moreover, WDM group members use online spaces as visual archives of their offline activities and personal ties. Photos from offline events can help sustain commitment to the group by providing group members with possibilities for viewing documentation from their own participation. The aesthetic properties of visual self-representations enable emotional engagement in relation to a cause (Chouliaraki, 2006b). Emotional engagement plays an important role in sustaining commitment to political causes as well as specific SMOs (Mouffe, 2005). Further, cultural archives such as these visual collections of offline activities can work as places of memory that foster commitment to the act of participation (Carpentier, 2010). Thus, for WDM group members their own self-representations aimed at potential supporters facilitate the preservation of WDM subjectivities.

The issue that emerges as important to SMO members' identifications in relation to the movement grants a pivotal role to the visibility that can be achieved through creating intra-movement chains of equivalence, while the challenges this poses to promoting a coherent SMO brand are backgrounded. Rather than concerns about promoting a coherent image of the SMO, group members manage multiple belongings to different activist constellations. This relates to notions of multiple fluid identities and the transient practices facilitated by online media: the speed at which social movement actors can click between causes and campaigns is argued to encourage a focus on specific issues for short-term campaigns, often without committing themselves to specific SMOs (Bennett, 2003; Cammaerts, 2007, Castells, 2001). At the

same time, the contingency and fluidity of over-determined political identities adds to this profusion of possibilities for embracing different points of identification (Carpentier, 2005; Fenton, 2008b; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Melucci, 1996). WDM members provide accounts of managing a multiplicity of political identities across involvement and memberships in several GJM SMOs. Yet, from these accounts seems to emerge a hierarchy of identities which privileges WDM. Conveying strong identification with WDM's intellectual approach, repertoires for action and participatory group structure, WDM group members portray the other SMOs with which they are involved as constitutive outsides. For example, while several of the respondents are also members of Greenpeace, they still compare the autonomy granted WDM groups and the production of background reports to Greenpeace's direct action strategies on the sea. This tendency of a hierarchy of manifold, flexible identities seems similar in accounts from War on Want members. A significant difference pertains to group members' ephemeral involvement in War on Want and the ensuing lack of allegiance. Yet, the tendency can be traced to commitment to other SMOs such as ATTAC.

Addressing the possibilities of multiplicity and polycentrality, particularity and universality of online media, Fenton (2008b: 240) raises the question "although we each may have different political identities, can we have a politics in common?" In the cases of WDM and War on Want, at the level of SMOs, an answer gestures towards the affirmative. While an eclectic range of subject positions are provided by different SMOs, groups and networks in the online arena, deeply held loyalties to and identification with a specific SMO and its politics seems to be forged through offline activities. This is hardly anything new. The role of face-to-face interactions in securing commitment has been noted in central studies on social movements (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Diani and McAdam, 2003; Tarrow, 1994). Activism is certainly often embedded in a local offline setting. The micro-level nitty-gritty of holding meetings to organise events, coordinating and participating in direct actions and social activities plays a crucial role in building personal ties among activists (Cammaerts, 2007). This



local anchorage also instils a sense of agency by providing achievable, however minor, possibilities to make a difference. This sense of agency is both reflected in group members' accounts of their identifications with the trade campaigns' motivational framing at the SMO level and in their own self-representations at the group level.

The importance of offline planning and protesting is intrinsically connected to the ability of these processes of sociality to generate deeply felt emotions (Juris, 2008). For WDM group members this translates into a tendency to grant primacy to the visual representation of personal ties between groups as well as SMOs rather than to WDM. The role of face-to-face interactions of planning and the heated experiences of protests in developing affective and personal ties may have contributed to the fragility of a sense of collective identity among War on Want group members. The transience of student society groups seems to impede the forging of personal ties within the War on Want group and between the group members and other actively involved SMO group members.

This, of course, also reminds us that a study of passive members rather than group members might have unveiled a less prominent role of offline activities. What is important here is the significance that SMO group members attach to popular online spaces in reaching wider publics and the ensuing challenge of bringing these peripheral supporters to the core through the forging of affective commitment in offline settings.

These commitments to specific SMOs are important, because SMOs can help provide stability during periods of decreasing visibility between large-scale protest events (Juris, 2008). Here, the quotidian planning and micro-organisation of smaller events within the auspices of specific SMOs can help sustain the GJM beyond the periodic outbursts of counter-summits and facilitate a common political horizon through inter-SMO relations (Mueller, 2008).

## 8 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is three-fold. First, it aims to reflect on the strengths and limitations of the research design of this thesis. Second, it presents the key findings of the thesis. Finally, it discusses these findings and their wider implications so as to open up some avenues that the study raises for future research.

The aim of this thesis has been to understand how SMOs' practices of self-representations in popular online spaces shape the formation of political identities and engagement.

To this end, this thesis has explored the interplay between the rationales behind SMOs' self-representations in online spaces, how these rationales as they are manifested in online campaigns and members' identifications with these campaigns in a multisited and multimodal domain.

Previous studies on the intersection between online media and social movements have often centred on websites, alternative media, and micro media, overlooking the dynamics at the interface of strategic self-representations and political identity formation. Responding to this gap, this thesis has drawn on political discourse theory and social movement framing theory to explore the rationales behind and identifications with online campaign appearances from a normative perspective of possibilities for radical democratic citizenship in popular online spaces. This led to the central research question: *How do popular online spaces as a strategic scene of activism shape articulations of contestation and the formation of political identities in the context of Global Justice Movement organisations?* Here, political discourse theory informed the analysis as the overarching theoretical and analytical framework, supported by elements from social movement framing and the analytics of multimodality developed within critical discourse analysis. As discussed in Chapter 3, the social ontology of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory breaks with the realism/idealism dichotomy, and approaches the discursive as conditioning our understandings of the world and possibilities for action in that world. From this

perspective, self-representations are constitutive of political identities and contestation. Therefore, this thesis has argued, the possibilities provided by online spaces for promoting self-representations hold the potential to significantly transform non-institutional politics because of their unprecedented low cost and ability to bypass mass media gatekeepers. At the level of SMOs in the GJM, this means the potential to forge and sustain political engagement among members. In this light, this thesis has approached political identities as strategic constructs. This expressive conception of political identity entails the possibility of influencing identity formation through discursive articulations, for example, in SMO campaigns (Griggs and Howarth, 2002). To capture the strategic aspects of contestation and political identity formation, social movement framing theory has provided supplementary concepts to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework, notably in relation to the analysis of issues of problem identification and strategic alliances. However, this conceptual framework did not approach political identities from a purely instrumental viewpoint. Rather, points of political identification were approached as moulded in interaction – they may be offered, but that does not necessarily entail their acceptance. In other words, subject positions may be accepted, negotiated or even rejected. This thesis has argued that this is why we need to explore the interplay between SMOs' strategic articulation of subject positions and SMO members' identifications with these. Therefore, the thesis has adopted a three-dimensional perspective on practices of contestation in online spaces in terms of the interplay between (1) rationales for using online media; (2) how the campaigns are promoted across online spaces; and (3) identifications with these appearances as they are expressed by SMO members.

This three-dimensional perspective has also guided my three sub-research questions. Sub-research question one addressed SMO directors and campaign and web officers' *rationales* behind using online media, asking *What are the rationales that inform the SMO's campaigns, and how are these understood specifically in an online context?* Sub-research question two then dealt with the manifestations of the articulation of contestation and political identities in online campaigns, asking *How are SMOs*

*articulated as agents of resistance and members of the Global Justice Movement in their campaigns in popular online spaces, and what possibilities for political identity formation does this entail?* Sub-research question three addressed acceptances, negotiations and rejections of the points of identification offered in online campaigns, asking *How do SMO members articulate the role of popular online spaces in fostering political identification and commitment at an organisational level in the Global Justice Movement, and how does this feed into their own uses of popular online spaces?*

The three sub-research questions were addressed in three empirical chapters in order to explore the role of popular online spaces in shaping political engagement in SMOs at the intersection of contestation and political identity formation (Chapter 5: rationales for using popular online spaces for political contestation; Chapter 6: online campaign appearances; Chapter 7: members' identifications with online campaigns). This chapter presents the main empirical findings of the thesis and discusses their theoretical contributions and some wider issues that have been raised for future research.

