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Globalising Resistance against War? A Critical Analysis of a Theoretical Debate in the Context of the British Anti-War Movement

Tiina Seppälä

The political revival of the anti-war movement after 9/11 launched a controversial debate on global resistance against war. Liberal cosmopolitans characterise the movement as a consensual force of opposition against war in the form of global civil society acting on the basis of 'universal' values. Radical poststructuralists consider it a preliminary example of the Multitude, waging 'a war against war' as a global body of opposition. For state-centrics, these views are utopian in referring to global struggles and political subjects that do not yet exist, and alarming because global resistance escapes power in the 'post-political' struggle. Here, the theoretical debate is critically analysed from the perspective of 'critical theory in political practice'. Through an empirical case study of four organisations within the new anti-war movement in Britain, it is demonstrated that these theories' connection to practice is inadequate, and in many ways problematic due to their tendency to resort to a dualistic 'either-or' logic. The paper introduces a 'both-and' approach that not only reflects more accurately the way in which the relationship between global and local is conceived within the movement but also provides a more comprehensive perspective for conceptualising power in the context of social movements generally.

Introduction

The political revival of the anti-war movement after 9/11 launched a controversial debate on global resistance and inspired conceptualisations of a global political collective dedicated to resistance against war. The debate has been dominated by two discourses,

the liberal cosmopolitan approach and *the radical poststructuralist* approach. Their adherents can be described as belonging to the category of academic globalists. A third perspective, the *state-centric* approach can be considered their critique. In this paper, the liberal cosmopolitan approach is examined through the work of IR theorists such as Mary Kaldor and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and sociologists such as Manuel Castells and Ulrich Beck. The radical poststructuralist approach is studied as it is reflected in theorisations by probably the best-known poststructuralists: the post-Marxists thinkers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. And the state-centric approach is identified with the critique by David Chandler. The works of these scholars are treated here as illustrative examples of current political theories describing and conceptualising the role and power of social movements from different perspectives.¹

According to academic globalists, resisting war and transforming the 'war system' must take place 'from below', which requires transnational political engagement in global advocacy networks transcending the boundaries of nation states. While liberal cosmopolitans suggest that global civil society can become an important challenger of state power, contesting the status quo from below (Beck, 2000; Castells, 2008) and resisting war (Kaldor, 2003a), radical poststructuralists argue that the 'global state of war' can be challenged by the oppressed people of the world by forming together a Multitude which would wage a 'war against war' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 67, 215, 284). In this context, the political meaning of the worldwide demonstration day against the Iraq War in February 2003 is celebrated. It is described as "*the movement of public opinion*" at the global level "full of political meaning" (Castells, 2008, p. 86, emphasis in original) which showed that "each individual was confronted with the existential choice between war and peace" (Beck, 2006, pp. 123–124). The anti-war movement has been referred to as an example of the 'becoming' Multitude and as a continuation of the alter-globalisation movement (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 67, 215, 284).

Liberal cosmopolitans maintain that any meaningful political engagement must take place at the global level, where social movements can gain symbolic power by influencing global public opinion through their informational and soft-power resources. It is explicitly suggested that social movements should think locally but act globally. (E.g. Castells, 2004, p. 143; 2008; Nye 2004; Beck 2000; Kaldor 2003a). Shaping global opinion is considered *the most effective form* of power. It can be used for putting pressure on states and governments when challenging their official foreign policy goals. (See Castells, 2004, p. 161; Castells, 2008, pp. 82–82, 90; Beck, 2000, p. 70; Nye, 2004, pp. 31–32, 90, 97–98, 105–106, 137.)

Radical poststructuralists hold that resistance should be globalised, because power has been decentralised and globalised in the 'Empire'. For them, too, the global level is clearly primary and they consider traditional and local forms of resistance old-fashioned and ineffective. (See Hardt and Negri, 2000, pp. 45–46, 206–207, 299; Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp. 91–93, 100, xv.) They explicitly argue that social movements must

“think globally and act globally” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 207). The power of social movements lies in their ability to resist biopower with instruments of soft power, that is, in their ability to execute “moral interventions” against the Empire (Hardt and Negri, 2000, pp. 35–36, 61; Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp. 91–93, xv, 82, 100).

Both approaches are abstract and future-oriented in that they talk about global struggles and global political subjects that do not yet exist. As a representative of the state-centric approach, David Chandler (2009b, p. 537) points out, “these struggles remain immanent ones’ because there is no collective political subject that could ‘give content to the theorising of global struggle articulated by academic theorists”. According to Chandler (2009b, p. 535), it means that theorising “becomes a political act or statement in itself regardless of any link to social agency”. Provocatively, he goes on to argue that “politics has become globalised in the absence of political struggle rather than as a result of the expanded nature of collective political engagement” (Chandler, 2009b, p. 537). Because resistance is nothing “without the strategic, instrumental, struggle for power”, he regards global and symbolic forms of resistance as lacking strategic engagement and thus *escaping power* in the ‘post-political’ struggle (Chandler, 2009a, p. 18–22, 207–208).²

Despite these problems, there is something very interesting going on, since many political theorists invite us to take a closer look at the anti-war movement as an integral part of global civil society or the Multitude. Obviously, the debate has been taken far beyond the current movement when speculating on the possibility of establishing a global collective political subject dedicated to resistance against war. It does not mean that the existing anti-war movement should, or even could, be totally left out of the debate. Although it is not considered the forthcoming global collective political subject *as such*, it is difficult to imagine a global collective dedicated to resistance against war that would exclude the existing anti-war movement.

