"Hearts with one purpose alone"?

Thinking personal sustainability in social movements

Abstract:

While attention is now being paid to emotions and personal sustainability in social movements, relatively little attention has been paid to difference between social movement situations or broader cultural contexts. This paper locates the question in the broader history of thinking about ordinary people's political engagement since the French Revolution. It explores various literatures relating to the topic, arguing that emotional sustainability is only one aspect of personal sustainability in social movements. Using the example of WB Yeats' response to the 1916 Easter Rising, it highlights the importance of locating this in place, time and culture. The paper offers a typological approach as a counter-strategy to the assumption of uniformity, focussing on difference in social situation, organising contexts and background cultures.

Keywords:

Social movements, emotional sustainability, political participation, activism

Introduction: questioning "emotional sustainability"[1]

This article explores the problem of personal sustainability in social movements: what does it take for individuals to get involved and keep going? Responding to the debate on emotional sustainability from the viewpoint of social movements research, it suggests an alternative approach to the topic.

Within the sociology of social movements, there has been a flurry of recent interest in emotions (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001, Flam and King 2005; *Mobilization* (vol. 7 no. 2), Goodwin and Jasper 2006). In this context, Barker (2001), drawing on the dialogical psychology of Voloshinov and Vygotsky, has argued that it is a mistake to see emotions as something separate from the other dimensions of social movements. Following Barker, I want to suggest that emotional sustainability should be seen as part of a broader question of how people become, and remain, the kind of actors capable of taking part in social movements. Here I frame this question as "personal sustainability", a concept that includes actors' workplace situations, support networks, financial resources, physical vulnerability and a range of other issues, all of which are of course shot through with emotion, but which in turn massively condition emotions. This concept is part of a developing action research programme into sustainability in social movements, drawing in part on over 25 years' movement experience and involvement

in collective attempts at tackling the problem of sustainability within movements. It is therefore conditioned by the practical concern to identify which issues (emotional or otherwise) are most important in relation to sustainability. It is also conditioned by awareness of the very different personal situations and struggles faced by activists in different places and contexts, and is thus intended deliberately to enable the mapping of difference.

This article therefore seeks to relocate "emotional sustainability" within a broader context as one aspect of personal sustainability in social movements. How important, and how problematic, emotions are cannot be taken for granted We cannot generalise the experience of specific kinds of activist within a single country and a single type of movement as representative of all social movements everywhere. Here I argue instead for a comparative, historically-informed, approach. My purpose here is not to silence emotion (Anderson and Smith 2001: 7) but to contextualise it. If we object to the removal of emotions from "political behaviour, economic rationality, class relations and so on" (2001: 7 – 8), the problem is not resolved by treating emotions in isolation from economics and politics, as if they were historically and culturally universal. To do so simply naturalises the situations we are familiar with, as if everyone everywhere had the same experiences. Thus a key tool for contextualising emotions within social movements is the comparative analysis of how movements are articulated with everyday life in different times, places and contexts.

Defining personal sustainability

Personal sustainability in social movements is very much a heuristic category. It covers the conditions which make it possible for specific individuals to take up and maintain effective involvement in informal politics. In this sense, personal sustainability is a crucial problem for social movements, most notably in the area of mobilisation and demobilisation (burnout and dropout).

A focus on "emotional sustainability" alone hides other problems, such as age, gender, class, race, disability, and so on, by presupposing actors who *are* able to engage politically once they are emotionally healthy and / or supported to be so. By contrast, the literatures on social movements and popular political participation highlight the extent to which mobilisation and demobilisation are differentially affected by social structure, as well as by culture and political context.

The comparative-historical aspect of personal sustainability

This article is written within a comparative-historical approach that aims to be sensitive to variation in social movement experience across space and time and to pick up on underlying similarities, rather than universalising a particular local experience. This latter temptation is particularly powerful for privileged people in dominant states, including movement activists. In relation to the US civil rights movement, for example,

several authors (e.g. Mendel-Reyes 1996) have criticised this self-referential portrayal of the movement by privileged activists.

Conventional political sociology resolves "place" into historical patterns of political organisation and cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, Lash and Urry 1987). Such variation is well-known regionally (Todd 1988, Ginsborg 2003) and cross-nationally in giving rise to systematic and enduring variations in the level, nature and meaning of popular political participation. These variations also represent very different ways in which *individuals* "live" their political participation (or lack of it). The cultural meaning, interpersonal implications, practical outcomes, social risks of involvement in social movements etcetera are massively conditioned by *where* an individual becomes active, not simply in the obvious sense that risks to life, physical integrity, economic security and so on vary. This awareness is largely lacking in the "emotional sustainability" literature.

The editorial to this special issue highlights a view of activism as something separate from the everyday, and challenges this in various ways. But while the editors argue for recognising low-level forms of "everyday" or "implicit" activism, they do not consider that in many contexts participation in social movements, including high-risk and conflictual participation, may be located *within* the everyday as a matter of course.

In contexts such as republican communities in Northern Ireland or the Indian adivasi communities studied by Nilsen (2006) it may be more appropriate to use Williams' notion of a "whole way of life", or, as Thompson put it, a "whole way of struggle" (Hall

1989: 61), within which one's identity, as republican or adivasi, is not alien to the family, in the neighbourhood or the workplace.