This concluding chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents reflections on the research design, including reflections on the theoretical and conceptual framework and choice of methods. The second section summarises and discusses key empirical findings. The third section discusses the contribution of the empirical findings to political discourse theory and social movement framing theory, including an analytical strategy. The fourth section reflects on some wider implications of the role of popular online spaces in shaping extra-parliamentarian political campaigning and identity formation, and suggests paths for future research in light of these reflections.

## 8.1 Reflections on the research design

This section critically discusses the choices I made in the research design of this thesis and reflects on the scope of the study.

### **8.1.1 Implications of grounding the research design in Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology**

The theoretical framework and methods were cast within the ontological and epistemological presuppositions that are embedded in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory as a social ontology. This meant approaching the case SMOs as examples of hubs that potentially facilitate the enactment of radical democratic citizenship. Here, radical democratic citizenship is grounded in relations of antagonism/agonism and allows for manifold allegiances and identifications to coexist. This means that political identity is something to be constructed, not an empirical referent (Mouffe, 1992). Moreover, it meant approaching interviews as sites of articulation rather than as a method for obtaining a universal picture of rationales for and identifications with articulations of political contestation. Finally, it meant adapting supplementary analytical tools to an ontology of discursive construction and casting the entire analytical strategy within a framework of contingency and over-determination. For example, analytical categories from social movement framing were approached as contingent constructs rather than semiotic referents of predetermined structures and identities. The focus on two similar UK-based SMOs is further anchored in McCarthy and Zald's (1977) notion of 'social movement sectors' which approaches SMOs as interacting with each other within configurations of activity. I return to the specificities of the implications for these three aspects in my reflections below.

### **8.1.2 Cases and multi-sited ethnography**

I chose to focus on a case study of two specific SMOs that belong to the GJM and their group members: WDM and War on Want. The GJM is made up of a messy range of overlapping and multi-level networks, groups and SMOs (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). Therefore, as discussed in Chapter 4, specific empirical focal points were needed to separate out what is otherwise a disparate field. SMOs provide a pertinent focus for analysis, because they work as hubs for sustaining political identities and iterative counter-hegemonic practices during periods of decreasing visibility and

between large-scale protest events (Griggs and Howarth, 2004; Juris, 2008). Moreover, focusing on two cases from the same social movement sector facilitated a comparative study of intra-movement as well as intra-section dynamics of identification. More cases would have provided a broader picture of these dynamics. In a similar vein, an analysis of activist networks would have provided important insights into intra-movement dynamics in different forms of organisation such as anarchist organisation (see Juris, 2005, for a discussion on anarchy as a mode of organisation). However, two cases from a single social movement sector were selected, favouring an in-depth focus on two organisations across online spaces at the expense of breadth across organisations, or across multiple networks. Given the time and resources available, this was the most appropriate strategy.

As discussed in Chapter 4, in tracing the SMOs' online presences, I drew on Resnick's distinction between 'micro', 'middle' and 'mass' media (Resnick, 1997) as spaces of self-representation and political identification. However, this focus was not chosen on the basis of an *a priori* assumption about SMOs' online media uses. It emerged on the basis of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). This meant that the online spaces were selected on the basis of the campaigns' appearances.

### **8.1.3 Interviews and participant observation**

The study of WDM and War on Want was qualitative, drawing on interviews, participant observation and online campaign material. As argued in Chapter 4, the interviews were conducted with HQ staff as well as SMO members so as to move beyond the bias often caused by focusing only on carefully managed SMO representations, which bracket the diversity of negotiations at the membership level, (Blee and Taylor, 2002; Johnston and Noakes, 2005). The decision to focus on group members rather than including non-active members or people who participate in single campaigns was grounded in the interest in political identity formation and engagement beyond single acts of participation. Probing issues of political

identification and commitment requires talking to activists whose involvement extended beyond one-off participation and beyond the payment of membership fees. Here, more interviews, especially with War on Want group members would have provided both a more nuanced picture of the group members' political identities and a more solid basis for generalisation. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the difficulties I encountered in trying to obtain more interviews reflect the short-term scope of War on Want's student society group. Therefore, the scant access to War on Want group members can be seen as indicative of aspects of the group's ephemeral involvement with War on Want. Participant observation was conducted in seminars and workshops organised by WDM and War on Want. Despite their usefulness for probing SMO actors' motivations and identifications, qualitative interviews are associated with challenges of trustworthiness, reliability, validity and individualistic, idealistic and interpretist biases, because they rely on subjective interpretations (Kvale, 1996). Indeed, moving from a focus on textual properties of online campaigns to a concern with HQ staff's rationales and members' identifications with online campaigns runs the risk of ending up with a very broad analysis and ambiguous claims that encompass too many aspects. As the concepts of political identity and articulation comprised the main interest of this thesis, they helped focus the analyses of the interviews. Nonetheless, it may still be difficult distinguishing interviewees' attempts at conveying a particular image to the interviewer and processes of identification. However, the epistemological frame of this thesis has entailed a concern with articulations of contestation and political identity formation rather than assuming the possibility to reveal truths or a universal picture of these articulations. This relates to the anchorage in Laclau and Mouffe's ontology of the social on which the conceptual framework in this thesis builds. Therefore, in this research, interviews were considered as sites of articulation, and as such helped capture respondents' experiences of SMO activity in an online setting as forms of political identity and engagement.

As explained in Chapter 4, participant observation worked to support and increase the interpretive validity of the case study (Lichterman, 2002; Snow and Trom, 2002). It

thus served a background purpose. With hindsight, drawing more explicitly on data obtained from participant observation – examples of respondents’ rationales, frustrations, political identifications and personal bonds – would have added ethnographic thickness by unveiling intra-organisational ambiguities and struggles in a more nuanced manner (Ortner, 1995; see also Barassi, 2009; McCurdy, 2009, for examples of participant observation and ethnographic thickness and the GJM). As Gould et al. note, participant observation can help access "perspectives in action" and "perspectives of action" (1974: xxiv-xxvi). Perspectives *in* action refer to talk that occurs during ingroup interaction in an on-going social context. Perspectives *of* action are articulated to make a context or situation meaningful to an outgroup member, such as a researcher conducting interviews (Snow and Anderson, 1993). Participant observation can thus enable perspectives in action to inform perspectives of action. In this thesis participant observation provided very useful background knowledge for analysing interviews and online campaigns. For example, attending workshops on local campaigning at WDM’s annual Campaigners’ Convention provided insights into members’ scepticism towards the internet – many members felt that handing out flyers would both reach more people and be much more effective than using the internet. In addition, the convention and the workshops provided insight into some of the ways in which WDM tries to involve their members in the organisation of their campaigning.

Both participant observation and interviews also provided offline perspectives on the interplay between management rationales, online campaigns and political identity formation. The online realm is far from the only place where political identities are encouraged, formed, and moulded (Barassi, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009; Orgad, 2005). In this way, interviews and participant observation also generated important insights that helped sensitise the analyses by contextualising the role of online spaces in relation to offline practices.



#### **8.1.4 Analytical framework**

Translating Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory into an analytical framework was no doubt a challenge. While the concepts in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory can work as analytical constructs, they are abstract and can be difficult to operationalise. Moreover, analysing different forms of data (interviews and online campaign material) posed additional challenges. Getting this to work required two measures of adaptation. First, it required operationalising discourse theoretical concepts into analytical categories. Here, categories from social movement framing theory worked as a supplementary toolbox. Second, it required incorporating into the analytical framework categories that could help capture the multimodality of the SMOs' online campaign material. Here, I drew on elements from Chouliaraki's analytics of mediation (2006a) and technologisation of action as part of campaign communication (2010). This resulted in an analytical framework that comprised two analytical strategies, one for interviews and one for online appearances. This approach a further set of challenges: one related to epistemological commensurability and one related to the role of framing in the analytical framework.

