

Part One

Networking the Political



D2



Chapter One

Place and the Relational Construction of Political Identities

On 8 March 1792, Thomas Hardy, a Scottish shoemaker who was the first secretary of the London Corresponding Society, wrote to a prominent Sheffield abolitionist, Reverend Bryant. He addressed Bryant as follows:

Hearing from my friend, Gustavus Vassa, the African, who is now writing memoirs of his life in my house, that you are a zealous friend to the abolition of that cursed traffic, the Slave Trade, I infer from that circumstance, that you are a zealous friend to freedom on the broad basis of the Rights of Man. I am fully persuaded that there is no man, who is, from principle an advocate for the liberty of the black man, but will zealously support the rights of the white man, and vice versa. (Hardy, 1976: 45–6)

The LCS was the ‘most controversial and most famous’ of the various reform movements that emerged in Britain in the 1790s (Thale, 1983: xv). It has been understood as part of a distinctively English tradition of radical dissent. E. P. Thompson located the LCS as part of an ‘English agitation, of impressive dimensions, for an English democracy’ (Thompson, 1968: 111). This first piece of correspondence of the LCS gives a markedly different sense of the constitution of the political identities and practices of the LCS. This letter can also be used to question many dominant assumptions about the relations between space, place and political activity.

The letter demonstrates that contacts between the LCS and reform societies in Sheffield were facilitated by Gustavus Vassa. He is better known today as Olaudah Equiano, the ex-slave, free black and anti-slavery activist whose memoirs *The Interesting Life of Gustavus Vassa* became a key abolitionist text (Equiano, 1995). Equiano’s life traversed the Atlantic. He is a prominent example of what Ira Berlin has defined as an Atlantic creole (Berlin, 1998; Carretta, 2005: 367).⁵ Berlin defines Atlantic creoles as

having 'by their experiences and sometimes by their person . . . become part of the three worlds that came together in the Atlantic littoral. Familiar with the commerce of the Atlantic, fluent in its new languages, and intimate with its trade and cultures, they were cosmopolitan in the fullest sense' (Berlin, 1998: 17). Equiano explicitly embraced a cosmopolitan identity, defining himself as a 'citizen of the world' (Carretta, 2005: 367).

The relationships between Hardy and Equiano, and between activists in London and Sheffield, emphasize that from the outset of the formation of the London Corresponding Society this London-based political organizing was produced through negotiating connections that stretch beyond London. They locate the formation of the LCS as part of the 'irreducible social heterogeneity and transnationalism of the cultures of anti-slavery' (Fischer, 2004: 226; see also Gilroy, 1993b: 10–11). Further, it emphasizes that these connections shaped the notions of political community, practice and identity adopted by the LCS in significant ways. This opens up a more generous, recursive sense of the ongoing relations between place-based political activity and geographies of connection. This chapter seeks to make an intervention in the understandings of subaltern spaces of politics through engaging with these dynamic relations. I argue that adopting a relational account of place-based political activity as always already intervening in the ongoing construction of flows and routes of political activity, opens up important possibilities for understanding political identity and agency. These implications have not been fully worked through. In particular, such a relational account of place opens up important resources for understanding the dynamism of subaltern spaces of politics, which continue to be theorized as less geographically networked/dynamic than capital flows etc./ elites (Cox, 1998; Escobar, 2001; Harvey, 1989, 1996, 2000; Harvey and Swyngedouw, 1993; Swyngedouw, 2004).

The first section contests accounts which construct resistance politics as localized and working within limits circumscribed by capitalist social relations (see Harvey, 1996: 380; Escobar, 2001; Miller, 2000). It argues that there are important histories and geographies of dynamic networked subaltern spaces of politics and uses the term 'counter-global networks' to foreground these forms of networked subaltern political activity. I then explore the insurgent spatial imaginaries of C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins*, arguing that it is a neglected intervention in the relations between space and politics. The chapter draws on this work to construct a contested, dynamic and ongoing account of the relations between geographies of connection and subaltern political identities. The final section of the chapter draws out the implications of this approach for place-based political activity. It argues that adopting a relational account of place-based politics can foreground the 'inventiveness' of subaltern political activity. The chapter concludes by outlining key aspects of the relational construction of militant

forms of place-based political activity, what Raymond Williams termed 'militant particularisms'.

Spaces of Subaltern Politics and the Making of Counter-Global Networks

In his book *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* David Harvey makes a key historical claim regarding the geographies and histories of radical struggles in Britain. He argues that socialism in Britain has always been 'powered by the sort of militant particularisms' that Raymond Williams discussed in his writings about Wales and that Harvey encountered in relation to the struggles over the Cowley car plant in East Oxford (Harvey, 1996: 39). Harvey characterizes these socialisms as being rooted and cemented primarily through 'local bonds' (Harvey, 1996: 23, 33). Williams used the term 'militant particularisms' to describe precisely the militant 'place-bound politics arising out of the experience of class solidarities and gender relations' formed through particular struggles in particular places (Harvey, 2001: 176). These concerns were shaped by his engagement with the militant politics of areas like the mining valleys of South Wales. For Williams, there was a 'decisive difference between militant particularism and militant socialism'. He argued that militant socialism 'necessarily' depended on having 'a political movement at the centre, a broad strategic aim to transform society' (Williams, 1979: 380). He celebrated this move as the 'unique and extraordinary character of working-class self-organization' through which militant particularist struggles and identities were connected 'to a general struggle' (Williams, 1989: 115).