The same issue arises from the proposition that emotions are undervalued within movements and research. It is hard to imagine how this could be said in relation to, for example, the US civil rights movement, Italian communism or peasant movements in Latin America, for all of which emotions are or were manifestly a central part of movement activity. Indeed, emotional *display* is often key to the activities of social movements (consider, for example, hunger strikes, public shaming (Henry 1994), the strategic use of breast-baring or modesty (Fantasia 1988), the "moral economy" and bread riots (Thompson 1991)). Again, a particular time and place is being mistakenly universalised. In the process, some of its most interesting features – those which make emotional sustainability seem separate and uniquely problematic – are lost to analysis. Thus spatiality needs to be considered not simply in terms of alternative spaces or "flow" but also in terms of international / cross-cultural comparison, not taking our own emotional situation for granted (Rosaldo 1993).

This article deliberately uses a wide range of examples from different places, movement traditions, social groups and historical periods to destabilise the taken-for-granted sense of activism as specifically *emotionally* problematic. It suggests that a more interesting question is *where and when* movement, or personal, sustainability can most plausibly be seen as a matter of emotional sustainability. More generally, in the (large majority of) movements where this is not the case, it seeks to hold open the question of the relative

salience of emotions to personal sustainability, as well as the question of the *articulation* of emotions with other aspects of sustainability.

The article attempts this in four steps. Firstly, it explores how ordinary people's relationship to the political has been thought since the French Revolution. Secondly, it looks at how the problem of personal sustainability in movements has been theorised in different literatures. Thirdly, it uses a specific historical example to highlight the need to reflect on the positions from which we approach the question. Finally, it proposes typologies as a counter-strategy for avoiding universalism, and suggests a number of important kinds of variation for research.

The paper does not offer in-depth treatment of individual movements, but attempts to take sufficient distance from specific cases to show the full range of diversity of societies, historical periods and movement types involved. This is not due to any lack of sympathy or involvement, but to a pressing practical concern to see the wood for once, rather than the trees.

I.   Personal sustainability: thinking the problematic

"Active citizenship" and personal sustainability

In conventional political theory, "active citizenship" is an unquestioned Good Thing: to repeat the clichés of first-year political science courses, the human being is a "political animal". In this context, as in so much European discussion of education for citizenship, of declining political participation, of the need for "public debate" etcetera, the problem is seen as an individual one to be overcome by individuals' own efforts and a bit of hectoring (Beetham 2005, Hay 2007). In practice, social movements encounter substantial limits to this voluntarism, manifest in difficulties in mobilisation and sustaining participation, which are sufficiently widespread to form the basis of a school of social movement research (resource mobilisation), and the reappearance within movement participation of all kinds of social inequality. One value of the concept of personal sustainability is to pose this question empirically: what *does* get in the way of people's active participation in social movements?

For practical purposes, there are distinctions between problems which are internal to movement organising, and can therefore be tackled directly (e.g. gendered aspects of movement culture); individual problems to which movement participation can offer a solution (e.g. social isolation); problems which at present can mostly only be tackled at the level of the individual (e.g. some kinds of mental illness); and problems which are normally beyond the control of either the individuals or the movement (e.g. state violence). Some of these can be tackled in exceptional movement waves or revolutions;

indeed, these are often precisely those which movements are organised around. Part II discusses some of the more specific contours of this problem.

Movement participation as precondition or endpoint?

Debates concerning the relationship between the individual and the public sphere have a long history in European political thought[2]. The rather static terms of the debate on active citizenship assume an essentially given set of institutions towards which citizens orient themselves, and it is assumed that this participation is important for the public sphere as a whole. The bulk of European history, however, has seen political participation restricted to a tiny elite who were born to rule, with a handful of exceptions (some Greek city-states, the Roman Republic, some Italian city-states and Iceland) where "active citizenship" was briefly possible to a somewhat enlarged section of the population.

It is only with the English, American and (particularly) French Revolutions that the problem of active citizenship became a real one for substantial numbers of people over any long period of time. The experiences of these revolutions highlighted for contemporaries the fact that active citizenship is *not* a permanently present option. The possibility for ordinary people to *become* citizens in any sense, and beyond this the possibility for meaningful participation in politics, was historically created through the

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[2] They pose themselves differently in stateless societies (Taylor 1982) and outside Europe (Sen 2004).

radical rupture of political institutions that depended on *exclusion* in various forms. It was not until 1945 that "democracy" became a dominant form of government even in western Europe (except Iberia), following 150 years of democratic, nationalist, socialist and feminist struggle against autocracy and fascism (Canfora 2006).

This historical experience has been read theoretically in various ways, which represent different positions towards the emerging fact of popular participation in politics, different strategies for making it possible, and different self-imposed limits.

(a) In the liberal view, once representative democracy has been attained, the problem is solved. As the theorists of "democratic elitism" (Bachrach 1980) present the case, popular political participation beyond occasional elections is a hindrance to effective technocratic government. Active citizenship, let alone social movements, are thus not to be encouraged.

 (b) There is a critical view of the limits of the supposedly "Enlightenment" model of citizenship, which calls for its extension to women, ethnic and other minorities etc., but treats this as essentially an intellectual problem for critique, rather than a political problem to be resolved from below (Jaggar 1983).