The contradictory debate on global resistance/anti-war activism operates on a very abstract level. It is alarming that in fantasising about global struggles, suggesting global strategies, and even constructing visions of a global political subject dedicated to resistance against war, the theorists are not engaging empirically with the current anti-war movement but ‘jumping’ directly into the future. This invites four critical questions.

Firstly, the lack of empirical engagement with the current anti-war movement invites the question of the extent to which the globalised interpretations made by academic globalists in regard to the nature of the movement and its political strategies can be considered accurate. Secondly, one might ask whether their globalised normative assumptions and visions are even compatible with the values, beliefs and political premises of the movement. This question relates to a third one – whether the kinds of global political collectives academic globalists are dreaming of can be regarded as possible, or even desirable, political projects from the perspective of the existing movement. Fourthly, it prompts one to ask whether academic globalists are able to

provide any practical suggestions on how to organise resistance against war more effectively.

An intimate link between theory and political practice is the basis of *critical theory*, by definition. Critical theory must be explicitly constructed for social theories to have a practical political impact (Fay, 1987, p. 2). As Stephen Leonard (1990, p. 3) puts it, without a practical dimension a critical theory would be “bankrupt on its own terms”. Critique is to be understood as a synthesis of theory and practice: advocates of critical theory must help ‘emancipate’ its addressees “by providing them with insights and intellectual tools they can use to empower themselves” (Leonard, 1990, p. xiii, 14; Fay, 1987, p. 4, 22, 29; see also Gilbert, 2008, p. 213; Massumi, 1992, p. 103). Political theories, such as currently dominant theories of resistance, can thus be read as ‘proposals’ of strategies put forward to social movements. These ‘proposals’ should be immanent for their objects – in this case the anti-war movement. The problem is that there have been no serious attempts to engage with the existing movement. Without understanding its political and normative premises, it is as easy to make wrong interpretations as it is difficult to offer concrete suggestions on how to organise resistance more effectively.

This paper critically reflects on the ongoing theoretical debate from a perspective of “critical theory in political practice” (Leonard, 1990). Through an empirical case study the article evaluates how much common ground there is between the theoretical debate and political practice at the moment. The aim is to determine to what extent the understandings within the movement ‘resonate’ with those of the three theoretical approaches, and what the main convergences and divergences are. Such a critical mediation in between the ‘metatheories’ and ‘micropolitics’ can help to develop the theoretical debate further by establishing a more intimate dialogue between the recently popular theories of resistance and the current anti-war movement.

The case study is based on an analysis of the premises of four anti-war organisations opposing the Iraq War in Britain during the period between 2003 and 2008. A wide umbrella organisation, the *Stop the War Coalition* (StWC), was founded in 2001. It is closely connected to the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) but cooperates also with the *Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (CND). Together they have organised dozens of mass demonstrations against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The CND is a well-known long-standing (founded in 1958) anti-nuclear organisation that has intimate links with trade unions and the Labour Party. *Globalise Resistance* (GR), founded in 2001, is a leftist organisation involved in a broad range of issues such as promotion of anti-capitalism and global economic justice. *War Resisters’ International* (WRI) is an international pacifist organisation with its headquarters in London. It was founded in 1921. WRI’s long-term work is based on the principle of nonviolence and direct action in particular.

The organisations were studied by analysing different sets of materials: thematic in-depth interviews with their representatives³, histories, statements, books, and

web sites. The interviews and other materials were analysed by qualitative content analysis. The fact that only a limited number of organisations were studied might raise some critical questions in regard to the extent to which it is possible to talk about a 'movement'⁴, and whether it is admissible to study the movement through the perceptions of only a few organisations.⁵ It is not suggested here that the premises of four organisations could be equated with those of the British anti-war movement as a whole. Hence, qualifying expressions such as 'within the movement' are used. It is also acknowledged that due to heterogeneity members share 'a particular set of ideas' only in regard to certain issues (Gillan, 2006, p. 88; Gillan, et. al 2008).