Harvey and Williams construct place-based struggles as the products of 'fixed, local places' or the bounded 'origins' of political struggles (Mitchell, 2002: 69; Harvey, 2000: 241). Harvey follows Williams in seeking to examine how 'ideals forged out of the affirmative experience of solidarities in one place get generalized and universalized as a working model of a new form of society that will benefit all of humanity' (Harvey, 1996: 32). In this way his account is structured by a constitutive separation between 'the militant particularisms of lived lives' and the 'struggle to achieve sufficient critical distance and detachment to form global ambitions' (Harvey, 1996: 44). Militant particularisms, here, become the already constituted building blocks needed to form a universal global ambition (Harvey, 1996: 44). This position conflates two very different binaries: local-global and particular-universal. It produces topographies of political engagement where the local is elided with the particular. The result is that universalism becomes defined against the practices of local struggles. This makes it impossible for local

political activity to break out of this prison-house of particularism in ways which shape political imaginaries. This becomes left to those 'intellectuals' capable of abstraction and who are positioned 'outside' of the practice of local struggles.⁶

This counter-position of space and place, and their association with the 'universal' and the 'local', serves to marginalize the agency and dynamism of subaltern forms of political activity (see Gibson-Graham, 2002; Massey, 1999, 2005). As I argued in the introduction, this counter-position has powerfully structured David Harvey's work (Harvey, 1989: 236; see also Harvey and Swyngedouw, 1993; Smith, 1993). Thus Castree has commented such a position counterposes 'the seemingly irresistible gales of capital's creative destruction to the limited means that place-based workers have at their disposal to make their own history and geography' (Castree, 2000: 275). The spaces of politics of subaltern activity, then, have been defined negatively as the settled opposite of the dynamism and networked spatialities of capital.

The contention of this book is that this way of constructing the spatialities of subaltern politics, both in the present and the past, is deeply damaging to radical political imaginaries. Positioning forms of place-based politics as 'always already' negotiating flows and routes of political activity challenges rigid counter-positions of place-based political activity and national or global political ambition. This opens up more generous possibilities for accounts of place-based political activity. As the example of Equiano and Hardy's friendship suggests, their intersection through place-based political organizing in London contributed to explicit notions of multi-ethnic 'political community', though these were framed by exclusionary gendered constructions of politics (see chapter 4). The formation of the LCS was shaped by practices where it makes little sense to make such a rigid distinction between the 'local' and the 'universal'. The routes of political activity that came together through the place-based political activity of the LCS contributed to multi-ethnic notions of political community, and linked struggles for political liberty in Britain, with anti-slavery politics (though see chapter 4 for the fragmentary and contested character of these associations). This permits an account of militant particularist action, not as the product of a bounded politics of place, but as the product of sets of relations and as productive of 'multi-ethnic conceptions of humanity' (Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000: 352).

These resources for understanding the dynamic generative forms of place-based political activity are undermined through the counter-positions of local and global, particularism and universal, that structure Harvey's account. They are further undermined by the pervasive tendency to counterpose the spatial politics of the past and present. Conceptions of the spaces of the political as the products of flows and networks have become

increasingly influential both in geography and across the broader social sciences (see Amin, 2002, 2004; Connolly, 1995; Hardt and Negri, 2001, 2004; Latour, 2004; Marston et al., 2005; Massey, 2004, 2005, 2007). The prominence of vibrant forms of transnational opposition to neo-liberal globalization has also emphasized the redundancy of bounded understandings of political activity. These bodies of work have forged a number of significant insights through moving beyond bounded and nation-centred geographies of the political. They have positioned places as products of diverse forms of connection and relations. They have challenged scalar accounts of spatial relations which have emphasized boundaries between different spatial scales, marginalized the flows which constitute subaltern spaces of politics, and counterposed space and place in problematic ways (see Featherstone, 2003; Marston et al., 2005). Finally, they have situated political activity as part of the ongoing constitution of networks, rather than something seen as formed before interventions in political activity (Braun and Disch, 2002).

There is a tension, however, in the ways that these relations between space, politics and transnational networks have been conceptualized. The constitution of the spaces of the political through flows and networks is often figured as something that is an 'entirely' new development. A networked and transnational present is frequently counterposed with a spatially more settled, and simpler, past (see Cohen and Rai, 2000). Hence, Rogers and colleagues argue, 'the once clear-cut separation between the domestic sphere of national life and the external or international sphere has largely broken down' (Rogers et al., 2001: 1–2). Ash Amin has argued that the rise of transnational flows and networks 'no longer' allows 'a conceptualization of place politics in terms of spatially bound processes and institutions' (Amin, 2004: 33). These accounts, then, suggest an ontological disjuncture between contemporary forms of political activity that need to be theorized in terms of networks and flows and past forms of politics that can be adequately understood in terms of 'spatially bound processes and institutions'.

Such ontological disjunctures structure the iconoclastic political theorizing of Hardt and Negri in *Empire* and *Multitude*. Hardt and Negri use the term 'multitude' to suggest new forms of radical political collectives. They argue that the multitude is constituted through smooth space, in contrast to the forms of 'traditional social organizations' such as labour unions (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 136–7). This disjuncture between past and present forms of organizing temporalizes different forms of spatial politics. Thus, for Hardt and Negri, the multitude forms not a situated politics in particular places, which can connect up to become part of broader networks or cycles of struggles, but a total resistance to Empire, where different forms of global sovereignty are pitted against each other (Allen, 2003: 89). This

account of the multitude is dependent on a notion of 'smooth space'. This produces a reductive account of the spatial politics of the past through ignoring the diverse connections that have made up past struggles. This in turn produces a limited account of the spatial politics of emerging resistances to neo-liberal globalization. Thus they argue that place-based movements like the Zapatistas are specific and 'based on immediate regional concerns in such a way as they could in no respect be linked together as a globally expanding chain of revolt' (Hardt and Negri, 2001: 54). This ignores the generative relations between place-based struggles and transnational networks. The solidarity networks inspired by the Zapatistas, for example, were a key formative influence in the emergence of counter-global networks of resistance to neo-liberalism (Olesen, 2005). These were also related to histories and geographies of international solidarity in the region, such as the coffee brigades to support the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

Placing ontological distinctions between the spatial politics of past and present struggles does work, then, in both theoretical and political terms. Theoretically, it sets restrictive limits on resources for what Amin has described as the project of developing a networked vocabulary of the political (Amin, 2004: 38). It closes down a focus on the different legacies of past political cultures on the spatial politics of the present, such as the important traditions, subjectivities and repertoires of solidarity associated with internationalisms. It makes it harder to recover and account for dynamic subaltern spaces of politics. In political terms this marginalization of subaltern agency in the past risks feeding a sense of dispossession of subaltern agency in the present. This is one of the effects of constructions of globalization as solely the product of networked neo-liberal actors able to outwit subaltern resistances trapped in the confines of particular places (see Castells, 1997: 354; Harvey, 1989: 236; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Asserting that there have been spatially stretched forms of resistance to globalizing processes in the past can counter this dispossession of subaltern agency.