(c) In one radical perspective, ordinary people's participation in politics is circumscribed by their situation (lack of economic power, lack of education, restriction of the public sphere etc.; more recently, critiques of the media, consumerism and social isolation have been added) and so basically calls, in a "utopian" sense, for elites to create a world where citizen participation in politics is easier (Draper 1966).

(d) Finally, there is a perspective, present in Marxism and elsewhere, which holds that it is in attempting to participate in politics against the grain of established institutions – in other words, in social movements and revolutionary processes – that people *remake* themselves as political actors, learn to act collectively, develop themselves and so on; and that they often do this from a starting point of poverty, oppression and cultural stigma. In other words, there are substantial *differences* between what it means to be an active citizen who is "part of the system", or of "civil society", and what it means to be part of the *making of social movements*, whether in the short or long-term, and on whatever scale (Gramsci 1991).

Set in this context, the question of "personal sustainability in social movements" fits into a much broader, and longer, debate about how ordinary people can become, and remain, political agents. This question is massively contested both in its goals and as regards strategies. To theorise personal sustainability effectively, we need to take this bigger picture on board and observe that carving out the right to exist as social movements is something which, in most places and most times, has been fought for, in practice as well as theory.

Within the perspective of the *self-making* of social movements, personal sustainability is neither simply a precondition for movement participation nor a result of successful movements – in either case, movements would become impossible. Rather, it is something developed in the process of struggle; it is vulnerable to repression, inter-

group dynamics, and undermining outside of the directly political sphere; but when it is sufficiently robust, movements can be both possible and effective.

Personal sustainability in social movements, then, is a problem which is both historically variable and politically contested. It is the sharp end of struggles over power between established political elites and those who are (relatively) powerless; and what it entails empirically varies as a result of this: for example, as a result of different levels of repression, or the different economic, educational and other gains won by previous popular struggles (Davies and Flett 2009).

Contextualising emotions

From this perspective, "emotional sustainability" appears as a very situation-bound concept. Firstly, the question of whether emotions are *particularly* problematic in terms of sustaining movement participation is by no means a given. In fact this special issue illustrates the point well; despite its theme, most of the papers do not focus on emotional *sustainability* within movements, and a number highlight by contrast the *everyday*, routine nature of the emotions they study.

Secondly, the question of whether emotions can usefully be *separated* from other issues affecting movement participation is again highly context-bound. It is clear that it can be so where what is at stake is severe psychological damage such as childhood abuse,

depression, burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, and so on. Here emotions are indeed central to the ability to continue in movements (Cox 2009).

Nothing is gained, however, by a looser concept of emotional sustainability which lumps these situations together with questions of identity, discourse and display, and separates this bundle off as distinctively "emotional", from the other issues with which emotions have most commonly been entwined in social movements. Here Barker's perspective is useful:

"[T]here are no such 'things' as emotions. In grammatical terms, we should talk about them not as *nouns* but as *adjectives* or *adverbs*, denoting qualities of action, speech and thought… [W]e need to grasp ideas, speech and actions [together with their affective aspects] in the intersubjective contexts which they occur. That is, we need to grasp them as part of *dialogical* processes occurring in concrete historical settings" (2001: 176).

Thus fear, empowerment and mourning are typically bound up with conflict, everyday violence and repression. Emotional display is typically bound up with movement symbolism, culture and the framing of messages to the wider culture. Pride and shame are typically bound up with issues of caste, class, race and gender; and so on.

No doubt, for activists whose everyday social situations are not problematic, who do not face poverty or violence as a matter of course, and who live within cultures where the public expression of emotion is frowned upon, "emotional sustainability" can appear as a problem essentially divorced from others. But that context needs to be

named and explained; and it cannot usefully be generalised, historically or cross-nationally.

The value of a concept of personal sustainability, then, is to avoid taking any individual situation for granted, and to highlight a problematic whose variations, from one time, place and movement to another, tell us much about the nature of those movements and their contexts. We cannot know *a priori* what makes it possible for an Argentinian piquetera, an Italian trade unionist, a Native American activist or an Indian community leader to keep going; but finding out the answer to the question will tell us far more than assuming that their problems are all the same. One key requirement for the study of personal sustainability, then, is an attention to the comparative and historical dimensions of popular agency, and to the ebb and flow of struggle and repression.

II.   Dimensions of personal sustainability and the movement process

A diversity of literatures

There is no single, obvious literature dedicated to this topic. As Fillieule (2008: 2) notes, " the literature on political activism … has remained relatively silent on the maintenance of commitment and, what amounts to the same thing, defection". It is not that nothing is known, but rather that the problem is not "owned" by any single discipline. As we have seen, the problem raises central, essentially contested questions within a fundamental political debate. In this context, there is no scope for a cumulative approach to knowledge; rather, the definition of different literatures proceeds by forgetting others.

Part II of this article thus deals with a series of different literatures, each tackling different aspects of the question how people can become, and remain, active political agents. These literatures come from a range of political, theoretical and disciplinary traditions, each with its own characteristic focus. If a simple positivist approach to "the literature" is impossible, something can still be learned about the shape of the problem through paying attention to the different *questions* asked by different literatures.