In the empirical analysis, there were five different units. Each of them considered one major aspect of the theoretical debate in light of the empirical material: 1) the *who*-question (agency) of resistance; 2) the *what*- and *why*-questions (aims, targets and causes); 3) the *how*-question (strategies and tactics); 4) the question of *power*; and 5) the question of the *effects* of resistance. In each regard the theoretical debate was analysed in terms of the empirical material, with a summing up of the main convergences and divergences between the two perspectives, and concluding remarks on the extent to which the two seem to 'resonate' with each other.

In the sections to follow, the findings of the study are presented in the following order. First, the main empirical findings are discussed. Thereafter the discussion proceeds to a more detailed treatment of the main failures of the theoretical approaches. This is followed by suggestions as to how the theories can be developed further by outlining a 'both-and' instead of an 'either-or' approach. The paper concludes by critically discussing the broader normative political projects and visions proposed by the theoretical approaches.

Summary of Empirical Findings

Firstly, the study reflected the theoretical debate on the movement against the Iraq War by exploring how the political agency of the movement, its ascendance and the new elements proclaimed by academic globalists are conceived within the movement. It revealed a gap between the political reality experienced by the organisations within the British anti-war movement and the highly globalised and consensual interpretations made by academic globalists who also tend to emphasise new characteristics of the movement more than is the case within the movement. The more recently founded organisations, the StWC and GR, tell a rather uniform story of the 'birth' of the new movement, whereas the long-term organisations, the CND and WRI contextualise it differently. They tend to emphasise traditions and history while conceiving the movement as a continuation of the 'old', long-term peace movement, not something completely new and extraordinary. It is common to consider the anti-war movement an

international collection of nationally operating movements which have due to exceptional political circumstances cooperated more closely together than is usually the case. International coordination in the context of the Iraq War is not regarded as evidence of a permanent phenomenon, or the start of a totally new kind of global project for the anti-war movement.

Moreover, the ascendance of the movement was not as easy and consensual a process, nor its relationship to the alter-globalisation movement as harmonious, as academic globalists assume. Many organisations, especially GR, suggest that when the anti-capitalist movement was 'subsumed' into the anti-war movement, it experienced inflation. Because the former is considered more critical of the system as a whole than the latter, many anti-capitalist activists had resisted any attachment to the anti-war struggle. It is often argued that due to the StWC becoming such a strong group, interest in the anti-capitalist movement declined. There have been also other internal disagreements and conflicts within the movement in regard to leadership issues. The movement has faced difficulties when trying to make collective decisions and to define its main goals and strategies. One of the main problems is that the StWC articulated the political purpose of the new movement as an effort to unite the left, which was not a position supported by all. There have been also disagreements concerning cooperation between organisations, the preferred extent of centralisation, and the movement's connection to other social movements.

Secondly, the theoretical debate concerning the aims, targets and causes of resistance was reflected in the study by analysing how these are defined within the movement. It was found that the main targets of resistance are articulated quite clearly. All organisations consider the US the main perpetrator of the war, and are critical of its power more generally. The war is regarded as an imperialist endeavour of the US, supported by its loyal ally Britain. The British government is portrayed as a target of resistance for the movement in two different ways. Firstly, it is represented as either a 'poodle' of the US, obeying the latter's will in the context of the transatlantic 'special relationship', or as more of an independent actor which has its own political and economic motives for participating in the war. Secondly, it was criticised due to its refusal to respect the will of the majority of its citizens, who opposed the war.

The analysis of the StWC rests on a traditional Marxist approach, in which war is seen as the result of economic rivalry between great powers. The CND partly shares this view but it emphasises the role of militarism and arms trade more. Whereas these two organisations stress the importance of resisting the imperialist governments, GR takes a broader perspective. It underlines the role of multinational corporations and international institutions such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as servants of neo-liberal world order. Resisting the US and the UK governments on account of their policies is considered important, but not sufficient in itself to stop wars or structural violence. WRI,

too, maintains that there is a direct linkage between economics and militarism, whereby it believes that socio-economic problems and injustices must be tackled in order to address the causes of war. However, it stresses that it is not enough to concentrate solely on great powers. It is necessary to resist the militarism and authoritarianism embedded in every nation state: the main target of resistance should be militarism as an institution of the nation state.

Rather than citing the abstract global opponents or invoking the abstract forms of governance put forward by the poststructuralist approach, most of the organisations define the main targets of resistance in quite traditional terms – governments and nation states. This locates them closest to the state-centric approach. Yet, when it comes to the long-term aims of the movement, many understandings correlate also with the views of academic globalists. The fact that the results are mixed indicates that the movement has simultaneously clearly articulated state-level opponents and more abstract targets of resistance. In contrast to the theoretical debate, within the movement it is maintained that both are important. Yet there are also divisions between the organisations with regard to how they consider the relationship between the short- and long-term aims of the movement.

