Temporality and Identity: The Role of Time in the Representation of Social Identities at Political Demonstrations

ROBERT D. LOWE

Manchester Metropolitan University

The incorporation of time is a growing concern within social psychology. This paper explores the use of temporality as an anchor for constructing political and social identities, and thus for constructing the nature of wider social conflicts. Drawing on internet board discussions about a series of political demonstrations held annually on May 1st in London over a number of years, the paper charts different ways that time is used to construct the political goals of both the demonstrations and the demonstrators: immediate social contrast, origin histories, relations with non-Mayday events and prospective histories. Users of the discussion boards anchor their accounts of their political and social identities within particular temporal contexts in order to incorporate or exclude social actors from their ingroup, and therefore to demarcate the boundaries and subject matter of political conflict.

The roots of contemporary conflicts are routinely described in historical terms, and yet social psychology has regularly been criticised for its failure to incorporate such historical context into its theories and practices (e.g. Tajfel, 1972; Condor, 1996). However, this is now changing as a growing focus within the social psychological literature concerns the notion of 'time', and its roles

in identity processes (e.g. Abbott, 2001; Condor, 1996; Levine, 2003; McGrath, 1988; McGrath & Kelly, 1986; McGrath & Tschan, 2004; Slife, 1993).

This paper takes a different approach to examining the role of temporality on identity and conflict. It considers how individuals within an area of political conflict (collective demonstrations celebrating the politically evocative occasion of Mayday) draw upon temporal references in order to define and limit social group membership, in effect creating the boundaries across which political conflict is defined and subsequently enacted.

IDENTITY AND TIME

Social representations and social identity approaches have been particular foci for the incorporation of temporality into social psychological concerns. That time has only recently come to the fore within these theoretical traditions is striking in light of the temporal orientation that early theorists, including Moscovici and Tajfel, showed towards their discipline. For example, Tajfel laments the absence of change from the literature leading, he argues, to disengagement with the major social events and conflicts that the discipline should be concerned with (e.g. Tajfel 1972, 1974, 1981, discusses amongst other events his own work in relation to the Holocaust, the Vietnam war, and the Freedom Summer). Israel and Tajfel's (1972) 'The context of social psychology' and similar 'Crisis' literature (e.g. Armistead, 1974; Gergen, 1973; Harré & Secord, 1972; Ring, 1967) also highlight the absence of temporal context within social psychological analysis.

Despite this early interest in temporality, writing twenty-five years later, Condor (1996) continued to highlight the exclusion of time from the analytic eye of social psychology. A concentration on artificially-created groups and/or immediate group dynamics, she argues, implies that the groups discussed are typically not placed within a temporal context. Condor notes that most meaningful groups have resources of different possible historical narratives upon which they can draw, and furthermore must project the implications of current actions onto possible future outcomes. Such situating of the group within a temporal lineage is often missing within artificially created groups, or alternatively is removed from the analytic perspective when the social psychologist examines group processes at a particular moment in time (see also Levine,

2003). The absence of this temporal perspective limits our studies of social groups, by missing many of the longer-term processes that are involved in group membership outside the research laboratory.

In a similar vein, Cinnirella (1998) notes the requirement for methodological flexibility if social psychological research is to overtly address time: in particular he espouses the value of qualitative methodologies for examining the role of historical and imagined future identities in social identity processes, alongside the more commonplace quantitative research techniques. This need for flexibility and willingness to move between methods is seen in elements of both social representations theory and social identity approaches, and some contemporary research within these approaches that has overtly considered time will be discussed below.

Within social representations theory, Liu and colleagues (e.g. Liu & Hilton, 2005; Liu & László, 2007; Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Khan, 2008) have particularly incorporated a temporal dimension by considering representations of history. Liu and colleagues' work has spoken to the broad significance of history to identity construction and maintenance (e.g., Liu et al., 2005) but returns repeatedly to the significance of temporal representations in situations of social conflict. Themes addressed in this work include the representation of historical events to justify nation state preparedness to take military action (Liu & Hilton, 2005), and argumentation over ethnic inequality in New Zealand (Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Khan, 2008).While much research has therefore investigated the way in which social representations operate at a societal level to determine or influence debates and political conflict, little has considered the generation and use of such representations at the individual level. However, some research within the social identity tradition has considered the impact of temporal narratives on individual social identifications.

Alongside Liu and colleagues' research on national and international perspectives on historical representations, work within the social identity tradition has also begun to examine the impact of a historical perspective on group identity. Sani and colleagues discuss the notion of perceived collective continuity: that group members 'tend to see themselves as being part, not only of an entity that exists in the present time, but also, and importantly, of an entity that exists and moves through time' (Sani, Bowe & Herrera, 2008a, p.160). Perceived collective continuity is measured by Sani and colleagues as the extent to which group members consider their group to have displayed cultural continuity and a coherent historical narrative over time. The perception of

collective continuity has been linked to personal well-being (Sani, Bowe & Herrera, 2008b) and also to a defence against death awareness (Sani, Herrera & Bowe, 2009). This work highlights the significant impact of temporality on strength of social identity, and how it has important implications for the individual. However, whilst this work has been valuable in showing that groups draw on time, it does not show how those temporal representations are presented in everyday activity.