Firstly, the long struggles of mass movements against oppression have generated, since the late nineteenth century, substantial theoretical traditions as well as bodies of practice geared directly towards the self-transformation of large numbers of people, working together, from a state of individualized fragmentation and passivity to one of powerful collective agency. These issues have been tackled by writers in or on Marxism

(Gramsci 1991, Barker 1997), socialism (Hoggart 1957, Williams 1961), feminism (Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright 1979), gay liberation (Blackwell and Seabrook 1988), the US Civil Rights movement (Robnett 1997), peasant resistance (Scott 1990), adult education (Mayo 1999), community organizing (Naples 1998), anarchism (Ward 1982, Bookchin 2005), radical subcultures (Hall and Jefferson 1990, McKay 1996) and movements of the precarious (Melucci 1989, Curcio 2006). Despite many differences, these approaches share a concern to analyse how subjectivities are constructed within dominant social structures (capitalism, patriarchy, colonization etc.), and how people come to change these, and their own subjectivities, collectively - in social movements and in political parties, in revolutions and in popular education. Personal sustainability, within these literatures, appears above all as something which is a process rather than a fixed state of affairs; and as something which has to be struggled for.

In the wake of these traditions, a range of radical psychologies for liberation have been developed, combining a more distinctly moral, aesthetic or psychological critique of the nature of "given" subjectivities with forms of more or less practical, individual-level analysis with a view to liberation. There are already elements of this in the young Marx (Fromm 1966, Geras 1983) and radical Romantics like Blake and Morris (Thompson 1976, 1993); it matures into a lasting form with the Marx / Freud debate from the mid-twentieth century (Marcuse 1964 etc., Fromm 1993 etc.) Subsequent authors have tackled the issue from the standpoint of the New Left and counter culture (Goodman 1962a, b; Cooper 1968), have brought in majority world experiences (Fanon 1963, Freire

2000) and have brought feminism into the equation (Ernst and Goodison 1981, Ryan 2002).

These various radical psychologies provide an important counterpoint to the subjectivities literatures in their focus on individual experience and psychological damage, and on the question of what immediate steps people can take to change their own lives. Personal sustainability appears here as involving a broad rejection of internalised relationships and ideologies of domination; and as something which entails a process of overturning these in our feelings, thoughts and actions. In this, the radical psychology literature overlaps with engaged spiritualities and radical religious traditions, which in various ways have provided psychological techniques for activists. Here we can distinguish radical tendencies within the existing religions of oppressed groups (e.g. the black churches of the American South in the 1950s or the Catholicism of the Latin American poor in the 1970s), whose focus is on transforming existing languages, institutions and techniques within processes of social and political liberation, from people already committed to movements, who consciously choose or create what are (for them) new religions in the hope of finding adequate languages, institutions and disciplines to make their struggles more personally sustainable (classic examples include Jamaican Rastafarianism and US black nationalist Islam).

To take one example, engaged Buddhism means something quite distinct as part of anti-colonial movements in traditionally Buddhist countries in Asia (Queen and King 1996, Aung San Suu Kyi 1997); as a convert religion for Indian dalits seeking exit from

caste-based oppression (Omvedt 2003, Kumar 2006); and as a source of spiritual techniques and personal transformation for western ecology and peace activists (Kaza and Kraft 2000, Rothberg 2006). Central to personal sustainability, in the literatures of engaged spirituality, are the questions of how people can connect personal ethics with political action, and how they can find adequate "techniques of the self" for dealing with conflict and trauma.

The literatures just discussed highlight the contrast between the given world experienced by the passive individual or group, and the ways in which people can transform *both* themselves and their world. A somewhat different set of literatures focus on what happens once people are already involved in this process.

Social movements research (della Porta and Diani 1999) has explored processes of mobilization, inclusion or exclusion and the construction of networks, all of which affect people's ability to become active in movements, and the role of movement organizations and cultures in these processes. Dimensions of personal sustainability researched include biographical availability (which includes issues of financial and time pressure, caring responsibilities and health), and supportive family and social networks. The most interesting aspects of this literature ask how social movements "do" the business of involving people. Thus there are literatures on how people become resisters (Thalhammer et al 2007), on the everyday emotions of ordinary activists (Cox 1999a, Roseneil 2000), on how movements "work" emotionally (Freeman and Levine 1984, Maguire 2002), on the process of personal transformation across social movements

(Jasper 1997, Nilsen 2006), on leadership in social movements (Barker, Johnson and Lavalette 2001), on empowerment and education (Conway 2006), and on the modes of transformation within contemporary social movements (de Sousa Santos 2006, Gordon 2008).

Less has been done on burn-out and drop-out (Fillieule 2005, 2008) and on non-participants generally (Cox 1999b). Similarly, the impact of conflict and trauma, of the threat of violence and other sanctions, and of intra-movement dynamics, are under-studied (della Porta and Reiter 1998). Personal sustainability within this literature, then, appears primarily as an aspect of organisation.

This movement-centred work overlaps with the psychological study of activism and burnout, which focusses on the role of identity (Harré 2007, Harré et al. 2009), the effects of group structures (Manning 2008), and the question of motivation (Simon et al. 2000, Hornsey et al. 2006). Here personal sustainability appears above all as a matter of individual life circumstances. A classic study is Downton and Wehr (1997), which develops a detailed (but situation-specific) model for sustained commitment.