Thirdly, the theoretical debate concerning strategies and the primary context of resistance was reflected by analysing how these are understood within the movement. The study found that both the national and international levels are considered important, but emphases vary. GR regards war and other global injustices as inseparably interconnected, and therefore, it views strategies of resistance in global terms: different struggles can be advanced by common strategies of global opposition. In contrast, the StWC and the CND advocate collective political engagement at the national level. They regard pressuring the national government with a strategy of mass mobilisation as the most effective strategy. They readily engage in parliamentary politics through their close political contacts in the Labour Party and the SWP. Their understanding of politics and power is quite traditional in that they seek political change by influencing those in power. GR has an intimate connection to the political system through the SWP as well, but seems to regard this kind of an engagement less important. WRI is the only organisation that has no connections with the political system. It does not cooperate with trade unions either, which the other three engage with.

Despite their national focus the StWC and the CND believe that it is important to engage in international campaigning as well, and they have taken part in organising some of the 'global' demonstrations. They also share the belief that resistance against the war can be enhanced by supporting the objectives of other social movements. The StWC connects the anti-war struggle to the struggle against imperialism, and stresses the importance of a united front and the organisation of the working class. The CND connects anti-war activism to the anti-nuclear movement and also suggests that different

social movements are in the process of developing a common analysis of interconnected problems that stem from unjust international economic structures and institutions (e.g. Hudson 2005). Usually specific forms of support or collaboration are not outlined in detail, but are instead articulated through references to 'global solidarity'.

WRI stresses that long-term work promoting peace through nonviolent direct action is more effective than organising mass demonstrations or working through the political system. It cooperates primarily with other pacifist organisations, and is clearly internationally oriented. While WRI connects anti-war activism to issues such as the expression of individuality and freedom from collectives, centralised organisations as well as state rule, the three other organisations believe that the struggle against war requires unified and large political collectives with a strong sense of solidarity, and often one of unity as well.

In sum, most resonance was found with the state-centric approach but also some common ground with the globalist frameworks, especially in regard to long-term struggles of the movement. Instead of defining strategies in purely national or globally oriented terms, as the theoretical approaches do, the organisations rather advocate a mixed approach. While they usually target the national government in order to influence political decision-making, the significance of expressive, symbolic politics aimed at the global level, especially in the form of international cooperation and solidarity, is simultaneously emphasised.

Fourthly, the study reflected on the theoretical debate regarding the power of social movements by analysing how power is conceptualised within the movement. It was found that power is understood mainly in relation to three elements: public support, the unity of the movement, and the diversity of the movement. Public support is articulated as a power resource either by reference to public opinion or public action. Especially the StWC and the CND emphasise public action in the form of mass demonstrations. GR is more inclined to regard global, and not national, public support as a constituent of power. Although more generally WRI subscribes to a more multifaceted definition of power, in the context of the anti-war movement it views power from an instrumentalist perspective.

Although expressing some very critical views towards the political system, organisations such as the StWC and the CND have nevertheless sought power by drawing on their contacts in political parties and major trade unions. Their conception of power echoes the more traditional, instrumental view of power advocated by the state-centric approach. However, they are not hostile towards liberal and radical conceptualisations of symbolic power: they consider it possible to simultaneously engage politically outside the political system of the nation state and to seek soft power via symbolic politics. GR, too, operates on a similar kind of logic but its emphasis is the opposite. Its conception of power is closer to that of the poststructuralist approach – it promotes symbolic forms of political engagement at the global level. While the three other organisations define power in terms of public support and collective power, WRI

explicitly criticises this view. It is highly critical of engaging with the establishment and sceptical of other forms of power, too. Yet due to its strong emphasis on civil obedience, WRI has the most optimistic view in regard to the power of an individual to make a difference: s/he can effectively use power by either refusing to obey, or by actively breaking, unjust laws and restrictions.

Besides public support, both unity and diversity are believed to bring power to the movement. Since there is less explicit discussion about unity than about diversity, one might easily get the impression that the importance of unity has been overwhelmed by that of diversity, given that the latter is constantly celebrated in almost all possible contexts. However, a closer analysis reveals that much of the debate about diversity is actually related to issues that bear on the unity of the movement. From the perspective of the power of the movement, most organisations consider unity more important. Where diversity is explicitly discussed, it, too, is argued to give more power to the movement. Diversity is considered not so much a value in its own right but instead as a means to an end.

Fifthly, the study explored how the main effects of resistance and the successes of the movement are regarded. The organisations believe that the anti-war movement has accomplished many things although it was not able to prevent or stop the war. In the national context, the most significant success is said to be 'getting rid' of Prime Minister Tony Blair, who is usually represented as 'Bush's poodle'. It is argued that the movement has shaken the political establishment, and managed to pressure the government in different ways. Influencing domestic public opinion, uniting people from different backgrounds, empowering participants, getting people interested in politics again, and encouraging young people to become politically active are considered among the main national achievements of the anti-war movement. In regard to the international level, the arguments are more presumptuous. Without a doubt the most interesting idea is that the movement has prevented certain future wars from taking place, such as the 'War on Iran'. It is also argued that the anti-war movement has been effective in preventing terrorist attacks, in breaking up US alliances as well as shaping its policies. The most common argument is that the movement has influenced global public opinion, and thus enhanced 'global consciousness' and created a sense of solidarity at the global level.