Given the epistemological and ontological assumptions of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory that underpinned the research design of this thesis, the incorporation into the analytical framework of social movement framing theory entailed certain caveats. Drawing on Griggs and Howarth's (2002) discussion of incorporating structurally grounded approaches to textual analysis into a discourse theoretical framework, I approached framing as a constitutive aspect of the social. This helped with an analysis of political identities as strategic constructs – as strategically malleable, but negotiated, contingent forms of political identification (Griggs and Howarth, 2002). In other words, framing was positioned within an overarching discourse theoretical lens so as to retain the strategic aspect of framing while repositioning the concept in an ontology of contingency and over-determination.

The discourse theoretical concepts proved useful as analytical categories for capturing strategic aspects. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory does not explicitly address

strategy in the articulation of political dissent (Glynos and Howarth, 2008). Nonetheless, the left-wing sympathies that underpin Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (as discussed in Chapter 3) grants latent strategic import to social agents who strive to build and promote left-wing alternatives to current models of organisation. This is, for example, reflected in the concept of chains of equivalences as alliance building and the notions of the universal versus the particular in terms of popular support (Griggs and Howarth, 2008). Teasing out this implicit potential for analysing strategic aspects of contestation proved unproblematic in the analyses. Both the concepts of articulation and chains of equivalences provided illuminating tools in most aspects of the analyses. The framing perspective helped add nuance to the analytical capacity of chains of equivalences by facilitating the distinction between short-term alliances with a strategic aim and long-term alliances that entail identification and a common enemy. For example, inviting local MEPs to advocate for a campaign against EU's trade strategy is a short-term strategic alliance that does not involve the construction of the EU as a common enemy or adversary as a chain of equivalences would imply. I will return to the specific conceptual implications in the section on the theoretical and analytical contributions of the empirical findings below.

Before I move on to discuss the main empirical findings, a comment on the claims to knowledge that this study can make is due. The SMOs that comprised the empirical focus of this thesis, WDM and War on Want, are UK based organisations. SMOs are shaped by the social, political, economic and historical context within which they navigate (Tarrow, 1998: 3). Therefore, generalisability beyond a UK context is problematic. On a similar note, the choice to focus on SMOs rather than explore a network or movement level has meant that generalisability into such contexts is equally problematic. The aim of this study was not to offer generalising explanations of the role of online media in the GJM. Rather, the aim was to offer a situated account of processes and practices of political contestation and identity formation in a specific social movement context in relation to online media so as to fill theoretical and analytical gaps in relation to discourse theory and social movement framing.

Now that I have discussed the scope of the study and its limits, I will turn to discuss the key empirical findings that emerged in the three empirical chapters.

## 8.2 Key empirical findings

This section discusses the main empirical findings in three sections, one section dedicated to each of the empirical chapters. First, the HQ staff's rationales for using popular online spaces for SMO self-representations is discussed (Chapter 5). This is followed by the online campaigns (Chapter 6), and then members' identifications and their own self-representations at a group level (Chapter 7). I will discuss interrelated aspects, contradictions and concurrences between the findings from the three empirical chapters.

### 8.2.1 Rationales for using popular online spaces for SMO self-representations

The findings presented in Chapter 5 demonstrate that War on Want and WDM HQ staff's rationales for using popular online spaces are grounded in reflections on their SMOs' agendas and the GJM's agenda. War on Want and WDM HQ staff reflect on their SMOs in very similar terms, but stress a number of minor differences as significant points of positioning and identification. These articulations of compare and contrast emerge at the level of the SMO agenda and at the level of the GJM agenda. The possibility to promote their own representations of the SMO agenda and to promote intra-movement alliances is seen as important reasons to use popular online spaces. Moreover, HQ staff see online spaces as inadequate for forging political engagement and long-term commitment to the SMOs. Nonetheless, they think it is important to have multiple online presences because they hope this can help them reach broader publics.

#### **8.2.1.1 An opportunity to promote a distinct SMO profile**

HQ interviewees emphasise the use of online spaces as an opportunity to promote their SMOs as distinct from other GJM actors. They see this opportunity as significant to the promotion of an overtly political agenda. In other words, online spaces are seen as providing opportunities to 'kick up the backside' of powerful corporate and systemic enemies (Hilary, seminar, June 2009). A central aim conveyed by HQ interviewees from both SMOs is challenging the hegemony of a neo-liberal globalisation discourse. In doing so, they talk about their SMOs' agendas within a discourse of justice. Within this discourse they stress the importance of political solutions to poverty and inequality rather than aid-centred relief or voluntary codes of conduct. This means identifying policy makers as perpetrators of inequality. In addition to policy makers, HQ staff in both SMOs also identify the corporate world as an adversary. It is the promotion of these relations of agonism that require spaces that allow the SMOs to bypass mass media gatekeepers and promote self-representations – their agonistic position puts them 'on the outside' (Tucker, interview, May 2009).

Significantly, promoting their SMOs as distinct actors within the GJM is also seen as intrinsically related to reflecting the offline organisation of members and member groups. As Southworth put it in Chapter 5: 'the tone online needs to reflect the organisation' (Southworth, interview, July 2009). Here, a noteworthy difference between WDM and War on Want emerges. WDM HQ interviewees stress structured but autonomous member roles as important, while War on Want HQ respondents stress the importance of fluid member roles within a coherent, carefully managed frame. HQ interviewees thus project onto online spaces the organisation and involvement of local groups that was outlined in Chapter 2.

#### **8.2.1.2 An ambivalent opportunity to promote the cause**

The opportunity for SMO self-representations that online spaces are seen as providing is also seen as an opportunity to promote the cause at a coalition level. However, HQ

interviewees talk about this as a challenge to the promotion of the radical position that defines WDM and War on Want in relation to broader GJM coalitions. As WDM Network Development Officer Katharine Talbot explained in Chapter 5:

*...what is probably also going to be a problem with any coalition is that inevitably messages get watered down [...] it is a bit of a trade-off...also from a branding point of view [...] we obviously don't want our brand to get hidden underneath all these other coalition brands.*  
(Talbot, interview, April 2009)

HQ staff talk about entering into coalitions as a trade-off between the promotion of the particular agendas of their own SMOs and gaining leverage for the cause through the promotion of coalition agendas. They perceive this trade-off as augmented in online spaces. The discourse of justice that characterised the articulations of their agendas at the SMO level is seen as diluted in the promotion of alliances. Here, 'justice' is sufficiently emptied of meaning to cover a diverse movement that comprises issues ranging from anti-capitalism to climate change (Griggs and Howarth, 2002). In this sense, WDM's and War on Want's particular agendas get "watered down" and lose their overtly political edge (Talbot, interview, April 2009). HQ interviewees explain that this poses increased challenges for them to carve out a distinctive position for their SMOs.

Positioning their SMOs in relation to the GJM, HQ interviewees articulate a doubly differentiated position. They locate WDM and War on Want at the radical end of the GJM. Here, they take great care to explain how WDM and War on Want are distinct from each other. In Chapter 5 I argued that this doubly constructed position produces a narcissism of minor differences between WDM and War on Want. This narcissism of minor differences plays an important role in HQ interviewees' rationales for using popular online spaces for forging and sustaining commitment among existing members and reaching new members. It means that the two SMOs construct each other and thus also try to produce competing points of identification for activists in a small social

movement field. These are important dynamics that contribute to the production of agonistic relations vis-à-vis more 'mainstream' GJM actors and, as such, should not be taken as a negative term.

A final finding that has to be mentioned is the contradictory relationship between using profit-driven online spaces and War on Want's and WDM's agendas. As discussed earlier, HQ interviewees from both SMOs point to corporate power as a decisive factor in contributing to social inequality. The popular online spaces that they use are profit-driven and conditioned by corporate power. This can be seen as antithetical to constructing the corporate world as an adversary. At the outset of this research, I expected this to play a crucial role in HQ staff's rationales for using specific online spaces. However, WDM and War on Want's critical approach to corporate power does not translate into acute concerns about profit-driven online spaces. Nonetheless, HQ interviewees do convey a sense of reflexivity and do not take for granted the corporate structures of many of the popular online spaces they use. They express wishes for an alternative, but do not regard radical or alternative online spaces a realistic alternative option. My expectation of finding acute concerns about using corporate online spaces was met with a hardnosed view that using profit-driven online spaces was necessary.