A related set of literatures, using oral history and autobiographical approaches, focusses on individual cases, exploring who "does" movements and what it is like for them. These include accounts of particular movements (Fraser 1988, Tovey 2007) and generations (Hamon and Rotman 1988) as well as reflective individual accounts (Ryan 2006) and collections of interviews (Berlowe et al. 2002). Here personal sustainability

appears, naturally, as retrospective narrative – usually highlighting difficulties overcome rather than those forcing movement exit.

A particularly interesting literature is the "how-to" literature on movement sustainability, focusing on helping people beyond disempowerment and despair, on group process and dynamics, and on the construction of supportive movement cultures. This has a long tradition in community organizing (Hope, Timmel and Hodzi 1984; Plyler 2006) and in anarchism (Martin 2001, TRAPESE 2007), as well as in the peace and environmental movements (Shields 1991, Starhawk 1987, 1990). In this literature, personal sustainability appears as the focus of practical toolkits for movement organisers.

The emotional sustainability literature

The emotional sustainability approach focuses on activist subjectivities, identities and emotions from a practical, individual-level viewpoint, and in this way is most directly the inheritor of some forms of radical psychology and engaged spirituality, as well as therapeutic work done with the survivors of torture, genocide, and abuse. Nevertheless, there are important distinctions within it. Here I focus particularly on the activist-oriented literature on emotional sustainability.

Work such as. Wollmann (1985, 1992), Lester, Lamson and Wollman (1996), Wineman (2003), Jones (2004), Rettig (2005), Activist Trauma Support (2005, 2007), MacNair and PSR (2006), Barry and Dordevic (2007), Wells (2007) or Bernal et al. (2008) tackle issues

such as stress management, burnout, trauma support and recovery and sustainable activism, typically using a mixture of applied psychology and groupwork tools (see Cox 2009 for an overview). There is a contrast between the relatively gentle situations discussed in the purely academic literature on the topic and those discussed in this activist-oriented literature. Crucial to authors such as Activist Trauma Support, Barry and Dordevic, Bernal, Jones or Wineman is a focus on situations of severe trauma and extreme physical vulnerability, particularly the long-term effects of childhood abuse and the effects of repression. In this literature, then, personal sustainability appears as a matter of psychological survival and, ultimately, of psychological recovery (most sharply in the work of the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims). This highlights the need to name the context for our discussions, and to reflect on our concepts rather than to naturalise our local situations.

The diversity of the literature

This section of the article has sought to map out the different dimensions and moments in the movement process that need exploration in order to find out *which* issues are most significant, *to whom* they matter most, and *what*, if anything, movements can do about them. One thing that should be clear is the diversity of theoretical traditions and institutional settings that determine, for example, whether a particular issue is seen as an individual problem, to be tackled in terms of a contemporary Anglo-American self-help model; as an issue of social structure, to be tackled through large-scale collective

mobilization; as a spiritual issue; or as a problem for popular education. Underlying the diversity of the literature, in other words, is a diversity of voices, in different places and times, facing different problems, which raises the key sociological question "Who is saying this? And why do they say this rather than what other people say?"

Thus along with time and place, the analysis of personal sustainability also requires a close attention to social situation within a given historical context: to class, race and gender, but also to which movements and intellectual traditions people are located within. In the excursus that follows I want to shift gear and use a single example to tackle this question of "who speaks?"

III.   Excursus: "Hearts with one purpose alone?"

"Hearts with one purpose alone

Through summer and winter seem

Enchanted to a stone

To trouble the living stream.

The horse that comes from the road,

The rider, the birds that range

From cloud to tumbling cloud,

Minute by minute they change;

"Hearts with one purpose alone?"

A shadow of cloud on the stream

Changes minute by minute;

A horse-hoof slides on the brim,

And a horse plashes within it

Where long-legged moor-hens dive,

And hens to moor-cocks call.

Minute by minute they live:

The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice

Can make a stone of the heart…"

WB Yeats, "Easter 1916" (1926: 335-6)

A few months after the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, which heralded the start of a new phase of the nationalist movement that ultimately led to the breakup of the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland", the poet, dramatist and cultural nationalist WB Yeats published one of the most enduring, and ambiguous, of Irish political poems. Here I want to use one aspect of this poem as a way into broader issues of method in the study of personal sustainability.

In *Easter 1916*, Yeats reflected on the contrast between the "motley" of an everyday life with which (uncharacteristically) he identified himself and the *kind* of emotional self-management that he saw in the makers of the Rising and to which he ascribed their sustainability as activists. Having previously seen them as ordinary parts of the "casual comedy" of an ordinary city, he now came to see them as (in earlier verses) "transformed utterly", hardened into stone, set aside from normal emotion.

In all probability, his analysis was wrong, at least in relation to a figure like the Rising's military organiser, James Connolly, a far more "grounded", and rounded, personality than Yeats, and one whose last communication to his wife was that he'd lived a full life and a good one. If Connolly's life was problematic, it was because of being a manual labourer's son who held down a series of proletarian jobs before becoming a poorly-paid organiser for a range of political and union bodies, moving between three countries with his wife and six children in the face of poverty, organisational crises and repression, and not because of any difficulty in remaining politically committed (Nevin 2005; see also Morris 2008).