Diverse bodies of work have challenged this tendency to counterpose the spatial politics of the past and present and offer resources for foregrounding forms of subaltern agency constituted through spatially stretched forms of resistance. Post-colonial theorizing, for example, has challenged dominant understandings of key terms of debate such as cosmopolitanism (Appiah, 1998). Cosmopolitanism has often been theorized as a bounded product of 'Western liberal democratic universalism' (Holton, 2002: 153). Recent scholarship, however, has emphasized how such forms of universalism are often merely forms of particularism which generalize Western experiences and give the pretence that they are universal (Chakrabarty, 2000; Hall, 2002). This marginalizes the ways in which forms of interna-

tionalism and democracy emerged at the intersections of West/non-West actors such as the connections between Hardy and Equiano (see Slater, 2002). Through discussion of ‘The Universal Races Congress’ held in London in 1911, Holton has drawn attention to the existence of a ‘plurality of forms of cosmopolitanisms’ which he argues are ‘an important conceptual extension to our understanding of intercultural encounters and conflicts within the global arena’ (Holton, 2002: 167). This exposes ‘the Eurocentricity of the older unitary Western cosmopolitanisms’ and foregrounds the multiple geographies through which different forms of cosmopolitanism are constituted. This permits a focus on the diverse forms of political identity and agency constituted through different forms of cosmopolitanisms.

Holton’s work dislocates an association of cosmopolitanism with elite groups. As Vertovec and Cohen note, a ‘frequent attack on cosmopolites is that cosmopolitanism is only available to an elite – those who have the resources necessary to absorb other cultures’ (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002: 5; see also Calhoun, 2002). In a temporalizing move, however, they argue that this has ‘historically, been true’, with the majority of the population living ‘their lives within the cultural space of their nation or ethnicity’. This temporalization of difference serves to marginalize important forms and traditions of what might be termed subaltern cosmopolitanism (see also Gidwani, 2006; Pollack, forthcoming). It leaves little space for the cosmopolitan forms of identity produced by ‘Atlantic creoles’ like Equiano. It marginalizes forms of subaltern cosmopolitanism produced in cities like London in the eighteenth century which were an important context to the multi-ethnic political cultures of the LCS. Further, it ignores the kinds of unruly, heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan social relations produced through sites such as the ship in the early modern Atlantic (Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000: 151).

Foregrounding these multiple geographies of cosmopolitanism challenges the idea that historical forms of cosmopolitanism were solely the preserve of elite groups. This suggests the importance of powerful social and political movements like pan-Africanism, which contested globalizing processes such as colonialism through the formation of spatially stretched alliances and political networks. The geographies shaped through these movements have been foregrounded by Brent Hayes Edwards in his account of the radical black internationalisms constructed by the political activists George Padmore and Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté in the 1930s. Edwards notes that ‘figures such as Padmore and Kouyaté’ were ‘mobile not just in their own colonial spheres, but moreover among metropolitan “centers”, within each other’s circuits of activity (Padmore moving from a British colony in the Caribbean to the US, and then not just to London but to

Moscow, Hamburg and Paris; Kouyaté moving from one French colony to another and then to Paris and to Moscow).’ He argues that these forms of black radicalism formed counter-logics, an ‘unruly pattern of flows and alliances’ (Edwards, 2003: 245).

Such unruly ‘flows and alliances’ are central to this book, which seeks to interrogate the geographies of these counter-logics. I use the term ‘counter-global’ to account for forms of subaltern politics which are constituted through ‘unruly patterns of flows and alliances’ and formed through antagonistic relations to dominant ways of generating ‘globalization’, whether these be mercantile capitalist, imperial or neo-liberal. The term evokes forms of political activity which have contested dominant forms of globalization in both past and present, but have eschewed, challenged or exceeded bounded forms of the local. It deliberately echoes Gramsci’s notion of counter-hegemony which signalled forms of resistance constituted through connections and articulations between unlike actors (see Gramsci, 1971).⁷ This book attempts to foreground the dynamic spatialities produced through these alternative ways of generating global networks. In contrast to Hardt and Negri and other authors who have argued for a smooth space of flows, it situates these counter-global networks as situated, partial and contested (see also Bunnell and Nah, 2004).

Edwards’s work on Padmore and Kouyaté is a significant challenge to ways of thinking about the subaltern politics of the past. It suggests the vibrant, powerful forms of subaltern cosmopolitanism which constituted movements like pan-Africanism. Paul Gilroy has argued that pan-Africanism offers a profound challenge to dominant understandings of the relations between place, space and the political ‘because it overflows from the confining structures of the nation-state and comprehensively queries the priority routinely attached to those structures in historical and sociological explanations of social and cultural change’ (Gilroy, 1993b: 151). Debates on cosmopolitan democracy and radical democratic theory, however, have ignored the experiments with transnational organizing and radical democratic practices constituted through pan-Africanisms (Held, 1995; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). As James Tyner has argued, debates in political geography and on nationalism remain ‘woefully ignorant of pan-African nationalism and other African diasporic movements’ (Tyner, 2004: 343). The forms of oppositional knowledge produced through pan-Africanism don’t just challenge dominant, nation-centred, explanations of social and cultural change. They offer important resources for rethinking the ways in which space, politics and the geographies of connection might be understood. The next section seeks to engage with the ways in which these concerns are figured in C. L. R. James’s *Black Jacobins*, one of the ‘great inaugural texts of the discourse of anti-colonialism’ (Scott, 2004: 9).