Of the organisations studied, the StWC is the most eager to proclaim a great number of achievements for the movement while also downplaying some of the principal failures. It allows the organisation to promote its own role within the movement when seeking more public support and power. The CND also emphasises many of the successes brought up by the StWC, whereas GR and WRI are more cautious, or even sceptical, in this regard. The fact that the StWC and the CND have in many ways been the leading and most influential organisations within the new British anti-war movement probably explains to a great extent why they 'dare' to refer to so many achievements. The

views of the StWC and the CND resonate with the state-centric approach as they conceptualise the effectiveness of the movement mainly in terms of its ability to take part in and shape political struggle against government policies. However, this constitutes only part of the organisations' understanding: many of the suggested broader, global impacts of the movement that the StWC and the CND draw attention to are similar to those presented by GR. Together these views resonate with the argumentation by academic globalists.

Although there are differences in regard to what are considered the most important successes, and what the movement is expected to be able to achieve in a certain time frame, generally all the organisations studied consider the effects of the anti-war movement in short-term *and* long-term, instrumental *and* symbolic, as well as national *and* global terms. In comparison to them, all three theoretical approaches can be considered quite narrow. While academic globalists approach the question of effectiveness from an abstract and idealistic perspective, the problem in the state-centric approach is that it is mainly concerned with direct impacts on government policy in the short term. Thus, it fails to pay attention to broader long-term goals, which take longer to materialise and are also more difficult to evaluate.

Towards a 'Both-And' Instead of an 'Either-Or' Approach

On the whole, the five empirical sections demonstrate that within the anti-war movement the understandings and premises are overlapping, complex and mixed rather than clear and simple. This shows that it is not only difficult but also problematic to conceptualise resistance from only one theoretical perspective.

Why is this problematic? Firstly, from the perspective of 'normal' political theory it is troubling that a lack of engagement with the current movement leads theorists either to make inadequate, and sometimes even false, interpretations of its character, aims, targets and strategies – or to evaluate its power and influence from a very restricted perspective. Secondly, and more importantly, it is problematic from the perspective of critical theory that the theoretical approaches are characterised by their inability to engage and communicate with the objects of their conceptualisations and/or addressees of their visions and suggestions in terms which could be practical, helpful, or at least somehow relevant to them. Thirdly, as we will see below, it is unfortunate that theorists define their political projects of resistance and emancipation in a way which enables their conceptualisations to be autonomous from practice, and their normative suggestions and visions to be divergent from the values and beliefs held within the movement. Despite the academic globalists' many emancipatory claims, normative suggestions and political projects, their connection to the political practice of the existing anti-war movement seems to be weak.

Before these findings can be elaborated on a higher level of abstraction, an

important question needs to be asked: How generalisable can they be considered when only four organisations have been studied in the context of one country? In other words: Would the empirical findings be different if, for example, German or French anti-war organisations were studied instead? The answer is probably 'yes', at least in some respects. In each country there are historical, political and cultural factors which influence how the state and political system is viewed. In Germany, for instance, the role of established political institutions has traditionally been quite weak in the anti-war movement. Therefore, it is likely that the German movement resonates more with many of the perspectives of academic globalists than those of scholars espousing the state-centric approach. Ideologies and coalitions vary in each country: whereas pacifism has historically had a negative connotation in France, it is deeply rooted in the British political tradition.

Due to the above-mentioned differences – and many others – it must be openly acknowledged that studying the premises of anti-war organisations in another country would surely have shown different degrees of resonance with the theoretical approaches under investigation. However, I argue that the most important findings would nevertheless be the same. Even with this very limited case material, the study has demonstrated that the theoretical approaches are excessively polarised and dualistic in their conceptualisations. In that respect, they all fail to relate to the movement's political practice and premises.

In conceptualising effective resistance solely in terms of expressive and symbolic action at the global level – that, is, where social movements shape global opinion by communicating their values and beliefs – the liberal cosmopolitan approach ends up ignoring the more practical side of power. Radical poststructuralists make essentially the same mistake. The state-centric approach is problematic, too, because its strong emphasis on the national context does not completely resonate with the understandings held within the anti-war movement – and probably not with those of many other social movements either. Although the approach recognises that politics is “deterritorialized in terms of its conceptualisation, in terms of the aspirational content of political demands”, it argues that power is always and “necessarily territorialized in terms of the specific strategies and articulations of those demands to put those demands into practice” (Chandler, 2009a, p. 16).

