

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The case of agriculture revealed that once we move away from the assumption that social movement activism is exclusively geared towards changing the existing, a new dimension to both political activism and social change comes to the fore that conventional approaches to the study of these movements have failed to fully explore. In order to recognise those types of movement activism that are aimed towards constructing, developing and enhancing an alternative social reality outside and independent of the existing societal model of modern industrial societies, I suggested a new approach to the study of social movements in chapter three. This approach, first of all, pays attention to de-legitimised knowledge systems and recognises their holders as the key agents in instigating social change. Social movement strategy and outcome are evaluated accordingly, that is from their standpoint as societal outsiders. Rather than assessing how and to what degree social movements have contributed to the shaping of modern industrial societies, social movement outcome is evaluated in terms of the materialisation of an alternative societal model.

In chapter five, such agents of change were identified in the working utopias of an ecological agriculture. Their paradigm, which fundamentally differs to the conventional modern industrial agriculture system in terms of knowledge system and social structure, was described. Not only was the existence of an alternative

agricultural model rendered visible in this chapter, which revealed that agricultural science is only one particular view and does not provide ‘the ultimate truth’ on food production, but our understanding of social movement strategy and outcome was also broadened. The strategy pursued by members of an ecological agriculture paradigm (AP) is directed not towards changing the existing AP or towards influencing its elites, but towards developing, providing and testing a viable alternative to it. Here, political activism is located within cultural laboratories and working utopias such as Brithdir Mawr, the HHP, the Findhorn Community and the WFA. This type of political activism takes the form of life-style changes, the establishment of eco-communities, and the development of local food economies, and in doing so, local spaces are re-appropriated and building blocks for an alternative agricultural model established. Alternative knowledges, meanings and practices are developed and tested as well as taught to others. Knowledge production is participatory, it serves food producers and consumers, and has a beneficial effect both on the socio-economic as well as the natural environment.

To achieve their aim, the practitioners of an ecological AP do not seek to exercise power *over* others but they make full use of the power that is located *within* themselves to non co-operate with the type of social reality they disapprove of and to construct within the possibilities of their locality, via the conduct of their everyday lives, an alternative societal model. In chapter five, therefore, the potential of working utopias to instigate structural change at the grassroots level of society was revealed. Within these spaces, the power to name, the power to construct new meanings and a social reality they can identify with, and the power to produce the knowledge and the technologies that are relevant to their everyday lives, was fully exercised by the

members of eco-projects and extended to anyone wishing to participate. This confirmed the importance of adopting Eyerman and Jamison's reading of social movements as producers of knowledge.

I further suggested in chapter three that a new approach to the study of social movements should explore the mechanism by which the dominant societal model marginalises or neutralises alternative social realities if social movement outcome was to be assessed accurately. When combined with a world-view which has attained the status of 'truth', I argued in chapter two, truth regimes and knowledge production function as a buffering device against those who seek to bring about change. By applying this new perspective to the case of agriculture, I revealed processes that led to, and maintained, the subjugation of ecological agriculture. I showed that the holders of traditional rural or ecological knowledges were subjugated to the knowledge claims of the scientific truth regime which assisted in the institutionalisation of the modern industrial AP in the UK.

Chapter four described how the scientific truth regime appropriated the British countryside during the 18th and 19th centuries for the very reason that its knowledge claims are scientific and therefore true, a process that resulted in the displacement of the traditional rural social framework of knowledge. During the 20th century, the modern industrial AP was assisted by the scientific knowledge system in maintaining its hold over rural spaces. First of all, new knowledges and meanings on farming and food production were produced which served as a tool in the exercise of power over the members of the traditional rural societal model. Farming ceased to be a complex undertaking and was constructed as a linear industrial input/output production process. Farmers were no longer required to know about pest-predator

relations, local conditions, field rotation and natural cycles but were educated to know how to apply the latest 'modern' scientific and technological developments. Farming ceased to be an art and a way of life and was constructed as an occupation or business enterprise. The 'true' farmer, according to the new 'modern' agricultural discourse, was an entrepreneur and aware of managerial techniques and agricultural economics. Traditional knowledges came to be seen as outdated and backward and in order to be recognised as food producers, farmers were forced to comply with this new agricultural vision. Those who did not comply were denied reality, and thus denied existence. Just like the grazers in Moss's pond model, they were swallowed by the 'true', large-scale, conventional food production and distribution processes whose practices are sanctioned by the dominant version of agricultural reality. Those who complied did not only gain the status of a valid food producer, but were also rewarded financially. As a result, however, farmers were deprived of the possibility to make knowledge claims, and as such they were excluded from the debate over how farming was to develop in future. Farmers became reliant on, and thus controlled by, external knowledge producers.