The Black Jacobins, Subaltern Agency and Geographies of Connection

The Black Jacobins is one of the few texts associated with pan-Africanism that has pressed on debates about space and politics. A powerful retelling of the story of the Haitian revolution, it makes a radical break with the 'Western' canon of social and political theory, and particularly with the Marxist tradition James was writing in, by centring Atlantic slavery as a key process in the constitution of world history. The book is insistent in viewing slaves as active in the making of their own history and in asserting the slaves' historical agency. This is developed through an account of Toussaint Louverture, one of the political and military leaders of the revolution in St Domingue. James wrote out of a frustration with depictions of black people as historical victims (Hall and James, 1996: 21). Instead, he sought 'to show that black people were able to make historical progress, they were able to show how a revolution was made' (James cited in Hall, 2003: 32). In this way his account was an attempt to provide a 'usable past' for the anti-colonial struggles of the mid-twentieth century.

This 'usable past' emerged from a set of dynamic, radical forms of transnational political practice. James was shaped by the work of Trinidadian intellectuals like J. J. Thomas, whose book *Froudacity*, a major critique of the Oxford historian J. A. Froude, who dismissed the capacity of the West-Indian people for self-rule, was a key intellectual influence on James (Cudjoe, 1997: 120, 124; see also Hall and Schwarz, 1998). *The Black Jacobins* was written while James was living in Nelson, Lancashire, with the West-Indian cricketer Learie Constantine, and reporting on the Lancashire League for the *Manchester Guardian*. James notes that his involvement in the culture of the Independent Labour Party in Nelson challenged the previously 'rather abstract' character of his 'labour and socialist ideals' (James, 1994: 119). His political outlook was decisively shaped by his involvement in the international Trotskyist movement. His research in the Parisian archives, where he met the Haitian military historian Colonel Nemours, was partly funded by his Nelson friends and comrades, Harry and Elizabeth Spencer, to whom the book was dedicated (James, 1989: v–vii). The book took on its own transnational trajectories, influencing various anti-colonial intellectuals and activists in different space-times (see Hall and James, 1996: 22). Finally, James produced a play out of the research for his book which was performed in London through the prestigious Stage Society in 1936. The play was written and produced in 'part as a protest against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935' (Kaplan, 1998: 56). Paul Robeson played Toussaint Louverture, and the production was significant for bringing together two important communist and Trotskyist figures, as

well as for casting a black lead actor (James, 1980: 256–64; see also Duberman, 1996: 196–7; Fischer, 2004: 246, 349n7).

These routes of transnational political activism shape the book's concern with the interconnections through which the Haitian revolution was made. The book does not view the slaves' agency in isolation. James foregrounds the relations of their struggles to the French revolution, famously noting how the slave revolt in St Domingue dislocated and challenged the notions of liberty formed in the French revolution. As James argues:

The blacks were taking part in the destruction of European feudalism begun by the French revolution, and liberty and equality, the slogans of the revolution, meant far more to them than to any Frenchman. That was why in the hour of danger Toussaint, uninstructed as he was, could find the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau, and Raynal . . . Toussaint could defend the freedom of blacks without reservation. (James, 1989: 198)

Central to James's account of the Haitian revolution, then, is a telling of how the French and Haitian revolutions were co-produced. This eschews and challenges Eurocentric geographies and histories. The geographies of connection posed in the text fundamentally dislocate the idea that the Haitian revolution was some kind of mere translation of French revolutionary ideals to the 'periphery'. This section interrogates the importance of these geographies of connection, signalling their importance by engaging with David Scott's reading of *The Black Jacobins*, which through its focus on narrative construction obscures the insurgent, imaginative geographies which structure James's book.

Scott's political and theoretical project is to develop a way of using *The Black Jacobins* to speak to the post-colonial present. He does this through a brilliant close reading of the different forms of narrative construction in the 1938 and 1963 editions of the book. The second edition of the book includes the 'inspiring' essay entitled 'From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro', which 'dramatizes the history of the Caribbean in its world-historical personifications, from Toussaint to Fidel' (Schwarz, 2003a: 40; James, 1989: 391–418). Scott's reading rests, however, on the significance of 'seven paragraphs' inserted in the second edition at the start of chapter 7 which form 'a very profound meditation on tragedy' (Scott, 2004: 11; James, 1989: 289–92). For Scott, the insertion of these paragraphs changes the dramatic and political structure of the book. It dislocates the 'romantic' construction of Toussaint and the history of the Haitian revolution developed in the first edition, replacing it with a construction of Toussaint as a tragic character. Through 'an explicit consideration of the tragedy of Toussaint Louverture' Scott argues these paragraphs bear on 'the larger tragedy of colonial enlightenment' (Scott, 2004: 11).

Scott's concern with the narrative structure of the book emerges from his contention that the 'relation between pasts, presents and futures is a relation constituted in narrative' (Scott, 2004: 45). Through temporalizing the construction of narrative, Scott excludes concern with how the connections between places are figured through James's work. Edward Said has written evocatively of how in *The Black Jacobins* 'events in France and in Haiti criss-cross and refer to one another like voices in a fugue'. He continues: 'James's narrative is broken up as history dispersed in geography, in archival sources, in emphases both Black and French' (Said, 1993: 338). Said's account of the book is more suggestive of the importance of geography to the text. Neither Scott nor Said, however, interrogate the significance of the geography through which the narrative is structured. This geography becomes something that the history is merely 'dispersed' through, a backdrop to the dynamic events of the book. These approaches do not allow any commentary on the significance of James's intervention in producing this particular insurgent, imaginative geography of the Haitian revolution. These dynamic geographies of connection are seen as just there to be uncovered. The significance that James gives to these forms of connection and how these connections actively shape his retelling of the story of the Haitian revolution, however, are integral to the politicized usable past this account creates. Evoking these dynamic geographies of connection allows a more generative, slightly more optimistic, if more modest politics, than that envisioned through Scott's focus on 'tragedy'.