#### **8.2.1.3 Offline activism = 'real' activism**

Despite optimism about opportunities for promoting a distinct profile for their SMOs, online spaces are not seen as adequate for fostering commitment to the SMOs. This is connected to a view of online activism as artificial. In contrast, offline activism is conveyed as 'real'. This was illustrated by John Hilary's remark in Chapter 5:

*...we do want to go beyond it and we try to continue our very much real world engagement with supporter groups...We do want to make it real and to be involved in the struggles as well. (Hilary, interview, July 2009)*

Interviewees see online spaces as useful for short-term, single-issue involvement, but 'mak[ing] it real' entails offline activity. This is deeply rooted in a view that political identities are forged in offline settings – in demonstrations, in seminars, in the everyday organisation and planning of campaigning, etc. HQ interviewees understand online spaces as privileging visibility over engagement. In this vein, promoting the particular SMO agenda in popular online spaces is seen as essential to gain visibility among broader publics. In both SMOs these broader publics are younger people. This view is captured by Talbot's reflections in Chapter 5:

*...which I guess is clearly aimed at a younger audience...So it should be beneficial to us I think in the issue of kind of to expand the audience we are able to reach. (Talbot, interview, April 2009)*

The rationales for using popular online spaces are thus not grounded in a belief that they can help sustain commitment among existing members. Rather, they are grounded in expectations of reaching new, younger publics.

### **8.2.2 Online SMO campaigns**

Overall, the findings presented in Chapter 6 reflect the rationales conveyed by HQ interviewees in Chapter 5. Three aspects of the SMO's trade campaigns in popular online spaces were particularly significant: (1) they represent the SMOs in an agonistic relation to the 'mainstream' part of the GJM and to political and corporate actors; (2) they represent members and alliances visually but not textually; and (3) they are constructed so as to appeal to broader publics. While the campaigns are similar in all three aspects, significant differences emerge, especially in relation to the last two.

WDM and War on Want both use the same popular online spaces in addition to their SMO websites: Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter.

### **8.2.2.1 Representing the SMOs' agendas: constructing agonistic relations**

Chapter 6 showed that, across online media platforms, both SMO trade campaigns are characterised by a discourse of justice. In this way, the campaigns mirror HQ staff's situations of the articulations of their SMOs' agendas within a discourse of justice. However, whereas HQ staff ascribe a political orientation to justice by linking it to calls for political measures, the campaigns remain somewhat vague in their articulations of what justice means. In WDM's trade campaigns 'justice' is linked to signifiers such as 'people before profits', and a system that is 'transparent, democratic and truly representative' (WDM, 2009). War on Want's use of justice is primarily qualified through what it is not. In this way, 'justice' entails a system that is 'not devastating to' or functions 'at the expense of' poor people.

WDM and War on Want's trade campaigns both identify two groups of adversaries: transnational governmental institutions and constellations such as the G8, WTO, EU and big corporations. In identifying transnational governmental institutions as adversaries the campaigns question their democratic legitimacy in negotiating trade agreements. In identifying corporations as adversaries the campaigns portray them as lobbying the WTO and the EU to push through agreements that favour corporate interests. Both link the two groups to undemocratic decision-making practices. This agonistic relation ascribes meaning to justice. In both trade campaigns, different degrees of antagonism are represented; overall, the articulation of the corporate world as adversaries tends towards enemy identification. In a much less antagonistic manner, transnational institutions are identified as adversaries, as legitimate opponents to be influenced for the better. In some campaign appearances, MEPs are even articulated as potential allies for strategic purposes. In several campaign appearances, both articulations link the two groups of adversaries to undemocratic decision-making practices through specific examples and visual techniques. The identification of adversaries in the campaigns links the discourse of justice that characterises the problem identification to signifiers such as 'robbers' and 'dictators'. The explicit articulation and comparison to people responsible for human misery and



death contribute to the ascription of meaning to justice. Justice becomes an issue of democratic practices that are construed as a 'crime' when they are not transparent and representative. Identifying perceived problems is grounded in a local UK focus in both campaigns. Similarly, the identification of the perpetrators of these problems takes on a local focus that mainly works on a national and regional level. For example, they focus on the UK policy makers in EU trade negotiations. Significantly, though, this runs parallel to a transnational orientation, especially towards the South.

In this way, the campaigns reflect HQ staff's accounts of their SMOs. The campaigns construct a dual position of being both radical and reformist for both WDM and War on Want. On the one hand, the articulation of the diagnostic framing as political rather than just technical issues to be solved by experts positions the two SMOs at the radical end of the GJM. On the other hand, the articulation of transnational institutions and the corporate world as adversaries rather than enemies positions them as reformist actors. The reformist position is further established through the modes of action that the campaigns call for in their online appearances: online petitions and offline peaceful demonstrations. These modes of action are different from the confrontational direct action promoted by radical groups of activists such as the black bloc. In this way, both the identification of villains and the modes of action are grounded in agonism rather than antagonism. Therefore, the online appearances of the two trade campaigns can be seen as indications of a willingness to collaborate with opponents if it entails working towards a democratic, social organisation that is underpinned by the diagnostic framing of the SMOs' agendas. In other words, the campaigns articulate WDM and War on Want as working within the structures of transnational governance rather than trying to refute the system altogether.

#### **8.2.2.2 Representing members and offline ties**

Chapter 6 also found that possibilities for instant participation such as online petitions are not featured prominently in WDM's or War on Want's online trade campaigns. This

reflects HQ staff's concerns with 'mak[ing] it real' that emerged in Chapter 5. Instead, the online trade campaigns visually represent members engaged in offline activities. This serves to connect the use of online spaces to 'real' activism. WDM's campaign in particular includes several photos that visually represent alliances between the reformist SMOs at the radical end of the GJM by showing WDM, War on Want and Friends of the Earth UK members together at demonstrations. War on Want's campaign features similar photos, albeit less prominently than the WDM trade campaign. Thus, the WDM trade campaign mirrors both WDM HQ staff's focus on structured but autonomous member roles as important, which emerged in Chapter 5. And War on Want's trade campaign mirrors War on Want HQ staff's focus on the importance of fluid member roles within a coherent, carefully managed frame. However, members are not the focus of any the online trade campaigns – both campaigns background members in written modes of representation. They are only shown in photos and videos from offline demonstrations. This gestures towards an overall emphasis on reaching broader publics rather than sustaining commitment among existing members. It thus adds ambiguity to the visual and multimodal representations of members in WDM's trade campaign in particular – and WDM HQ staff's (sceptic) hopes for fostering membership commitment in online spaces.

Also alliances are represented visually but not textually. Both campaigns include visual representations of a small, reformist equivalential chain at the radical end of the GJM. This chain includes Friends of the Earth UK, War on Want and WDM. This entails the identification of a common adversary that works as a constitutive outside to their alliance. Yet they differ in terms of emphasis. The representation of the alliance is granted a dominant role in WDM's campaign. While the alliance is also evident in War on Want's campaign, it plays a much more subtle role. In this way, the promotion of the single SMO is more prominent in War on Want's trade campaign, while WDM's trade campaign foregrounds a specific reformist alliance at the radical end of the GJM spectrum. The promotion of these alliances relies on representations of cross-SMO offline interaction between members. This again reflects the central role that WDM

grants its members and local groups. In a somewhat different manner, the overall focus in War on Want's trade campaign on promoting the SMO as a separate entity suggests a concern with fostering unambiguous political identities, a concern with promoting political identities that are committed to the single SMO.

### **8.2.2.3 Appealing to broader publics**

In Chapter 5, HQ staff's view that online spaces are inadequate for 'real' activism and for sustaining commitment emerged as grounded in an understanding of online spaces as privileging visibility over engagement. Therefore, HQ staff hoped online spaces could help them reach broader publics, and, more specifically, younger people. In Chapter 6, these hopes are reflected in the aesthetic properties of WDM's trade campaign. The WDM campaign employs multimodal properties and genres that draw on parody as a mode of critique. These are carefully produced aesthetics and provide an entertaining element to the campaign's explanation of complex issues. In this way, WDM's campaign tries to appeal to younger publics. In contrast, War on Want's campaign mainly relies on an unmodified aesthetics. Using handheld cameras, no sound modification, no lighting and no postproduction, visual representations of offline events cast War on Want and WDM in a challenger role. The professionalised aesthetics of marketisation come to work as a constitutive outside.