In addition, the scientific truth regime functioned as a buffering device against the challenges posed by an ecological AP. On the one hand, the scientific truth regime restricted the path future agricultural development was to take, and who was to pursue it, to the exclusive circle of the agricultural science-establishment. Its negative heuristic determined what research was to be pursued and what type of investigation was to be avoided. Biotechnology, the example given in chapter six, was an obvious outcome of this modern scientific outlook on the natural world since it both confirmed and reinforced modern scientific hard core principles and assumptions. On the other

hand, science de-legitimised critical voices on the basis that they are unscientific and appeal to emotion or intuition. Effectively, science exercised a form of power that forces the critics of modern industrial agriculture to comply with the dominant truth regime if their arguments are to be listened to, taken seriously, and acted upon in the 'real' world. In this process, both traditional political actors and organisations located within civil society such as the NFU, agricultural research institutes, environmental organisations and consumer groups proved to be "consenting target[s]" as well as "elements" of the "articulation"¹ of this power. This confirmed that, contrary to what polity-oriented approaches argue, power is not located exclusively within a particular set of institutions, groups or elites, but, as Melucci claims, also associated with the production of meanings, norms and knowledge.

In adopting the society-oriented conceptualisation of power to the study of social movements I was able to identify certain power relations which the green movement is exposed to, power relations that operate outside formal political processes. The mechanism which guarantees the existence of the dominant agricultural paradigm and its interest groups, i.e. existing political, economic and scientific communities, operate throughout society and conventional farmers, consumers, traders, agricultural institutes and policy-makers who feel they must appeal to scientific knowledge in order to legitimate their own activities are all equally implicated in this exercise of power.

Thirdly, I suggested that a new approach to the study of social movements should also seek to clarify the role reform and modernisation play in hindering or

¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), p.98.

facilitating the materialisation of an alternative societal model. In chapter two I argued that power relations infiltrate the introduction of reform and that reform assists in maintaining the continuity of a particular societal model by neutralising alternative versions of reality. When applied to the case of agriculture, the new approach confirmed that reform is not neutral but serves to sustain the dominant AP, which in turn exposes the compromising position reform movements find themselves in. In chapter six, using the example of agri-environmental schemes and organic and sustainable farming, I showed that their introduction and appropriation into the official agriculture discourse reinforces existing agricultural production and distribution patterns rather than fundamentally altering these. In the case of the modern industrial AP, the emergence of new meanings, new discourses, new knowledges and practices proved to be a *restoration*, a polishing, of the existing rather than a sign of progress. The greening of modern industrial agriculture remained rhetorical, without having any real impact on Nature. Modern industrial agriculture merely evolved to an *environmental* state by adding a *new* 'greener' variety of *large* actors to its system. In other words, the dominant AP underwent a change in form but not in substance. These changes, however, failed to bring about a significant improvement of the natural environment and in addition also proved counter-productive for the practitioners of ecological agriculture. Their alternative ecological meanings, knowledges and practices were neutralised and rendered invisible in the process.

The new approach to the study of the green movement also revealed that movement organisations that participate within formal political processes assist in the normalisation of new dominant meanings and thereby effectively neutralise the

meanings and identities produced by ecological working utopias. The Soil Association, for example, found itself in the position where, as an official organic certification body, it had to operate against *non-institutionalised* fractions of the organic movement, those that remained outside and independent of an official organic framework that was primarily set up to accommodate large-scale organic producers and distributors.