Bill Schwarz has argued that James was exceptional 'in regarding the peoples of the Caribbean as a modern people. He understood from early on that the Middle Passage and the plantation were located at the centre of the making of the modern world' (Schwarz, 2003a: 49). Integral to this understanding of the Caribbean was James's project to 'place ourselves in history' (James, 1969: 45). For James, 'placing ourselves in history' meant decisively rupturing the geographies through which 'history' was constituted. One of the key achievements of *The Black Jacobins* is to dislocate and challenge the story of the bounded emergence of Western civilization. This was not only a challenge to imperialist historians like Froude. It also decisively challenged the 'model at the centre of the most developed parts of Marxist theory, which suggested that capitalism evolved organically from its own transformations' (Hall, 1992: 280). The political and theoretical project of *The Black Jacobins* is completely dependent on this challenge to the dominant geographies through which 'history' was constituted.

James does not merely 'place' the Haitian revolution as a key event in world history which signals the agency and revolutionary potential of black political subjects. James draws attention to the dynamic geographies of connection between the French and Haitian revolutions. His attention to these connections has been marginalized in recent debates. Thus, Homi

Bhabha emphasizes Toussaint's failure to challenge and dislocate the limits of the notions of liberty forged through the French revolution: 'What do we make of the figure of Toussaint . . . at the moment when he grasps the tragic lesson that the moral, modern disposition of mankind enshrined in the sign of the Revolution, only fuels the archaic racial factor in the society of slavery?' (Bhabha, 1994: 244). For Bhabha, Toussaint becomes a 'victim' of the French revolution's failure to decisively end slavery. Scott, similarly, positions Toussaint as a 'tragic subject of a colonial modernity to which he was, by force, conscripted'. This 'tragedy inheres in the fact that inescapably modern as he is obliged by the modern conditions of his life to be, he must seek his freedom in the very technologies, conceptual languages, and institutional formations in which modernity's rationality has sought his enslavement' (Scott, 2004: 168).

'Modernity' here is constituted through a geography that seems to dispossess Toussaint of any role in constituting it. James, however, provides a more multifaceted and generative account of the connections between the slave revolt in St Domingue and the French revolution. Crucially, for James, they are *both* transformed through the political events of St Domingue. This dynamic sense of interconnection between subaltern politics in St Domingue and the French revolution is integral to the structure of the book: chapters 4 and 5 are titled 'San Domingo Masses Begin' and 'Paris Masses Complete'. This not only positions the transnational geographies of slavery as central to an account of modern politics. It also profoundly disrupts an imaginative geography whereby political activity in the 'periphery' is positioned in a subordinate way to political activity in the 'metropolis'. James's text thus offers important resources for what Slater has described as the challenge of thinking about 'relations across space' which focus 'on the mutually constitutive nature of west-non-west interactions' (Slater, 1998: 669).

James's play, based on his research for the book, foregrounds these connections. It contains the following piece of dialogue:

ORLEANS: Tell me something. How is the Revolution in France going?
 MARAT: The white slaves in France heard that the black slaves in San Domingo had killed their masters and taken over the houses and the property. They heard that we did it and they follow us.
 (James, 1992: 74)

Marat, an aide to the Haitian general Dessalines, powerfully turns upside down the sense that the slaves in St Domingue are not active in constituting transnational connections. By asserting that it is the French that follow the black slaves, not vice versa, James creates a subversive rupturing of

dominant geographical imaginations. It demonstrates that these connections were as important for French subaltern politics as they were for the constitution of Caribbean political identities. It creates an inspiring and unusual form of 'usable past' where 'black' and 'white' subaltern politics are seen as connected and part of the same struggles through shared opposition to 'slavery'. This unsettles both dominant narratives of black nationalisms and the usable pasts created by the radical historians of the New Left, structured as they were by English cultural nationalisms (Gilroy, 1993a; Linebaugh, 1986).

For Scott, this usable past has limited 'resonance' with the present conjuncture. He argues that the future which 'constituted James's horizon of expectation (the emergence of nation-state sovereignty, the revolutionary transition to socialism)' and which he anticipated in *The Black Jacobins*, 'we live today as the bleak ruins of our postcolonial present'.

Our generation looks back so to put it, through the remains of a present that James and his generation looked forward to (however contentiously) as the open horizon of a possible future; James's erstwhile future has elapsed in our disappearing present. But if this is so, if the longing for anti-colonial revolution, the longing for the overcoming of the colonial past that shaped James's horizon of expectation in *The Black Jacobins* is not one that we can inhabit today, then it may be part of our task to set it aside and begin another work of reimagining other futures for us to long for, for us to anticipate. (Scott, 2004: 45)

The 'problem space' that characterizes the present conjuncture is, as Scott contends, markedly different to that which shaped both editions of *The Black Jacobins*. It is a conjuncture marked both by the challenges posed by 'transnational disciplinary forms of neo-liberalism' and by often chauvinist, exclusionary, particularist forms of resistance (Sparke, 2005: 163; see also Retort Collective, 2003).

One of the key aims of this book is to assert and articulate kinds of 'usable past' which pose connections, juxtapositions and resonances between forms of spatially stretched resistance to forms of globalization in different places and at different times. It is in this respect that I contend that *The Black Jacobins* has slightly more optimistic resources for engaging with these tensions than Scott's reading allows. By centring the geographies of connection that shaped the Haitian revolution, James generates a particular kind of 'usable past'. *The Black Jacobins* can be read as a powerful story of the formation of 'unruly alliances and flows' which brought the geopolitics of Atlantic slavery into contestation. It is a story of geographies of connection which destabilize the idea of the West originating 'organically

from its own transformations'. The book celebrates spatially stretched forms of subaltern resistance to globalizing practices and their global reverberations. Further, it foregrounds the power of the hybrid radical political identities formed out of this resistance, which drew on 'enlightenment' ideas and fundamentally challenged, reworked and dislocated them. *The Black Jacobins* is of significance to this project precisely because it asserts histories and geographies of connection that disrupt assumptions that it is 'capital' or 'colonialists' that are dynamic and mobile, and subaltern politics that is always reactive and place-bound.