The aesthetic qualities of the two campaigns contradict two points mentioned by HQ staff: first, the parody aesthetics in WDM's campaign contradict the "sophisticated, intellectual" approach that WDM HQ staff highlighted as a distinguishing feature of WDM in Chapter 5. Second, the amateur aesthetics in War on Want's campaign contradict the concern with promoting a coherent, uniform image of War on Want.

### **8.2.3 Identifications with online SMO campaigns**

The findings presented in Chapter 7 demonstrate that group members' identifications with WDM and War on Want's online campaigns are characterised by reluctance. This

reluctance is tied up with the members' view that online spaces foster lazy activism. At the same time, their own self-representations at a group level repeat and reproduce some aspects of the campaigns. Moreover, for WDM members they also work as memory archives that provide points of identification that transcend the online/offline dichotomy otherwise conveyed by group members.

Three aspects of these identifications are highlighted here: (1) identifications with online campaign material that is aimed at broader publics; (2) the role of offline ties in conditioning possibilities for online identifications and (3) online spaces as places of memory.

#### **8.2.3.1 Identifying with the appeals to broader publics**

Chapter 7 found that WDM group members both embrace and reject the subject positions made available to them in the online appearances of WDM's trade campaign. They embrace the intellectual, in-depth elements in the campaign, but say that they reject the use of parody to explain WDM's problem identification. They think it is 'soft and bubbly' (Steve, interview, March 2009) and works to 'simplify a complex issue' (Veronica, interview, March 2009). They connect the use of humour in WDM's campaign to *online* activist practices. In other words, they see online spaces as insufficient for fostering political engagement among the activist hardcore. Instead, they echo HQ staff in their view the online domain as a space for reaching young people who are not normally engaged in political activism – and the use of parody and humour is seen as a mode of contestation that is used for appealing to younger publics. Despite the rejection of identifications with the use of humour that WDM members convey in interviews, their own online self-representations appropriate similar uses of parody and humour, for example, showing WDM members dressed as pirates and EU cowboys. This suggests that forms of identification do take place despite their dismissal of online spaces as useful for forging and sustaining commitment.

War on Want group members are similarly sceptical of online spaces as spaces of political engagement. However, their scepticism does not entail specific accounts of dissociation from online appearances of the trade campaign. They do not engage with the campaign appearances that HQ staff promotes across online spaces. Consequently, online campaign appearances do not constitute points of identification for War on Want group members, not even as points of identification that are rejected.

Both WDM and War on Want members identify with the trade campaigns' positioning of the SMOs at the radical end of the GJM. Echoing HQ staff's account, this is related to the two SMOs' opposition to a politically moderate and centre-focused orientation rather than modes of direct action. Dovetailing on this view is members' understanding of mainstream NGOs as a constitutive outside, because they are seen as lodged at the other, mainstream end of the GJM spectrum. Yet, they are still seen as legitimate collaborators in certain contexts.

#### **8.2.3.2 The importance of offline ties**

WDM and War on Want group members understand political engagement as forged through offline activities. The role of face-to-face interactions in securing commitment is a well-rehearsed aspect in studies on social movements (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Diani and McAdam, 2003; Tarrow, 1994). The micro-level nitty-gritty of holding meetings to organise events, coordinating and participating in direct actions and social activities plays a crucial role in building personal ties among activists (Cammaerts, 2007). Therefore, the role of face-to-face interactions of planning and the heated experiences of protests in developing personal ties may have contributed to the fragility of a sense of collective belonging among War on Want group members. The transience of student society groups seems to impede the forging of personal ties within the War on Want group and between the group members and other actively involved SMO group members.

In contrast, the involvement of WDM group members in everyday planning of local events has forged personal ties that gives members a sense of belonging and strengthens their commitment to the SMO. Members convey a strong identification with WDM's participatory group structure. Their online self-representations also testify to the central role of personal ties as social aspects of local campaigning are emphasised in images from offline events and in text such as WDM North London's invitation to join the group uploaded to their Facebook profile: "The group is a friendly and sociable, and looking to be increasingly active over the next 12 months. It also should be mentioned that its great fun!"<sup>50</sup>

#### **8.2.3.3 Places of memory**

WDM group members' uses of online spaces to promote their groups also work as visual archives of their offline activities. They become places of memory where group members can view documentation from their own participation. In this way, a key empirical finding shows that photos from offline events can help sustain commitment to the group, as visual self-representations enable emotional engagement in relation to a cause (Chouliaraki, 2006a) and foster commitment to the act of participation (Carpentier, 2010). Chapter 7 showed that, in contrast, War on Want group members do not use online spaces for visual or multimodal self-representations; they use online spaces for organising and promoting offline events. War on Want group members' own online self-representations are thus characterised by an instrumental approach to the use of online spaces for activist purposes.

This suggests that once political identities have been forged offline, popular online spaces can help sustain these among activists who are already engaged. Using the multimodal possibilities available in popular online spaces can help extend experiences

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[www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1035312260&ref=search#!/group.php?gid=7131786845&v=info&ref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1035312260&ref=search#!/group.php?gid=7131786845&v=info&ref=ts)

of agency and personal ties from offline events, sustaining commitment between these events. Forging political identities offline in an SMO context is intrinsically related to the organisation of offline engagement. The focus on involving members beyond membership fees and mere participation in demonstrations – involving them in planning and preparing offline events – as expressed in WDM HQ interviewees' rationales for WDM campaigning, including online campaigning, is a prerequisite for possibilities for sustaining engagement online.

### 8.3 Theoretical and analytical contributions of empirical findings

This section discusses the theoretical and analytical contributions of empirical findings. It begins with political discourse theory. Next, the complementary potentialities of social movement framing theory are discussed. I then turn to contributions to an analytics of political discourse theory that also captures multimodal aspects of political campaign communication in online spaces.

#### 8.3.1 Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework

The overall argument that I have put forward in this thesis is that the social ontology of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory provides a useful point of departure for exploring processes of identification at the intersection of rationales behind online campaigns, manifestations of these rationales in online campaigns, and identifications with online campaigns. I have argued that Laclau and Mouffe's approach to the discursive as conditioning our understandings of the world and possibilities for action in that world provides a useful theoretical lens, because it approaches self-representations as constitutive of political identities and contestation.

First, it allows us to probe formations of political identities without reducing these to pre-determined, fixed essences, or completely malleable constructs. This foregrounds the diversity of manifold overlapping identities that are open to strategic attempts at

managing identity formation and commitment, but embedded in contextual, subjective interests shared with others and thus also open to negotiation (Griggs and Howarth, 2002). Moreover, I have argued that an approach that is concerned with discursive aspects of power relations is important, because discursive attempts to destabilise dominant, taken-for-granted approaches to social organisation such as a neo-liberal approach to globalisation influence policy outcomes, as they condition the way we think about, talk about and, ultimately, legislate (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005).

Second, the critical aspect and normative ethics on which the notion of radical, agonistic democracy in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory hinges provide a useful premise for empirically probing counter-hegemonic practices such as those of the extra-parliamentarian politics of the GJM. Moreover, it extends the scope for thinking about citizenship as the notion of radical citizenship as an empowering ideal for civic participation and engagement as a socially constructed, ideational and affective dimension of the social.

These are important theoretical conditions for exploring how points of identification are proposed and accepted, negotiated, or rejected in an online media environment where possibilities for creating self-representations that bypass mass media filters are made available.

Finally, despite problems of operationalising the theoretical concepts provided in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical framework, its analytical capacity readily captures key dynamics of political campaigning and identity formation. Through analysis of the empirical material I have demonstrated that the concepts of articulation, nodal points, floating signifiers, adversaries/enemies in relation to agonism/antagonism, and chains of equivalences provide an extensive infrastructure for unravelling the rationales and identification processes that take place around online campaigns.