The state-centric approach importantly reflects on problems in regard to symbolic expressions of solidarity becoming the main point in political activism. It is a development understood as signaling a lack of political engagement, or even “a radical justification for the refusal to engage politically” (Chandler, 2004, p. 331). Although this is a legitimate concern, worthy of examining in greater detail, the argument constructs unnecessary binaries. Social movements can have clearly articulated political projects at the national level as well as express solidarity and acquire support for the cause beyond

the nation state – all at the same time. Moreover, there is “no reason why a particular political activity cannot be both expressive and instrumental” (Rochon, 1998, p. 122).

It is very interesting that this polarised theoretical debate resembles the spirited discussion between advocates of the ‘resource mobilisation theory’ and the ‘new social movement theory’ a few decades ago. The resource mobilisation theory maintains that social movements do not primarily aim at challenging political institutions. They are defined as “collective efforts to alter public policies”, and expected to cooperate with political institutions of representative democracy in order to “seek particular reforms” (Rochon, 1988, p. xvii). Like the state-centric approach, the resource mobilisation theory asserts that in order to gain political power social movements need to have clearly defined aims, opponents, strategies and centralised organisational structures. While defining power as the ability of social movements to achieve their stated aims (policy changes), it shares the instrumentalist view of power with the state-centric approach.

In contrast, the new social movement theory holds that the significance of social movements derives from their efforts to pose a revolutionary challenge to established political institutions (Tilly, 2004, pp. 68–71; Rochon, 1988, p. xvii). Social movements are considered expressive in nature, and expected to represent broad demands on the socio-political system while signalling the dissatisfaction of people towards mainstream political institutions (Rochon, 1988, p. xvii, 99). Movements are not to be assessed by their “immediate capacity to induce existing elites to pursue more enlightened policies” but their ability to find “new spaces in which to act politically” and “new ways of acting politically” as well as to discover the interconnectedness of “seemingly different movements struggling in different situations” (Walker, 1988, p. 8, 80). Because the goals of social movements cannot be determined in advance, it is sometimes argued that it is “important to resist inevitable demand for hard-nosed, concrete solutions to particular problems” (Walker, 1988, p. 7).

In short, the difference between the two approaches is whether social movements are considered collective efforts “to delegitimize the political system, or whether exercising political effectiveness within the system is paramount” (Rochon, 1988, p. xix). Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. The resource mobilisation theory does not answer, or even address, all relevant questions. Being primarily interested in interactions between movement organisations and political institutions, it concentrates mainly on the process of mobilisation rather than ideas and ideologies. It often fails to recognise the critique that political institutions confront across the western industrialised countries (Rochon, 1988, pp. 18–19, 122). The new social movement theory has shortcomings as well. One of its problems, which characterises also academic globalists, is that it invests very challenging, idealistic, even utopian expectations in social movements. They are believed to have “the capacity to extend the horizons of our political imagination” while transforming “the boundaries of the possible” (Walker, 1988, p. 3). They should not only challenge universal paradigms but also defy commonly

held understandings of what politics and power are about (Walker, 1998, p. 2).

While this kind of a polarised discussion took place already decades ago, the same dualism seems to – surprisingly – characterise the theoretical debate today. Academic globalists consider movements that aim to gain political power as reactionary and inward-looking in trying to control the political landscape as well as political imagination. The state-centric approach regards more broadly oriented movements as naïve, utopian and ineffective, because they mainly aim at affecting values and attitudes. In a new theoretical context, the debate has gained some new characteristics. It seems that increasingly globalised conceptualisations have led some approaches to ‘go wild’ on those perspectives that were articulated in what might be considered more down-to-earth terms in the late 1980s. In this regard, it is easy to agree with the state-centric approach. The interpretations of academic globalists are often too idealistic: whatever social movements do, they are almost automatically considered powerful, emancipatory and contributing to the good of the whole world (Chandler, 2004, p. 328).

However, in the name of political realism it is always very tempting to argue that social movements are weak and unsuccessful in their attempts to change the world for the better. As R.B.J. Walker (1988, p. 146) points out, this view presumes that “power is always and everywhere the same”. The suggestion that movements should not be assessed “in terms of some timeless notion of what power is” but “in terms of their capacity to alter our understanding of what power can be” (Walker, 1988, p. 146) would deserve substantially more attention. However, it is important to revitalise theoretical debate concerning more strategic and instrumental forms of political engagement as well.

Indeed, the empirical analysis of merely four organisations within the British anti-war movement has been able to demonstrate that it would be possible to have an intermediate, a sort of a ‘middle’ position that could combine the advantages of several perspectives. This kind of a ‘both-and’ approach⁶ not only reflects more accurately the way in which the relationship between instrumental and symbolic power is conceived within the movement but also provides a more comprehensive perspective for conceptualising power in the context of social movements generally. It enables global and state-based forms of political conceptualisations as well as dimensions such as instrumental/symbolic to be considered simultaneously. By deploying a *dialectical* approach in which rival perspectives are replaced by a more holistic one, it is possible to take into account the premises of the original perspectives yet go beyond them (Fay, 1998, pp. 227–228, 224). The ‘both-and’ perspective can also enable a more reflexive relationship between theory and political practice, as suggested by the findings here.