There are many tensions in *The Black Jacobins*. There is its paradoxical marginalizing of African political cultures, which Stuart Hall has argued 'remain a kind of silence' in James's account (Hall and Schwarz, 1998: 25). There is its fetishization of a particular relationship between violence and masculinity as what counts in the formation of revolutionary politics. This shapes a construction of a romantic heroism which gives 'free reign to the imaginative possibilities and limitations of pure masculinist heroism' and which structurally excludes female agency (Kaplan, 1998: 55). There is the tension between its attempt to foreground the activity of black masses and its primary focus on the leadership of Toussaint and Dessalines. The powerful imaginative geography of James's *Black Jacobins*, however, begins to emphasize what is at stake in both theoretical and political terms in asserting that past subaltern political struggles were constituted through dynamic geographies of connection.

Firstly, it develops a powerful sense of subaltern agency. It asserts the ways in which these geographies of resistance were made through the meeting up of dynamic trajectories. This develops a strong insistence that globalizing processes cannot be reduced to linear processes of westernization. Secondly, it positions the formation of political identities as the outcome of various connections. An account of subaltern agency emerges here because James foregrounds these connections, and demonstrates how subaltern political practices and identities were formed through contesting their location in these connections. Finally, James gives a sense of how these connections shaped particular place-based identities in various ways. Significantly, for James, it is as much identities in Paris that get reworked as those in Haiti, and these places become key sites through which transnational networks are made and remade. This produces a contested and ongoing sense of the activity of transnational political networks in contrast to the smooth spaces that structure Hardt and Negri's account of the multitude. This is a condition for foregrounding the diverse and contested forms of subaltern agency in constituting these networks and for recovering the productive and generative forms of subaltern political practices. The next section explores the impact of this relational construction of the political for accounts of place-based political activity.

Place, Agency, Identity

The preceding section argued that C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins* develops an insurgent imaginative geography of resistance through foregrounding subaltern geographies of connection. James's account has resources/resonances with the influential relational accounts of place that have emerged in recent work in geography, especially those associated with the writings of Doreen Massey (Massey, 1999, 2005; see also Amin, 2004). James, however, doesn't engage with the practices through which the geographies of connection that he foregrounds in his book were made and constituted. His Hegelian Marxist account of 'world history' was not sensitive to the partial, contested, situated geographies crafted through particular Atlantic connections (see Schwarz, 2004: 104). The final section of this chapter seeks to rework existing accounts of the politics of place through interrogating their relation to geographies of connection. I argue for a relational account of 'militant particularisms' which views militant place-based activity as always already part of the ongoing negotiation of connections. I then draw out the implications of this way of theorizing place-based political activity for accounts of subaltern identity and agency.

In a talk given to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the General Strike of 1926, Raymond Williams spoke movingly about the 'ardent' participation of his father, a railway signaller in the small Welsh border village of Pandy (Williams, 1989: 105).⁸ This was part of the solidarity action with locked out miners that sparked the General Strike (see Francis and Smith, 1980: 52–73; Skelley, 1976). While emphasizing that solidarity begins 'in very local, even physical ways', Williams also gives an important sense of the role of solidarities and connections in reconfiguring identities:

By the very fact of the railway, with the trains passing through, from the cities, from the factories, from the ports, from the collieries, and by the fact of the telephone and the telegraph, which was especially important for the signalmen, who through it had a community with other signalmen over a wide social network, talking beyond their work with men they might never actually meet but whom they knew very well through voice and opinion, and story, they were part of a modern industrial working class. (Williams, 1989: 106)

Williams's account of the General Strike foregrounds important geographies of connection. He emphasizes that the importance of these connections for the solidarities, political outlook and activity was actively shaped through these connections on the signal workers in Pandy. He also emphasizes how these connections were absolutely integral to the working lives of these railwaymen, noting how their solidarities exceeded local bonds and were produced with 'men' they knew by 'voice and opinion, and story'.

This account of the relations between place-based political activity in Pandy and the 'geographies of connection' which were produced through the General Strike opens up a more dynamic account of the constitution of militant particularisms than Williams is usually credited with. David Harvey, among others, has emphasized the ways that Williams situates 'militant particularisms' as the 'origins' of 'political struggles' (Harvey, 2000: 241). Rather than militant particularisms being the 'given', bounded origins of political struggles in particular places, here they emerge as produced through the ongoing negotiation of connections and relations. Williams's discussion of the militancy that characterized industrial South Wales, rather than focusing on narrow, bounded struggles, also situates militant particularisms as outcomes of struggle and interrelations. In *Towards 2000* he finds 'the real grounds of hope' emerging from the ways in which 'massive and diverse immigration' into the Welsh mining valleys was transformed into 'some of the most remarkably solid and mutually loyal communities of which we have record' (Williams, 1983: 196).

Williams, as Paul Gilroy has emphatically argued, grounds his arguments about militant particularisms in a notion of 'long experience' which is deeply exclusionary. Williams's concerns with 'authentic' place-based politics and with the importance of long experience reinscribe an essentially bounded notion of place. This reproduces the assumptions about 'authentic and inauthentic types of national belonging' which underpinned the racist discourses of the right (Gilroy, 1987: 49–50; see also Gilroy, 2004: 88). Williams doesn't interrogate the gender relations that such 'militant particularists' reproduced and depended on, and produced passive, unchanging representations of women in his work (see Massey, 2000: 230). Further, Williams fails really to address the significance of his insights that these politicized communities were the result not merely of 'local bonds', but also of 'massive, diverse immigration'. He fails to position Welsh sub-altern political identities as actively produced both through hostility to 'outsiders' in events like the riots against black sailors in Cardiff in 1919 and through positive identifications with other movements and struggles, such as the involvement of South Wales miners in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War (Evans, 1980; Francis, 1984; C. Williams, 2002).