My interest here is in *why* Yeats got it wrong. His own life was in many ways psychologically fractured, and he found public controversy, let alone street politics, deeply problematic (Brown 2001). It is at this level unsurprising that he found the question of "how could people become such dedicated activists?" challenging (as too in his poem *On a political prisoner*). By contrast, there is no evidence that Connolly "made a stone of his heart", nor did he need to: as Morris and Thompson (2008) note, he was a

highly successful union organiser in three countries, constantly immersed in action. If anything, his commitment to an immediate insurrection arose out of despair after the defeat of the 1913 lockout, rather than the cold long-term view Yeats proposes (Newsinger 2004). Nor, despite occasional crotchetiness in internal communication, does he seem to have seen himself as having made "too long a sacrifice".

This contrast, between Yeats' perception of what aspects of sustainability might be problematic for particular activists, and what transpires from an examination of one of those activists' lives, highlights an important methodological point. Personal sustainability is a particular problem for those who cannot take it for granted; where it is a basic starting-point, less reflection is given to it (neither Connolly nor Gramsci consider the question systematically, for example). The result is that much that is said on the subject is said by people who are not very good at it (and I include myself in that number). An intellectual and political problem arises out of this, if we want to sustain movement activism in a long-term and effective way: how can we develop an account of personal sustainability which is useful for those who need it but grounded in effective practice?

A second thread follows from this question, which is that of social and cultural *difference:* Yeats, as a modernist, appreciates and celebrates the diversity of his world, with its beggars and revolutionaries, shopkeepers and aristocrats, peasants and beauties. By contrast, much of contemporary literature speaks with an undifferentiated "we", implicitly American or British and living in a world where "activism" is unusual

and emotion is absent from politics. To suggest that issues of personal sustainability might be fundamentally *different* for Connolly the proletarian Marxist and union organiser, for the oath-bound conspirators of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood who collaborated with him on the Rising, or for Yeats the cultural nationalist from the Protestant Ascendancy, for example, does not enter into the equation of this universalising literature. Any adequate analysis, however, must start by recognising that personal sustainability does not represent the same problem for different people, even (as here) within a single time and place. Apparently general accounts of personal sustainability which take their own situation for granted miss the point as much as does Yeats.

A third, and related, point is that personal sustainability is lived in *place*, in *history* and in *culture*. To practice politics in contemporary Dublin (or anywhere) is, in part, to live in the shadows of the past, or rather of interpretations of the past. To hold a public meeting outside the General Post Office, the centre of the 1916 Rising, as part of an anti-capitalist protest in 2004, or when, in 2005, Northern Irish loyalists attempt to march past it and are met by a working-class riot, are obvious examples of this. Locally aware activists move through a cityscape overlain by this history and its competing interpretations[3] – in a poem like "Easter 1916", a play like Sean O'Casey's *The plough and the stars*, an oral history like Terry Fagan's work on the Monto, or a song like Patrick

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[3] *Pace* Backus (2008), Yeats' interpretation has always been contested on the Irish left, whatever its impact on international literary criticism.

Galvin's "James Connolly" – shaping and contesting our sense of where we live, the world in which we act politically and what has gone before[4]. Conflict in general, and social movements and revolutions in particular, are episodic, changing, constantly unfamiliar – and hence constantly problematic situations. Myths, positive or negative, can tell us how to act, and reassure us or warn us in the face of unfamiliar choices. Place, culture and myth introduce a third dimension of diversity to the the question of method in discussing personal sustainability. We (as activists, or as researchers) do not know in the abstract. We know starting from who, and where, we are, even granted that these are complex and contradictory facts. Much of the intellectual challenge comes from the diverse lenses through which we view the problem[5].

This article tries to define a strategy founded in this sense of diversity. This means seeing personal sustainability as articulated through place, history and culture, and inseparable from them (part I); seeing it as organised very differently in different people's lives (part II); and recognising both Yeats' sense of sustainability as a fragile achievement and Connolly's taking of it for granted as positional understandings, ways of knowing from particular starting points (part III).

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[4] At a 2005 Mayday protest, Connolly's statue was given an "autonomist" mask, adding another twist to the contestation of history and interpretation.

[5] As an Irish activist, for example, I struggle with the proposition that emotions are somehow undervalued in politics; and jump straight to the question "for whom, and where, is this so?"

Part IV develops a typological approach as a counter-strategy to the unreflective sense of "we" that appears when we do not reflect on how our understandings of personal sustainability are conditioned by its salience or otherwise in our own lives, the dimensions which affect us most strongly, and the culture and history that we understand it through. This fits within a general perspective of critical rationalism, which sees both our own knowings and those of the various movement writers and academic researchers mentioned above as fundamentally *situated* - across the long historical and political timeframe of the last 200 years of movement struggles in Europe and elsewhere, across the enormous diversity of struggles, theoretical traditions and movement institutions involved in these processes, and in terms of the contested and situated nature of our own lives.

IV.   Typologies of personal sustainability in movements

If personal sustainability means different things in different movements, times and places, how can we structure these meanings usefully? I have argued that personal sustainability needs to be seen in comparative-historical terms, in terms of the ebb and flow of movement struggles and repression (part I); that it is marked by class, race and gender as well as by movements and traditions (part II); and that we need to be attentive to different ways of knowing (part III). I have also argued that when we do this we find that "emotional sustainability" is too narrow, and context-bound, a concept to be useful. With this in mind, I want to suggest three different typologies that may turn these arguments into manageable questions for research, exploring the place of movement participants in the social structure, the place of movement activism in their daily lives, and the place of movement cultures in the broader society. The point of these typologies is not to provide answers but rather to push at the boundaries of what we think we know – or typically take for granted – in order to expand them and map this broader landscape.