Another area of social psychology that has considered the relationship between time and identity has been that of research on social movements. Reicher's (1996a) examination of intergroup conflict during the so-called Battle of Westminster (a riot in London during which police and student activists clashed violently during a march over the UK government's introduction of student fees) confronts notions of temporal adequacy by examining the consequences of event participation on social identity through multiple timeframes. This research charts the temporal shifts in participants' social identities during a single demonstration event. As well as short-term changes across the course of the event, the participants evidenced long-term identity shifts (e.g. Reicher, 1997, 2001; Drury & Reicher, 2000). The long-term identity shifts described by Drury and Reicher call for a longitudinal or cross-sectional social psychology to examine how identities can be consequences as well as causes of collective action, an approach that is taken up in the present paper through an examination of political demonstrations held over three successive Maydays in London (see also Reicher, 1996b).

AIMS AND RATIONALE

At a group level there is strong evidence from social representations and social identity approaches that groups draw on temporal narratives to present identity (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). In contrast, this paper asks to what extent these representations can be seen at the individual level. It considers how individuals draw on temporal narratives as a means of identity self-presentation and aims to show how a variety of different forms of time are used by participants on an internet discussion site. Time can be used to situate the discussion in relation to particular political events or backgrounds, and can also be used by discussants to present a particular political identity. This work differs from previous research in two respects. Firstly,

whilst a historical perspective has been the major focus of research (and is a major aspect of the social psychology of temporality) it is not the only way in which temporality can be incorporated into social psychological analysis. Alongside historical perspectives, this paper therefore also examines other aspects of temporality that are used by participants to position themselves within the political debate.

A second aspect of this work is to consider the use of temporality at the level of the individual. Examining how individuals invoke temporality in the presentation of their online identity and in their political arguments introduces a new level of understanding of social representations in action. Whilst any number of possible social representations are potentially available to be called upon, the distinct choices of participants shows the flexibility and fluidity of social representations to influence immediate debate.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

The possible advantages in developing the relationship between Social Representations Theory and Social Identity Theory has been a recurring theme over the past thirty years or so. Breakwell (1993, 2010, 2011) has returned to this relationship on several occasions, and in Identity Process Theory discusses the unpacking of the 'black box' of identity to incorporate the thought, action and affect through which identity is manifested. This process is dynamic and context-dependant, accounting for the shifts of identity-construction seen within both social representations and identity approaches.

Elcheroth, Doise and Reicher (2011) take up the significance of a multi-theoretical approach, arguing that insights from social representations approaches are ideally positioned to consider the shared knowledge and collective understandings that underlie power, resistance and conflict, just as social identity approaches consider the dynamics of group-membership.

Similarly, Liu and colleagues (e.g., Liu & Hilton, 2005) have combined insights from social representations and social identity to explore community relations in New Zealand. The content of historical accords between the indigenous Maori peoples and the first European settlers shape the presentation of group differentiation by delineating grounds of contestation. A striking detail drawn from the differing social representations existing within the groups in New Zealand

is that groups draw on different salient historical events as well as differing interpretations of their significance. Indeed Lamy, Liu & Ward (2011) use historical representations to draw out the synergy between the two theoretical traditions.

This paper focuses upon the notion of anchoring within the construction of social identities. A core concept within Social Representations Theory, anchoring involves the incorporation of an unfamiliar concept into already familiar perspectives to facilitate interpretation and understanding. Specifically, the present analysis considers temporal anchoring in online discussions concerning the Mayday protests, in which participants use particular ideas of time to support their membership of social groups. Anchoring becomes a useful concept through which to examine the active construction and projection of social identities by online participants, who must both respond to the existing context of the discussions and (if this does not suit their identity projects) create their own context.

The study concerns the manner in which individuals can present social group identification on the apparently acontextual environment of an internet discussion board. In order to consider the individual accounts that have been presented, the study incorporates the insights of social representations theory by considering how representations of a political demonstration are either shared or contested by participants, and how that supports group collectivity.

MAYDAY

The study is based around internet discussions of Mayday demonstrations between 2002 and 2004. Whilst the main focus of the discussions were demonstrations that were occurring in London, the origins and political orientations of the participants and the events were highly contestable due to competing concepts of Mayday's origins and purposes.

Historically and internationally the date May 1st has had, and continues to have, a host of different associations. In European folk history May 1st is associated with the first day of summer and is strongly tied to rites celebrating fertility. Across the UK local events and festivals continue to mark the onset of Mayday, often with dawn musical pageants, such as the Padstow 'Obby Horse Dances, or the traditions at several UK universities for dawn swimming. In Celtic

countries such as Ireland and Scotland the celebration is known as Beltane, and is marked by bonfires and further events.

Alongside the fertility rites of May 1st the date has also been associated with political campaigns for workers' rights since the late nineteenth century. It is a public holiday known as Labour Day in many countries. Perhaps the most well known instances of this were the Mayday parades of the old Soviet bloc countries, and Mayday parades still occur internationally. In the UK the 1st of May is not officially recognised, however the first Monday in May is a public holiday, albeit a contested one.