This unsettles Williams's assumption that 'solidarity and engagement' are formed in discrete places and then extend beyond these local places, which has been cited approvingly in recent work on the geographies of social movements (Miller, 2004: 227). The writer and miner B. L. Coombs made clear in relation to the 'racially mixed workforce in the Neath Valley', that the organizing of communities in the South Wales coalfield was not just a case of organizing already constituted and homogeneous communities. He recalled:

D2

What a mixture of languages and dialects were there sometimes! Yorkshire and Durham men, Londoners, men from the Forest of Dean, north Welshmen – whose language is much deeper and more pure than the others from South Wales – two Australians, four Frenchmen, and several coloured [*sic*] gentlemen. . . . The meetings had to be in English because most of the Welshmen could express themselves to some extent in English, while the majority of the English maintained a frightened silence whenever Welsh was spoken. (Coombs, 1939: 88)

Here there is a profound sense of the ways in which the production of ‘militant particularist’ activity in the coalfield was a work of interrelation and made out of difficult and ongoing negotiations between different groups. These solidarities were ‘always, already’, then the product of connections, connections which brought together activists with different political traditions and trajectories. Thus many of the Spanish workers brought into the Dowlais Iron Works in 1907, allegedly to undercut wages, were strongly ‘republican and either socialist or anarcho-syndicalist in political outlook’ (Francis and Smith, 1980: 11). They were to bring their political traditions to pit villages like Abercrave in the Upper Swansea Valley. Francis and Smith note that the ‘young militant miners’ leaders in Abercrave who emerged in the 1920s acknowledged that they primarily acquired much of their sharpened trade union consciousness and internationalist outlook from the presence of the Spaniards in their midst’ (Francis and Smith, 1980: 13). The explicitly internationalist banner of the Abercrave lodge of the National Union of Mineworkers was influenced by these connections (see figure 1.1).

These accounts demonstrate that political struggles in particular localities bring together different routes of political activity. They do not exist merely as discrete struggles waiting to be brought together by intellectuals or broader political movements. Rather, it can be through place-based political activity that different political trajectories overlap and are brought together, often with diverse and contested outcomes. This unsettles the distinction between local, particularistic struggles and more universal, abstract politics, with ‘global ambition’, which structures both Williams’s work and Harvey’s invocation of it. Foregrounding the relations that make up place-based politics opens up more generous possibilities of the agency of place-based political activity in shaping political ideas which stretch beyond place. It also permits a focus on how place-based political activity can be constituted through engagement with the connections beyond and between places (see Massey, 2007).

Relational accounts of the formation of place-based political identities have tended to understand connections in restrictively human-centred ways, focusing on the circulation of ideas, cultures, etc. (see Murdoch,

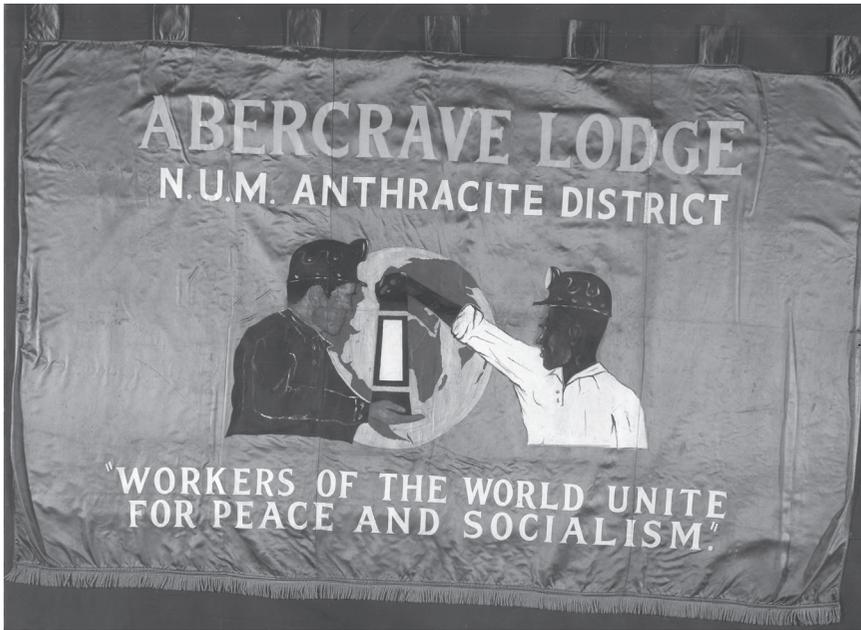


Figure 1.1 Internationalist banner of the Abercrave lodge of the National Union of Mineworkers, influenced by the Spanish community in the village, 1965. Source: www.gtj.org.uk/item.php?lang=en&id=19173&t=1.

1997, 1998). Recent work in geography, however, has emphasized the importance of ‘allow[ing] non-human worlds some of the action in making connections’ (Hinchliffe et al., 2005: 651; see also Braun and Disch, 2002). This has resources for understanding place-based politics as produced through the ongoing negotiation of processes and connections that are materially heterogeneous (see Law, 1994; Law and Mol, 2007). Situating place-based politics as co-produced through the fibrous, fissiparous and contested materialities which shape geographies of connection is significant. This opens up new ways of understanding the agency of place-based political activity. It permits a focus on how place-based political activity bears on particular strategic arrangements of humans and non-humans.

Williams’s account of the General Strike, for example, emphasizes how solidarities were co-produced with, and delegated through, the various technologies that constituted the railway network (Williams, 1989). He argues that because ‘signalmen had long times of inactivity between trains, they talked for hours to each other on the telephone – to boxes as far away as Swindon or Crewe. They weren’t supposed to, of course, but they did

it all the time. So they were getting news directly from industrial South Wales, for example. They were in touch with a much wider social network, and were bringing modern politics into the village' (Williams, 2003: 48). As Dai Smith (2005) has commented, these solidarities were made through his levers. These geographies of connection, then, are actively produced through particular configurations of relations between technologies and social activity. Chapter 2 develops the implications of these arguments for the geographies of solidarities, but here I develop their significance for the forms of agency and identity produced through place-based political activity.