The Multitude/Global Civil Society as an Answer to War?

When it comes to evaluating the global political projects against war that academic globalists are talking about, the many divergences and shortcomings discussed above suggest that those efforts are not easily compatible with the normative premises of the current anti-war movement. Their suggestions regarding the organisation of resistance, based as they are on quite different understandings of such central concepts as war and power, encounter the same problem. For liberal cosmopolitans, the ideal towards which global civil society should be moving is based on liberal values, regarded as universal – hence, the term ‘cosmopolitan’. They are accused of normative universalism, imposing western values and liberal governance on the rest of the world by radical poststructuralists. For them, the ideal towards which the Multitude should lead the rest of world is based on a vision of a post-Marxist political regime. Neither of these seem to resonate very well with the political premises of the current anti-war movement. Within the British movement, the premises of many organisations are based on a much more traditional Marxist analysis, where effective strategies of resistance against war are conceptualised in terms of anti-imperialist struggle, preferably combined with international organisation of the working class. There are also nonviolent ideals that challenge the liberal and radical approaches even more, neither being based on pacifistic ideals. Liberal cosmopolitans generally regard interventions by western liberal states as legitimate and radical poststructuralists do not exactly advocate a pacifist principle when talking about a ‘war against war’.

These findings certainly do not help academic globalists to counter the criticisms they have attracted for not having a collective political subject that could “give content to the theorising of global struggle” (Chandler, 2009, p. 537). On the one hand, it seems that academic globalists do not have much to offer the anti-war movement. On the other hand, one may wonder whether a closer engagement with the existing movement is even their purpose, as academic globalists have already fixed their notions of the goals and normative ideals towards which the struggles of resistance should proceed. When the end goal is already determined, what is left to be done is merely to find a ‘suitable’ social movement that would lead the pre-ordained political project. In this way academic globalists put themselves above their forthcoming, but as yet non-existent global political subjects.

Another problem is that while continuously celebrating diversity, academic globalists fail to take the diversity of movements into consideration in practical terms. The empirical analysis of only four anti-war organisations demonstrated that there is a great variety of political positions, beliefs and ideologies which are not always readily compatible with one other. These are sources of political conflicts and power struggles within the movement. It is troubling that in the theoretical debate the possible conflicting interests and power struggles within the global political collective are not taken into

account. The lack of this kind of discussion is especially problematic in the poststructuralist theory, since it claims to construct a metatheory with a clear direction for many movements to take while it itself ignores political ramifications as well as power issues *within* the Multitude.

When it comes to liberal cosmopolitans, the problem is basically the same, but since they do not generally discuss power or power relations much – and usually not at all in terms of governance – the post-political and power-ignorant stance is more predictable. On balance, both liberal cosmopolitans and radical poststructuralists can be criticised for their inability to conceptualise possible conflicts and contradictions within their global movements. Although the state-centric approach does not discuss these issues either, it seems to be the only one of the theoretical approaches capable of offering any analytical instruments for addressing these problems due to its definition of politics and the political.

The theorists should also note that the anti-war movement has not yet – despite two hundred years of efforts – managed to create a truly global organisation against war. The political revival of the movement after 9/11 did spark a vigorous debate about whether it should adopt a more global approach. However, similar kinds of debates have surfaced regularly throughout the history of the movement (see e.g. Prasad, 2005, p. 141, 339). There are thousands of different kinds of peace and anti-war groups in the world. Different branches all have their own coalitions and movements. Their aims and objectives, ideologies and premises vary greatly – they have different kinds of analyses of the causes of war, their main opponents and strategies of resistance.

Taking a closer look at the movement's history as well as exploring the diversity within the existing movement would be extremely beneficial for academic globalists. It would compel them to reconsider their conceptualisations of the Multitude and global civil society as essentially consensual political collectives. It is difficult to accommodate different views into one national movement, let alone to a global one. Transforming the anti-war movement into something more permanent and global is an extremely challenging endeavour – one that cannot be established from above. Critical political theory can and should play an important part in these debates, but it should not result in abstract intellectual projects that are independent of political practice and the premises of the movement. Critical political theory needs to communicate with its addressees in order to be emancipatory and practical (Leonard, 1990, p. xiv, 14; Fay, 1987, p. 2, 4, 22, 29). Social movements can benefit greatly from new theories of resistance but such theories must not be too abstract or completely determined in advance, for that is probably the most certain way to ensure that the visions of political theories remain mere utopias.