Nonetheless, in this thesis I have found that the analytical capacity of some of the concepts has certain shortcomings in a study that aims to capture strategic and



multimodal aspects of online campaigning. More specifically, the concept of the adversary as a constitutive outside to chains of equivalences appeared to be insufficient for capturing the fluid, contingent roles that were ascribed to mainstream NGOs. This complexity further ties up with the concept of chains of equivalences. The analysis of group members' articulations of adversaries and allies showed that the boundaries between the roles of mainstream NGOs as agonists and allies are unfixed and flexible. Normally, WDM and War on Want members would regard NGOs as adversaries. However, when entering into alliances around specific campaigns or events, group members regard mainstream NGOs as adversaries and allies at the same time. Therefore, I have suggested that we need to pay attention to hegemonies within counter-hegemonic constellations and open up ally/adversary distinctions to logics of difference and equivalence. This means approaching the concept of chains of equivalences as an analytical construct as open to contextual differences. While chains of equivalences require the identification of a common enemy as a constitutive outside to reduce or overcome differences within the chain (Mouffe, 2000), the make-up of the constitutive outside is complicated. The dualities of agonism/antagonism and ally/adversary can help account for these complexities if we approach them as positions on a continuum rather than dichotomous roles. In other words, allies can cross over and take on dual roles – have a foot in both camps, so to speak.

### **8.3.2 Social movement framing and political discourse theory**

I have used social movement framing theory as a complementary analytical lens for capturing strategic aspects of SMOs' management of visibility and organisational commitment in an online terrain.

Although social movement framing theory was developed as a response to rational, realist approaches to social movement activities, the perspective still carries reminiscences of the rational, structural bias of the resource mobilisation perspective. Nonetheless, where resource mobilisation and political opportunity approaches tend

to presuppose state and resource-centred models, the framing perspective brings to the fore social movements actors' grievances as social constructions (Benford, 1997; Melucci, 1996; Benford and Snow, 2000). I have argued that recasting social movement framing within the ontological presuppositions of contingency and unfixedity of discourse theory facilitates an approach to framing as processual and contingent rather than selections and linkages of pre-existing constructs. This meant approaching frames as strategic constructs through which SMO actors construct SMO self-representations with a view to obtaining visibility, support and legitimacy in relation to other actors identified as important allies (Benford and Snow, 2000) in a discursively constructed and unstable system of meaning (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). In this view, frames are not free-floating constructs but linked to struggles over taken-for-granted social orders (Olesen, 2005). Moreover, it entails a view of frames not as selective slices of an empirical referent, but discursive constructs grounded in strategic intent. I have argued that this provides a theoretical avenue for teasing out and making explicit underlying strategic aspects of Laclau and Mouffe's political discourse theory. I further argued that this is important in an online context that provides possibilities for SMOs to construct their own strategic frames rather than trying to influence mass media frames.

In the analyses of SMO HQ staff's rationales for using popular online spaces I have shown that analytical categories from social movement framing can help add nuance to the analysis of the articulation of adversaries. This emerged as a nuance that discourse theoretical concepts in the analytical framework in this thesis failed to fully provide. What emerged in the analysis of an online War on Want petition is that enemies/adversaries and antagonism/agonism are not discreet categories. Rather, they are fluid, contingent constructs with numerous ambiguous zones and roles. The petition asks users to send an email to their local MEP, 'urging them to commit to a rethink before the end of 2009'. In this way, some MEPs are represented as 'MEPs that support us', placing MEPs in the role of mediators of War on Want's agenda. As suggested in the previous section, opening up the concepts of adversaries and the

constitutive outside to work as continuums rather than dualities allows us to account for these ambiguous zones where the distinction between enemies, adversaries, and allies is not always clear cut. However, drawing on the concept of frame alignment (Benford and Snow, 2000) helps account for the strategic aspect that underpins this ambiguity. The concept of chains of equivalences does not entail an explicit strategic element, and indeed, is often not strategic. Moreover, the construction of a chain of equivalences relies on a constitutive outside, and as such, would prevent the identification of MEPs as adversaries. The category of frame alignment does not foreclose the role of the MEPs as adversaries; MEPs work as temporary allies whose interests are 'congruent' with those articulated in a specific context such as an email petition. This does not eliminate the political frontier between War on Want and their adversaries. Rather, it temporarily places the MEPs in an ambiguous zone further from the SMO's enemies and closer to its allies without transcending the political frontier that is crucial to War on Want's positions at the radical end of the GJM spectrum. Therefore, the introduction of a framework that pays attention to strategic as well as interpretative processes is useful for more specifically conceptualising articulations that are used to win allies to the cause and mobilise members and bystanders in a highly strategic manner (Snow et al., 1986).

A similar ambiguity was at play in WDM group members' online promotion of an offline event. Here again, frame alignment helped account for the strategic nature of a temporary form of alliance. The WDM groups organised a series of MEP Hustings events that saw WDM groups inviting local MEPs to join forces against the Global Europe trade strategy, regardless of the party political affiliations. While overall identified as enemies (particularly right-wing politicians), the set-up of the MEP Hustings events temporarily repositioned MEPs as adversaries whose opinions were respected in public spheres. In this way, the constitutive outside covers a range of multiple roles as adversaries and enemies with shifts in emphasis on one of the two varying across contexts. As in the example above from War on Want's HQ campaign, WDM group members temporarily articulate MEPs as strategic allies. Again, the

theoretical implications of these processes of political identity formation in relation to antagonists are that we need to consider the concepts of antagonism and agonism and the roles of enemies, adversaries and allies as contingent on a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive. Frame alignment provides a helpful analytical category for accounting for strategic articulations of adversaries as allies without cancelling out the possibility of strategic allies to form the constitutive outside to a chain of equivalences in which they themselves form a temporary part.

Incorporating categories from an approach that emanates from instrumentalist origins allows us to view these alliances as short-term marriages of strategic intent that enable rational agenda-setting. At the same time, we have to remember that the formation of political identities is tied up to the construction of a collective subject, a 'we' that enables networks of personal ties and trust against an external 'them'. Such political identities are not fixed, but constantly moulded through campaigning, the nitty-gritty of everyday organisation and planning, and action (Cammaerts, 2007; della Porta and Diani, 2006; Griggs and Howarth, 2002). Therefore, I have argued that we need to approach the dynamics of online political contestation as embedded in a duality of instrumentalist and affective identity-related registers. This helps us understand how strategic constructions of chains of equivalences and the backgrounding of difference in relation to the constitutive outside does not necessarily eliminate antagonism, but turns it into the agonism that Mouffe (2000) advocates.

### **8.3.3 The multimodality of online campaigns**

Carrying some of these critical insights from political discourse theory and social movement theory over to the domain of online political contestation and campaigning also requires paying attention to a multimodal environment (both in format and content). This includes considering the ephemeral qualities that are very different from that of print media and non-interactive electronic media (Chouliaraki, 2010; Livingstone, 2008). In Chapter 4 I suggested that elements from Chouliaraki's analytics

of mediation (2006a) and notion of technologisation of action as part of campaign communication (2010) provide a useful analytical approach to multimodal articulations of enemies/adversaries and diagnostic framing, subject positions, chains of equivalence and frame alignment.

Analyses of online social movement campaigns and websites have often employed content analysis (Mosca, 2010; van Aelst and Walgrave, 2004), text-focused analysis that only considers images “to provide context” (Simone, 2006: 349), and link analysis (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2005) that do not engage with visual and multimodal aspects of online political contestation. Therefore, in order to furnish an analytical framework that also captures the multimodality and technologisation of the SMO campaigns, I turned to Chouliaraki’s (2006a) analytics of mediation. Developed as a framework for the analysis of suffering and spectacular events in television news and later humanitarian campaigns, the analytics of mediation can help draw attention to the aesthetic qualities of online campaigns (Chouliaraki, 2006). In addition, the notion of technologisation of action (Chouliaraki, 2010) can help draw attention to modes of technological agency. This aspect is increasingly important as online forms of action potentially recast the act of participation itself as the political purpose rather than commitment to bringing about social reform (Fenton, 2008a).