My interest here is not to dissolve subaltern political activity into a diffuse morass of materially heterogeneous networks (see Thompson, 2004). Rather, interrogating how place-based political activity is constituted through intervening in 'strategic arrangements of humans and non-humans' opens up possibilities for foregrounding the inventiveness of subaltern political activity (Latour, 1998: 229). Andrew Barry uses the term 'inventiveness' in his account of the relations between politics and technologies as an 'index of the degree to which an object or practice is associated with opening up possibilities'. He argues that what is inventive is not 'the novelty of artefacts and devices in themselves, but the novelty of the arrangements with other objects and activities within which artefacts and instruments are situated, and might be situated in the future' (Barry, 2001: 212). Subaltern political activity in this regard produces forms of agency, forms of inventiveness through the way it generates, or attempts to generate, new forms of relations between different associations of humans and non-humans.

This can be illustrated by the strikes of Newcastle dockside workers or keelmen in the eighteenth century. Their strikes contested corrupt practices of measurement in the coal trade. Through doing so they produced new possibilities for the ordering of relations between labour, coal and the keels used to transport the coal from the dockside to the collier ships which would take the coal down the east coast to London (see Featherstone, 2004). The political agency and identities of this place-based political activity were produced through engaging with the ways connections were generated. It generated inventiveness through the way it brought into contestation particular ways of ordering social and material relations. Since the spatial relations that were produced through the coal trade were unfinished (cf. Massey, 2005), there was the possibility that the social/material relations produced through the conduct of the trade could be shaped, contested and produced in different ways. It is through foregrounding this kind of agency of place-based political activity in shaping how connections between and beyond places are constructed, that such a materially heterogeneous account of place-based political activity can be productive.

Conclusions: Towards the Relational Construction of Militant Particularisms

This chapter has contested accounts which have counterposed a dynamic, powerful, networked capital with bounded, local forms of subaltern resistance. It has foregrounded the diverse forms of geographies of connection which have shaped subaltern politics in both the past and present. Through doing so it has set up two of the key concerns of this book. Firstly, it has emphasized forms of agency and identity constituted through spatially stretched forms of resistance, or counter-global networks as I have defined them here. Secondly, it has emphasized the resonances between spatially stretched forms of resistance in the past and present. It has argued that this can energize contemporary political imaginaries.

The chapter has also contested the counterposition of 'militant particularisms' and 'global ambition' which treats place-based political struggles merely as building blocks of wider struggles to be networked by left intellectual elites. I have argued that adopting a relational construction of place-located political activity challenges this reductive distinction and have insisted on viewing struggles as always already constituted through various forms of connection. This produces accounts of the way militant particularisms can recombine networks of activity through distinctive political practices. This can foreground forms of subaltern agency and identity that tend to be marginalized, erased or ignored. There are four key implications of this relational reconstruction of the practices of militant particularism that I want to draw out here.

Firstly, it situates militant particularisms as performed and constituted through the way they 'bring together' different routes of activity and negotiate cross-cutting skeins of power. Rather than being the already constituted building blocks of wider struggles, place-based political identities can be reconfigured and intensified through these political activities. The formation of militant working-class communities in South Wales was not, as is so often assumed, something that emerged out of bounded communities, but was something that was the product of connections which brought together different experiences of activity and assertive political identities. The formation of subaltern political agency and identity through place-based political struggles was directly related to the ongoing and productive negotiation of such connections.

Secondly, this relational construction of local political activity suggests dynamic topographies of relations between place-based political activities and political imaginaries. It challenges the separation of 'local' political activity and the formation of universal political ambitions, suggesting how place-based political activity can decisively shape connections. The example

of the formation of the LCS suggests how place-based political activity can be formed out of ongoing and plural relations. Thus, this was a specific society in a specific site, but it was articulated in ways which spoke to the formation of political imaginaries and identities and was productive of explicitly multi-ethnic conceptions of political community. The meeting up of claims and equivalences between struggles can both reconfigure local political identities and shape distinctive political imaginaries. In this sense, 'universal' political imaginaries become the ongoing product of an 'indefinite chain of equivalent demands' between different struggles (Laclau, 1996: 34). This is also a testament to the productive effect of the meeting up of diverse trajectories and routes of political activity.

Thirdly, this networked account positions militant particularisms as part of the ongoing negotiation of multiple spatial relations. The relational construction of militant particularisms can have multiple outcomes, producing both open political identities and exclusionary spaces of political identities. Attention to the relational construction of militant particularisms can explode the binary that suggests a separation between the politics of bounded places and those 'most obviously multi-ethnic cosmopolitan places' which it is assumed are the only places that can be thought about 'progressively' (Nash, 1998: 3). Rather, it points to the importance of examining the different outcomes that the coming together of multiple routes of political activity can produce. There are no guarantees here. The coming together of routes of such activity can produce both exclusionary spaces of politics through the ways they negotiate relations, as well as more open and plural forms of identity (see Amin, 2002: 396–7).

Fourthly, this networked account of militant particularisms emphasizes how place-based political practices intervene in the formation of materially heterogeneous processes and connections. This opens up possibilities for accounting for the dynamic forms of identity and agency constituted through subaltern political activity. It challenges accounts which have constructed subaltern political activity as just trying to 'defend' existing relations. It opens up accounts of the ways in which place-based political activity intervenes in the ongoing construction of strategic arrangements of humans and non-humans. This has resources for foregrounding the 'inventiveness' of subaltern political activity. This concern with the inventiveness of subaltern political activity is developed in depth through the next chapter. It seeks to assert diverse forms of subaltern identity and agency through developing networked accounts of the formation of solidarities and antagonisms.