The inability of the theoretical approaches to seriously address the problems discussed above leaves much to be desired when it comes to offering convincing analysis,

visions or practical suggestions for resistance. There are also other problems in the theorisations. Liberal cosmopolitans do not take relations of power into account sufficiently or address power structures adequately. They have an obvious tendency to overemphasise the power of social movements and to consider the structural aspects of power only in very limited terms. Liberal cosmopolitans also depoliticise some issues, as seen in its tendency to regard certain (liberal) values as universal, and not affected by power. They uncritically equate a liberal order with peace and justice which is a problematic view. For many outside the western world this order equals violence and poverty – both of which are deadly. While celebrating global interconnectedness, which is supposed to bring peace and stability to the whole world, liberal cosmopolitans rarely pose the question of from whose point of view peace and stability is being constructed or secured. Peace is often understood simplistically only as the absence of war, and the ‘liberal way of war’ is rarely, if ever, problematised.

Radical poststructuralists emphasise the concepts of global power and global state of war perhaps too strongly. They also maintain a very broad and somewhat idealistic view of resistance that makes it difficult to propose concrete solutions and practical guidelines for resistance. Moreover, their concept of ‘democratic violence’ which legitimises the use of ‘defensive’ violence is a highly problematic concept from the perspective of the anti-war movement, at least if pacifists and nonviolent groups are to be included. Although the concept of ‘war against war’ can be regarded as an effort to construct some sort of a middle ground between “pacifism and traditions of revolutionary violence” (Reid, 2006, p. 120), the idea of democratic violence as a “conception of the legitimacy of violence in terms of its defensive qualities, is intrinsic to the very liberal tradition of war” which Hardt and Negri “are attempting to stand outside of” (Reid, 2006, p. 105).

The state-centric approach fails to recognise the legitimate critiques of those who argue that it is justified to resist democratic political institutions when these, in the name of liberal democracy, continuously resort to violence and military force. By very strongly defending the representative democratic system, the state-centric approach is too hasty to dismiss many of the justified criticisms put forward by academic globalists. Even if one were to reconcile oneself with the view that representational democracy is the best political system that currently exists, it hardly can be argued that we have now achieved a perfect form of government that should not be criticised or cannot be improved. On the whole, all the problems of the three theoretical approaches provide justification to suggest that their connection to political practice, and thus, to emancipatory critical theory is problematic and inadequate. At the same time, it has been shown that any generalisations are difficult because movements really are complex and multifaceted. Hence, I argue that critical theorists should aim at looking at specific movements in the way Leonard (1990) suggests, and directly engage with them, because otherwise it is impossible to establish anything of an emancipatory dialogue from the

perspective of ‘critical theory in political practice’. By communicating with activists, it is also possible for theorists to learn many new and alternative ways of thinking which, in turn, may help them to transform the relationship between theory and political practice, knowing and being, into something more reflexive.

Moreover, it should be admitted that it makes as much sense to try to produce a unified perspective for the anti-war movement as to try to develop a universal recipe for resistance against war in theoretical terms. As Leonard has illustrated, emancipatory political projects based on critical theory are deeply historical and necessarily localised in their efforts to change a perceived injustice because otherwise the ghost of universalism will bring many more problems. However, it is not enough to engage only in localised forms of critique – what is required as well is “a metatheoretical self-understanding” which accommodates “one the one hand, the need for collective solidarity, and on the other, a respect for plurality and difference” (Leonard, 1990, p. 87). While admitting that simultaneous commitment to *both* solidarity *and* plurality “is no mean task”, Leonard (1990, p. 261) shows that “to be anything less runs the risk of repeating the same mistakes that gave rise to the need for critical theory”.

Notes

- ¹ These are by no means the only scholars taking part in the debate, but are here taken as examples, since it would be impossible to analyse all the related discussion.
- ² Similarly, Chantal Mouffe (2005, p. 107) argues that the poststructuralist and liberal cosmopolitan approaches lack a “properly political dimension”. For her, Hardt and Negri’s theory represents “no more than an ultra-left version of the cosmopolitan perspective” which, instead of providing an empowering perspective, “contributes to reinforcing the current incapacity to think and act politically” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 107).
- ³ The in-depth interviews with seven representatives of the four organisations were conducted in London in March 2008.
- ⁴ There are many different kinds of definitions of a movement (see e.g. Tilly, 2004, pp. 3–7; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007, p. 8; della Porta and Diani, 2006, pp. 20–22; Rochon, 1988, p. xv).
- ⁵ Although social movement organisations cannot be equated with a movement (della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 21; Tilly, 2004, p. 48; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007, p. 8), for certain purposes “there are analytic gains to be had from adopting a more restrictive definition of a political movement, for example by looking only at the major organizations” (Rochon, 1988, p. 23).
- ⁶ This terminology has been adopted from Brian Fay (1998, p. 224).

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Dr. Tiina Seppälä holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of Lapland, Finland, where she works as a post-doctoral researcher. Her PhD thesis (2010, Lapland University Press) will be published by Routledge in 2012 under the title *Globalizing Resistance against War: Theories of Resistance & the New Anti-War Movement*. Contact details: tiina.seppala@ulapland.fi