I used these analytical tools along with the concepts from political discourse theory and social movement framing theory outlined above so as to analyse the interplay between textual and multimodal articulations across online platforms.

The analyses of the online campaigns (Chapter 6) and the analysis of SMO group members’ understandings of online petitions and their own online campaigning at a group level (Chapter 7) demonstrated that this analytical constellation is a useful toolbox for exploring multimodal dimensions of extra-parliamentarian political contestation in online campaigns. More specifically, the aesthetic quality dimension helped capture the multimodal articulation of enemies/adversaries and diagnostic framing, subject positions, and chains of equivalence and frame alignment through the

use of verbal and visual modes. The technological agency dimension helped capture technological aspects of proposals for action such as online petitions and relating them to effortless immediacy. I have argued that this ties in with articulations of agency as well as subject positions. Therefore, I argued for the importance of relating these dimensions to agency and motivational framing. The concept of motivational framing from social movement framing theory helps add an agency component to the framework by paying attention to vocabularies and multimodal representations of severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety (Gamson, 1995). The analyses in Chapters 6 and 7 showed that this is an important aspect to consider, because the analytical specificities of articulations of agency remain obscure in discourse theory (see also Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). In an analysis of online campaigns and identifications of online campaigns, I showed that the category of agency and motivational framing was intrinsically linked to technologisation of action as proposals for instant agency. Dovetailing on this, the articulation of subject positions also emerged as conditioned by the technologisation of action. I argued that it does so, because in online action antagonism is rendered a fleeting sensation at the expense of instant gratification, and as such fails to provide a constitutive outside that can work to forge political identities. As proposed in the section on key empirical findings, both SMO HQ staff and group members view online campaigns as non-committal modes of activism. I suggest that linking technological agency to motivational framing and the articulation of subject positions can help capture such dispositions, not just in online campaigns but also in the rationales behind and identifications with online campaigns.

Overall, while claims about WDM and War on Want may not directly apply to other GJM actors, the theoretical and analytical concepts that I have used and proposed in this thesis are, of course, not resolved and fixed approaches. Rather, I have tried to engage and present them with the aim of contributing to our understanding of the role of online spaces for political contestation and campaigning in conditioning political identity formation and engagement.

## 8.4 Discussion and suggestions for future research

In this final section I discuss some of the wider implications of the role of online spaces in conditioning practices of extra-parliamentarian political campaigning, and suggest paths for future research in light of these discussions.

Having discussed the three perspectives on the role of online spaces in conditioning practices of extra-parliamentarian political campaigning – rationales, manifestations, and identifications – I now turn to some of the implications that occur at their intersection, and discuss them in relation to the main research question which has driven this thesis, asking *How do popular online spaces as a strategic scene of activism shape articulations of contestation and the formation of political identities in the context of Global Justice Movement organisations?*

Studies on the potential of the internet as a scene of activism have clustered around two dominant perspectives. One perspective sees the internet with its decentralised, non-hierarchical structure as an opportunity structure, facilitating a ‘post-foundational politics’ that allows for diversity, conflict and multiple, tolerant identities (Cammaerts and van Audenhove, 2005; della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Fenton, 2009: 55). The other perspective sees the online domain as inextricably interlinked with profit-driven logics, fostering a system of commodification in which visibility requires persuasion and impression management (Dahlberg, 2005; Fenton, 2009).

The empirical findings in this thesis support previous studies on new social movements, and the GJM more particularly, which have contributed to nuanced takes on the potential of the internet in reinvigorating pluralistic public spheres (Bennett, 2003; Cammaerts, 2005; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Dahlgren, 2009; Fenton, 2008a; Kahn and Kellner, 2004; Kavada, 2010). However, as discussed in Chapter 4, this thesis has focused on an SMO level. I have suggested that within this focus, issues of commitment in particular lie at the heart of possibilities for counter-hegemonic practices. As a part of a counter-hegemonic project, commitment to SMOs rather than loose affiliations with networks is important, because SMOs can

work as hubs for sustaining political identities and fostering alternative imaginaries during periods of decreased visibility and between large-scale protest events (Griggs and Howarth, 2004; Juris, 2008).

Dovetailing on this premise I have argued that political commitment to resistance to neoliberal globalisation cannot be captured through any simple, singular definition of non-institutional politics (Chatterton, 2006; Mouffe, 2005). It needs to address the interplay between the affective and the strategic. The former is underpinned by an understanding of political activism at an SMO level as closely connected to a sense of loyalty and belonging which is forged through offline active campaigning (Fenton, 2008a). In a somewhat different vein, the latter is rooted in the resource mobilisation perspective and presupposes a view of strategy and rationality as key elements to maximise perceived output from alliances (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1988; McCarthy and Zald, 1977). While online sites are perceived by members as facilitating the latter, the analysis in this chapter suggests an understanding of loyalty and belonging as forged in offline activities.

In this vein, the articulation of a viable alternative to the neoliberal model is central for subject positions to become points of politicisation in a radical democratic project. If supporters are to commit around the vision and a means of a viable solution that is a political project rather than merely resist a specific approach to globalisation and trade, a collective social and political imaginary is required (Fenton, 2008b). This again requires political identities that can get people to commit to the proliferation of such an agenda. Against this background, for online spaces to contribute to the formation of political identities around a specific SMO they need to provide articulations of alternatives that can invoke a sense of belonging around the SMO and motivate commitment. The analysis demonstrates that members perceive such processes as taking place offline.

This thesis has shown that central to SMOs' attempts at legitimising articulations of alternative approaches to globalisation is the positioning and mobilisation of publics in



relation to these articulations (Fairclough, 2006). The possibilities that popular online spaces provide for bypassing mass media filters open up avenues for the proliferation of (re)articulations that seek to destabilise the hegemony of a neo-liberal articulation of globalisation. I have argued that globalisation can be seen as a floating signifier to which WDM and War on Want try to assign new meaning. In their attempts at re-articulating globalisation, WDM and War on Want do not condemn processes of globalisation as such. Rather, they specifically contest the neoliberal model of globalisation, and in so doing, can be seen as suggesting that markets represent normative principles rather than pre-existing orders of exchange (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Couldry, 2010).

Joining up these attempts with concerns about the perceived contradictory relationship between promoting the SMO and a constellation of alliances within the GJM can be seen as examples of the extension of market values to social action and political contestation. However, the ways in which these potential tensions are played out and condition political identity formation should not be taken for granted, but explored empirically. In doing so, I have found that the potentially contradictory relationship between protesting against neoliberal logics and using online spaces that operate along precisely these logics does not translate into acute concerns about corporate ownership among SMO actors. This limited reflexivity could be problematic as it makes them more vulnerable to co-optation, subjugating their political agenda to marketised aesthetics. Yet, insisting on the idea that contesting neoliberal models of society requires an absolute break with all media that operate along neoliberal logics is utopian. Counter-hegemonic groups may no longer be able to pretend that they provide a radical critique outside the logics they are trying to critique, but this does not mean that their political role has been entirely undermined.

#### **8.4.1 Suggestions for further research**

While this thesis has shown that popular online spaces as a strategic scene of activism do help sustain political identities around GJM organisations once these have been forged in offline settings, more research into the interplay between the online and the offline is needed. For example, as the perspectives from Chapters 5 and 7 demonstrated, the forging of political identities in an SMO context is tied up with the organisation of offline engagement. Involving members in planning and preparing offline events – as expressed in WDM HQ interviewees' rationales for WDM campaigning, including online campaigning – is an important facilitator of political identity formation. Past research has explored the organisation of anarchy in transnational social movement networks (Juris, 2005). More in-depth research into the relationship between anarchist ways of organisation and online practices would provide better insight into the role of autonomy, voluntary association and self-organisation in fostering commitment and solidarity. Here, research on how political subjects and modes of organisation are influenced by the use of ICTs in processes of participatory decision-making in institutional transnational (Flyverbom, 2010) and local contexts (Salskov-Iversen and Krause Hansen, 2008) can help provide methodological and empirical insights. The relationship between anarchist ways of organisation and online practices is related to the role of the emotional and affective in forging commitment and allegiances. Trust, friendship, feelings of indignation and frustration emerge as important in fostering a collective sensibility – in SMOs as well as in the construction of chains of equivalences between various groups of social movement actors. While Mouffe's (2000) distinction between politics and the political is driven by a call for the recognition of the importance of emotions in practices of politics, it does not elaborate the emotional dimension beyond an (important) argument for not eliminating antagonism from politics (see also Mouffe, 2005). We need to explore empirically what emotions are at play in political engagement, and what happens to these emotions when online media supplement offline planning and protest, for example in transnational SMOs.

