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CONTEMPORARY ANTI-WAR MOBILIZATIONS Agonistic Engagement Within Social Movement Networks

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ABSTRACT

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The Social Articulation of Contemporary Political Movements for Collective Action

This paper discusses the social formation of collective political movements, including the anti-war movement, that have challenged prevailing hegemonic powers like that of American global capitalism. These movements, while having no formal political status and being very often under- and/or mis-represented in the mass media, have been usefully conceptualised in neo-Marxist theory as a plurality of emerging contemporary social and political struggles. However, it is argued that post-structuralist analysis offers further useful resources for an understanding of the radical contingency of the social, due to the split between structure and agent, which prevents any power system from stabilising indefinitely. Specifically, by utilising the concept of 'articulation' as a process uniting social particulars into universal movements, the paper offers an account of how collective action operates and gains hegemony. The organisational and directional roles of Gramsci's conception of the 'organic intellectual' is linked with rhetorical and performative devices of African oral performers/poets in order to formalise the practices of these social 'representatives' into two typologies. The first concentrates upon the different styles adopted by these speakers in constructing internal power relations within the movement. The second formalises the rhetorical strategies which articulate different social relationships between the movement and its 'others', adding to Schmitt's notorious 'friends and enemies' the more fluid relations of 'guests' and 'associates'. Examples illustrate these informal practices of 'representatives' which rearticulate collective social identities so that people become active as political agents of social change in ways that challenge the hegemony of dominant 'truths'.