By focussing on activists' location within society, we can state the problem of "diversity" practically as a problem for research, rather than simply rhetorically. By looking at the way their "movement participation" fits into the rest of their lives, we can tackle the controversial notion of "activism" empirically, as a concept that is useful for some people and not others. Finally, by identifying the power or otherwise of movement cultures, we can situate our specific problems in a historical and comparative

framework. When we ask these questions, "personal sustainability" stops being a universalising and homogenising category and becomes a useful set of questions about how specific people, in a particular time and place, *do* a particular type of social movement – and what can be learnt from that experience that might be helpful to others in different situations. We can then also re-place emotions in their proper context: as aspects of social inequality, as the characteristic tensions of particular kinds of movement activity, and as aspects of activists' isolation or inclusion.

Movement participants and social inequality

Firstly, which dimensions of personal sustainability matter most to different participants in different social situations, times and places? As we have seen in part II, "personal sustainability" means very different things in different people's lives and movements. What conditions affect people's ability to become and remain involved in movements, and what resources can they draw on to do so?

The issues this raises are central to the social movements literature on initial mobilisation, commitment (Downton and Wehr 1997) and drop-out (Fillieule 2005). Above all, they are questions of inequality and difference, about individual movement participants' situation in their local social order:

- *Survival dimensions:* physical energy and vulnerabilities, physical and social dependence on others, caring and employment responsibilities and roles, living

and working circumstances as these support or hinder movement participation, family and personal networks, etc.

- *Movement-relevant resources:* economic, financial and time pressures and other effects of class, gender and race; access to the various means of communication, transport, organisation etc.; social expectations around participation in public life and associated cognitive / political skills, etc.

- *Emotional sustainability:* resources such as strong religious cultures, class or political ethics, supportive movement cultures; emotional management skills and supports; mental health and the impact of conflict and violence; etc.

These issues are important for people's ability to enter into social movement activity and to continue, recover from burn-out or repression, etc. They are also, of course, general features of social inequality which movements often seek to overcome (gendered division of labour, poverty and oppression, exploitative social relationships, etc.). They thus point not only to activists' individual situations but also to the ebb and flow of movement struggles, and so (for example) to levels of state violence, job security, the right to education or the strength of popular culture. They also connect directly to the question of the social embeddedness or marginality of activists, which will be discussed shortly.

Movement participation and everyday life

Secondly, where does people's participation in movements fit into their everyday lives? The discussion of Yeats and Connolly in part III suggests that our understanding of participation, and sustainability, is massively dependent on where we know these things from. So what does it mean to "be an activist", or is this even a useful phrase?

One starting point is the work of Lichterman (1996), who highlighted the difference between members of the (largely white and middle-class) US Greens, largely disconnected from their families, communities of origin and work colleagues, for whom "activism" was a special activity linking them as members of a chosen community, and participants in (largely Hispanic and black) environmental justice movements, for whom movement activity was not fundamentally separate from their roles as mothers (usually), neighbours, and members of a community.

In different ways, Naples (1998) and Bobel (2007) also make it clear that the disconnect between participation in social movements and "everyday normality" implied by setting off "activists" from "others" is not a universal fact, but locally and historically specific (Cox 1999c). In other words, we need to ask how movement participation is articulated with daily life, which is of course central in asking what makes it possible at all. There are at least four different situations:

- *Workplace-based movements* (e.g trade unions, peasant movements, some aspects of the European resistance, etc.) Here themes such as conflict with employers

and landlords, competing loyalties and workplace norms, instrumentalism vs pride in one's work, solidarity vs. scabbing and so on are particularly important.

- *Community-based movements* (e.g. in community organising, GLBT movements and many ethnic or religious movements). Here obvious personal sustainability issues are raised by the group's situation (e.g. as poor, oppressed and / or stigmatised) and the conflicting forms of organisation *within* a particular community (e.g. political vs religious).

- *Professional or full-time activism* (e.g. in NGOs, political parties, unions, political media etc.) Here there are particular problems with the management and routinisation of conflict in the public sphere, with work / time pressures, as well as workplace issues and intra-movement tensions.

- *"Leisure" activism* (outside people's working lives and geographical / ethnic / sexual community). This situation is clearly particularly poorly supported in terms of people's personal lives, and the issues of isolation vs supporting each other, voluntarism vs drop-out, etc. become particularly important.

Put like this, the key dimension of difference is the relative institutionalization or otherwise of movements and organizations. Other issues also vary along this dimension: for example, the different kinds of mental health challenge faced in the different settings, the different kinds of daily life experienced by participants (in terms of levels of work, violence, stigma etc.), the different levels of hostility and repression participants face (and its different sources), the different kinds of skill participants can

draw on (or have to invent), etcetera. Once we ask whether someone's movement participation is primarily a job, an identity, part of their everyday culture or a response to their working life, we are highlighting the very different issues that arise in sustaining these different kinds of activity. We are also, of course, pointing to the dimension of inequality just discussed, and to the relative strength of movements, discussed below.