Finally, while the role of online middle media in the forging of radical political identities in a reformist SMO context is important (see Chapters 5 and 7 for a discussion of the radical/reformist ambivalence of WDM and War on Want), more research into struggles between allies around protest events is needed. Here, struggles between promoting reformist and radical agendas have been argued to have been both augmented and moderated by the upsurge of online possibilities for self-representation (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Dahlgren, 2009). But also struggles over whether to adopt moderate or violent modes of protest have gained new pertinence. Staging violent protests helps access mass media (Rucht, 2004). Yet violent protests often render protesters vulnerable to negative mass media coverage (Gitlin, 2003). While activists have produced and distributed self-representations of performances of scripted violence for decades (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005), the speed and scope of the production and consumption of mediated acts of contention have reached new levels with the upsurge of online platforms. In this environment, activists face new challenges in terms of managing their visibility and intra-movement conflicts.

Intra-movement struggles are especially important at a time when the anti-globalisation movement is redefining itself by focusing on casting climate change as a direct consequence of capitalism. Moreover, if activists can gain resonance among broader publics this will enable them to influence public debate and, ultimately, policy processes (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). Gaining resonance is conditioned by intra-movement struggles over online media strategies. The dual purpose of direct action riots as media strategy and the forging of political identities (Juris, 2008) can be cast as a duality of inbound and outbound purposes in the context of online possibilities for self-representation. In terms of their inbound capacities, online self-representations of direct action riots serve to mobilise activists. Here, antagonism and trust are seen as crucial aspects. In terms of their outbound capacities, online self-representations of direct action riots serve to provide counter-hegemonic articulations to broader publics

beyond the activist hardcore. Here, resonance and mass media logics are seen as crucial aspects.

Other studies within political science as well as at the intersection between political and cultural studies have provided valuable insights into a range of important aspects of protests and the media. These include locally grounded historical analyses (Karpantschhof, 2007), activist media strategies leading up to an event (McCurdy, 2009) and mass media framing (e.g. Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993). Also organisational communication studies and critical management studies have begun to address possibilities for learning from movements for 'globalisation from below' (Böhm et al, 2005; Ganesh, Zoller and Cheney, 2005; Levy and Egan, 2003).

While these all help paint a picture of activism and the media, our understanding of activists' reflections on their online media practices as learning processes for future protest requires more research into antagonism as constitutive of political engagement and the role of online media in conditioning possibilities for forging intra-movement political identity as well as resonance among wider publics. I have suggested that social movement framing theory can help us understand how strategic constructions of chains of equivalences and the backgrounding of difference towards the constitutive outside does not necessarily eliminate antagonistic relations but turns them into agonistic relations. However, this raises the question what happens in activist groups where turning antagonism into agonism – even if for strategic purposes – is seen as selling out and undermining the cause and thus erodes political identities?

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Screenshot from WDM's trade campaign in WDM's website. Archived 2009 (removed 2010)

**Movement**

Home | News | Action | Climate Justice | Trade | Financial Crisis | Community | About Us | Support WDM

Home

**TRADE**

Trade

We are not against trade, but we do want to stop the European pirates stealing our resources

Norma Maldonado, Guatemala

**FREE TRADE ISN'T WORKING.**

UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE

**THE WORLD'S BETTER OFF WITH TRADE JUSTICE.**

www.wdm.org.uk

**Make trade work for the world's poor**

Trade takes place on a number of levels - whether it is goods you buy, services you use or the direct exchange of money. In the era of globalisation the search for profit has gone global. Trade has the potential to lift millions out of poverty. But the current rules of trade are biased in favour of big business at the expense of the world's poor. WDM is calling on the European Union to adopt trade policies that put people before profits.

**The problem**

The European Union is currently negotiating trade deals with half the countries around the world. These deals will benefit big business at the expense of the billion people living in poverty. In 2006, European officials and big European companies cooked up a new strategy in the quest to become the world's biggest trading power. It includes a hit list of developing countries to target for new trade deals - countries where more than 920 million people live in poverty.

But history shows that these kinds of trade deals make companies richer without benefiting the poor. For example, in Mexico a trade deal led to two million people leaving their land as the price for maize collapsed - whilst corporate giants reaped the profits.

**The solution**

World Development Movement is calling for these trade deals to be stopped and is campaigning for Europe to adopt a trade agenda that puts people before profits. It is possible to trade in a way that benefits the poor. Such a system would:

- Work in the interests of people and the environment
- Let developing countries choose their own development policies
- Not be dominated by European corporate interests
- Be transparent, democratic and truly representative
- Prioritise regional trade between countries at similar levels of development

Initiatives such as fairtrade provide a fair price for some developing country producers and can bring benefits to local communities. However, fairtrade only covers a minority of producers in a global trading system which is fundamentally unfair.

**Take action to make trade work for the world's poor.**

**Support our trade campaigning work** with a donation or by joining WDM as a member.

[Contact your MP](#) [Add new comment](#)

**Trade**

**Take action on the World Trade Organisation**

**World Trade Organisation (WTO)**

**Investigate trade information**

**Share this page**

**TRADE campaign news**

**Delegates to WTO ministerial conference welcomed by trade campaigners**

**WTO side event in the run up to WTO**

**First appointments and decisions at the WTO meeting**

**The WTO must show it back to back**

**The last chance to save the WTO - again**

**Win of world over global trade**

**After the election, the time has come for change**

**Anything in the EU to live or the solution?**

**SIGN UP TO E-NEWS**

Get all the latest campaign actions, events and news direct to your inbox.

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**SUPPORT WDM**

Help our campaign by supporting us today.

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## **Appendix 2: Interview topic guide**

Interview topic guide group members

### **Opening: the purpose of the research, the purpose of the interview**

#### **1. Interview Profile**

- Current role in WDM/War on Want?
- History of SMO involvement?
- Why did you get involved?
- Other involvement?

#### **2. Organisation**

- What does the group do?
- How are you organised?
- How do you communicate with HQ?

#### **3. The GJM**

- What is the GJM?
- Do you use the term? Why or why not?
- Are you involved in any coalitions or alliances?

#### **4. Uses of online media in the group**

- What online media do you use?
- What do you use them for?
- Has it been helpful? Problems?
- Alternatives?
- Problems of profit-driven online media?

#### **5. WDM's/War on Want's uses of online media**

- Asking about specific sites
- Asking about specific videos and images
- Asking about online petitions
- Social media vs alternative media

**Closing: Clarifications and elaborations:**

- Anything else you would like to add?
- Follow-up

## **Appendix 3: Interview topic guide**

Interview topic guide HQ staff

**Opening: the purpose of the research, the purpose of the interview**

### **6. Interview Profile**

- Current position in WDM/War on Want?
- History of SMO employment?
- Off-duty activism?

### **7. Organisation**

- Agenda of SMO
- What does the SMO do?
- How is WDM/War on Want organised?
- How do you communicate with members?

### **8. The GJM**

- What is the GJM?
- Do you use the term? Why or why not?
- Are you involved in any coalitions or alliances?

### **9. Uses of online media in the group**

- What online media do you use?
- What do you use them for?
- Has it been helpful? Problems?
- Alternatives?
- Problems of profit-driven online media?
- Asking about specific sites
- Asking about specific videos and images

- Asking about online petitions
- Social media vs alternative media

**Closing: Clarifications and elaborations:**

- Anything else you would like to add?
- Follow-up

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