A new approach to agriculture thus reveals the existence of two alternative societal models, one socially and ecologically sophisticated, the other responsible for pollution, the loss of biodiversity, and the breakdown of social relations. It also revealed the existence of two types of knowledge production, one that is participatory, that seeks to produce the sort of knowledge that sustainable food producers and consumers need so as not to cause any harm to the environment; the other elitist, serving economic and political interests, with immense environmental and socio-economic costs. This new approach also revealed the power that is exercised by agricultural science over ecological alternatives. This power serves to deny reality to the knowledges, practices, ideas and solutions held by the members of an ecological AP. In other words, while power serves to maintain the existing societal model, it also reduces the possibilities open to this societal model to deal with the problems it faces, such as environmental degradation. Conventional approaches to the study of social movements, however, have failed to take these issues into consideration when assessing the impact of social movement activism.

Conventional approaches to the study of social movements have failed to assess social movement outcome from the standpoint of societal outsiders, due to the restriction the truth regime imposes upon *them*. Conventional approaches to the study

of social movements remain informed by the truth regime of modern industrial societies. They carry conventional assumptions about 'true political actors' and 'truth', and they study social and political phenomena that comply with this known framework. As a result, conventional approaches examine changes to the existing societal model but they have failed to explore the changes that take place *outside* this particular societal model and the role working utopias play in bringing about the latter as well as the factors that hinder their success. Conventional approaches have failed to provide an adequate assessment of the strategies pursued and the impact achieved by members of the ecological AP at the grassroots level of society.

Specifically, conventional approaches have failed to grant everyday lifestyle politics a political status. Melucci argued that the mediation of formal political actors is essential for movements to achieve any impact on society at large. Movements, he argued, need to participate directly or indirectly in the formal political system in order to modernise the cultural outlook and procedures of dominant institutions and to select new elites. The case of agriculture, however, revealed first of all, the potential that is located within working utopias themselves to bring about change via the grassroots level of society, and secondly, that formal political participation could prove counter-productive. In the cases examined in this study, agricultural reform, agricultural modernisation and the selection of new agricultural elites all served to sustain the dominant AP and to neutralise the alternative agricultural model as practised by working utopias such as the WFA. The examples given in this study revealed that reform and innovation render working utopias, and thus any true attempt to instigate social change, ineffectual. As part of reform and innovation, alternative meanings, identities and knowledges are appropriated by the

dominant AP in an attempt to reabsorb control. Alternative meanings and knowledges are denied reality. In fact, in the examples given, it appears that while movement *latency*, the small networks submerged in everyday life, helps to overcome or undermine the buffering mechanism of the modern industrial paradigm, movement *visibility*, or formal political mobilisation, serves to reinstall power and control within modern industrial societies. This confirms Cohen's argument that in certain cases *the politics of identify* has its proper place.

Furthermore, what conventional approaches perceived as positive social movement impact, that is evolutionary change, was here exposed as a strategic move to marginalise and neutralise societal outsiders. Conventional approaches associate reform with social movement activism. Conventional approaches associated the greening of existing agricultural practices with a positive social movement impact, thereby taking the environmental synthesis as given, ignoring that environmentalism is determined by the hard core principles of the dominant AP. This means that conventional approaches fail to recognise that both reform and reform movements are effects of power.

In this study, to conclude, I argued that conventional social movement theories are inadequate and biased. I tried to show that they examine one version of reality only, that they examine the power relations *within* a particular societal model, the duality of this particular structure, but ignore the power relations that operate *between* different societal models. Conventional approaches also ignore the potential of movements to instigate change via the grassroots level of society because conventional theories have not considered everyday forms of movement activism to be political. I subsequently argued that there is a need for a new perspective on social

movements, social change and social conflict. This new perspective, I suggested in chapter three, needs to perceive social movements as representatives of an alternative social reality and to assess their strategies and their outcome accordingly. Secondly, a new perspective on social relations needs to place the knowledge dimension at the centre of the analysis of social change and reality-maintenance because knowledge is deeply implicated in power relations, both in the exercise of domination as well as the practice of resistance. Thirdly, a new perspective has to pay attention to those forms of movement activism that are not expressed openly but are conducted in the sphere of everyday life, within working utopias and cultural laboratories. From this perspective, individuals engaged in Gandhian forms of political activism, such as non co-operation and self-reliance, would gain the status of a true political actor, as an agent of change. Only when these three dimensions are taken into consideration can green movement activism be assessed adequately.