Movement cultures in the wider society

Finally, where does movement participation "fit" in the wider society? Part I suggested that "active citizenship" was a contested achievement: at the individual level, how far are movement participants isolated or supported in the rest of their lives? Does it entail ongoing conflict with parents, school, religious community, workmates, partners, neighbours, or is it accepted and even a source of pride and status? These questions parallel long-standing distinctions within the sociology of new religious movements between converts and those born into a religion, and the different problems they face. This parallel appears in both Fillieule (2008) and the seminal work of McAdam (1989). McAdam, for example, relies on a contrast between a new movement subculture and "mainstream society", with which movement milieux are expected to be in tension, both politically and in members' contrasting affiliations.

McAdam, however, is studying the *white* activists from the North who took part in the 1964 Freedom Summer project; he might have found quite a different story had he

focussed on the long-standing identities involved in Southern *black* participants in the Civil Rights Movement (Robnett 1997, Horton and Freire 1990) who were often embedded in traditions of family, church, union or NAACP resistance.

This assumption that activists are isolated individuals, born into but setting themselves apart from a mainstream culture, thus needs to be rethought as only one possible situation, to be contrasted (say) with the "pillarised" subcultures common in much of 20th century European politics (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). This is a key historical / comparative dimension to the context of movement participation, relating to the state of struggle within a particular society at a given point in time:

- *Long-standing movement cultures*, stretching back over generations, with activists often "born into" those movements, or with well-established mechanisms for recruiting, training and supporting participants (e.g. Northern Irish republicanism, the Italian left, etc.).

- *Classes or cultures* which are essentially supportive of movement participation, (e.g. sections of the pre-Thatcher British working class; some US black communities; or some religious groups such as the Quakers).

- *Moments of generational transformation*, where despite apathy or hostility from parents and older, more established institutions within the class or culture of origin, large numbers of young adults become involved in movement waves together (e.g. the first-generation proletarians in the French and Italian factory struggles of the 1960s and 1970s).

- *Newly formed, or essentially marginal, movements* which are at odds with family expectations, cultural context and broader class organisation, and with their peers, so that participants have to make significant efforts to create supportive movement cultures for themselves and in effect become sub- or counter cultural in the process (e.g. animal rights activism).

This dimension is linked to issues such as the emotional repertoires and expectations developed within particular local, regional, class, ethnic, religious or movement cultures; the different available individual "roles" within these and the different "readings" of political participation (as morality, personality, instrumental, etc.); the emotional dynamics and leadership structures characteristically developed, and the relationships expected between "class" and "party", "movement" and "culture", "political" and "military" and so on. At its simplest, it matters immensely to personal sustainability whether movement participation is an expectation, a challenge to one's culture, one possible choice among others or a family inheritance. These questions in turn are of course tied to social inequality and to the issue of how the movement is institutionalised within daily life.

Resituating movement participation

These three different typologies – of personal and social inequality, of the articulation of movements with daily life, and of the relationship between movement participants and the "rest of their life" – can help disentangle the specifics of personal sustainability for

movement participants, which always exist *in* this particular life, movement and place rather than in the abstract. Rather than assuming a particular set of conditions (as much of the emotional sustainability literature does) or rhetorically calling for diversity, rejecting "activism" *a priori* and so on, we can then ask concrete questions for research (or for political strategising) about the conditions under which people are participating in specific movements. Such questions have long been asked within social movements themselves. Within Marxism, for example, the typologies just outlined appear as the relationship between class position and political potential; as the question of organising strategy; and in debates on the relative importance of organised left cultures, newly mobilised groups and "hidden histories".

It should be clear from this example that a typology is not a theory, but rather clears the ground for theorising. Given the three intellectual problems identified in this article: the essentially contested nature of theories of popular participation (part I), the variety of literatures relating to different aspects of movement sustainability (part II), and the methodological challenges involved in thinking about the question (part III), the idea of a grand synthesis of "the literature" is neither feasible nor desirable. The point of typologies, and more broadly of a heuristic concept such as "personal sustainability", is, rather, to force us to question what we are talking about, who we are talking about, and how we are talking about them. In that sense, the purpose of this article is to strike a sharp blow at unreflective and what are often *de facto* positivist approaches, which deduce a general theory of emotional sustainability on the basis of local conditions that

are taken for granted rather than accounted for on a broader comparative-historical perspective.

Conclusion

This paper has explored various approaches to personal sustainability in social movements with the aim of undermining the power of the taken-for-granted, the here-and-now and our own specific problems. There are practical reasons for this: the problems we are most aware of as activists are the ones we are most likely to be doing something about already; while the most challenging issues of personal sustainability are those preventing other people from becoming politically active at all. I have argued that we have to think diversity, of situation and experience, rather than uniformity: for people to overcome passivity, isolation and defeat and transform the world they live in, they need to build alliances *across* their different movements, languages and institutions; and they need to find ways of supporting and learning from each other *despite* the immense diversity in the problems they are faced with. Finally, if we can see movement participation as *situated* – within structures of inequality, within the organisation of everyday life, and within the broader processes of movement struggles – we can explore participants' struggles with personal sustainability more effectively, and hopefully say something genuinely useful which will enable them – us – to keep going.

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