This heady mix of political and cultural themes makes Mayday a ripe arena for the examination of identity representation and justification; it offers competing narratives that can be used to stress both similarity and difference for participants wishing to claim membership of, or opposition to, different political positions.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This study draws on online discussion board conversations. Although the metaphors associated with the Internet are often spatial (e.g. cyber*space*, chat*rooms*, and web*sites*), it introduces a series of concerns regarding temporality (Jones, 1997). Internet communication is most often considered in terms of the potential near-instantaneity of communication, but it must also be considered in terms of delay. Many forms of Internet-enabled communication are asynchronous (for example an exchange of e-mail messages). The extensive availability of archives also introduces longevity into the system. The Internet therefore affords an excellent arena for examining temporality in social practice.

Bulletin board systems allow individuals to conduct discussions and display information on a central website. Individuals placing a new message on the board start discussion topics. Others can reply to this message, or start a new topic under a separate heading. Although the breadth of social media has developed into many different forms of online tools (e.g. blogs, Facebook-type pages, and the brief messaging of Twitter), bulletin board systems remain a popular medium for discussions due to their structure supporting multiple participants involved in

online conversations based around defined topics. They are also ideal for this research since posts remain visible and don't 'get outdated' in the same way that some more ephemeral social media messages do.

The particular discussion board examined in this study was associated over a number of years with activist politics including Mayday activities, although it hosts many other forms of discussion as well. Discussion threads were selected for analysis on the basis that new posts had been added at some point from the beginning of March to the end of May in the years of collection (2002, 2003 and 2004). The rationale for this three-month period was that it temporally allowed capture of both pre- and post- event discussions. Only threads discussing Mayday were collected, determined by an explicit mention of Mayday within the thread title or the contents of the first post.

In 2002, 54 discussion threads referenced Mayday in the title and/or first post. 1521 individual posts were recorded, with the largest thread running for 191 posts. In 2003 there were 61 threads incorporating 1990 posts, with 208 the maximum number of posts in one thread. In 2004 there was a notable reduction in the amount of discussion: 31 threads incorporating 1060 posts, with 202 the maximum number of posts in one thread.

Texts have been reproduced as found on the site, the inevitable spelling mistakes and 'slips of the keyboard' expected in such a forum have not been corrected or signposted.

Analysis

The analysis consisted of several phases connected through an iterative process of refinement. The analytic stages involved the initial identification of identity-related material, and specifically addressed the research question concerning the ways in which temporality can be used in social group representation. These phases are partly drawn from iterative grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), although the research focus was informed by previous qualitative research on identity (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, 1996b):

1. The data were collected at the end of May during each research period (2002-2004). All threads that mentioned Mayday in the title or content of the first post were recorded.

2. Collected threads were entered into the qualitative data analysis software Atlas-ti (Muhr, 1997).

3. An iterative procedure of coding was employed. Initially all instances that could be considered to invoke identity, however loosely, were identified.

4. Subsequently extracts invoking identity were classified as to whether temporality appeared to be used in the representation of identity.

5. The identified extracts were clustered, according to similarities of the forms of temporality used in the representation of social identification.

6. Finally, coded extracts were re-examined in their position in the broader bulletin-board discussion, to identify the wider context of their occurrence.

The analysis therefore allows identification and thematic categorization (cf. Braun and Clarke, 2006) of some of the identity processes occurring during the bulletin board discussions. The bulletin board system limits identity construction to text-based interaction, and the analysis draws out the significance of temporal concepts in the written construction of identity.

Ethical Considerations

The use of discussion board material in this study prompts ethical considerations. Thousands of individuals have posted, and many more have viewed the discussion forums. Material was only taken from public areas of the site, i.e. those areas where it is recognized that discussions can be viewed by all who wish to do so, including non-members of the site. The site developer gave permission to examine the postings, with the proviso that no real names are used in any textual reproduction. Although it is standard for posters to use already anonymised 'tags' to label their posts, these tags have been removed. This research was approved by the Lancaster University Department of Psychology Ethics Board.

RESULTS

Four ways that time is used in the representation of identity during the bulletin board discussions were identified: immediate social contrast, origin histories, relations with other events, and

prospective histories. The different representations of time support alternative projections of group membership by facilitating particular forms of group boundaries.

Immediate Social Contrast

Although the focus of this analysis is group identification, the first thing that is evident in the postings is the regular disavowal of the importance of organized groups. Rather than discuss unanimity of purpose, the possible variety of different motives for action is stressed. There is a rejection of simple characterizations of those expected to attend Mayday. Instead, when definitions are offered for a possible ingroup that may encompass the celebrants of Mayday, attempts are made to stress the diversity of the actors and the absence of unifying ideologies. For example, in the following brief question and answer sequence poster 2092 rejects the implication that Mayday attendance can be predicted in advance. In particular the absence of a central organizing group limits the definable qualities of Mayday participants:

Extract 1:

01   Posted by 2093 on 30-04-2002 08:18 PM

02   Yet another MAYDAY thread...

03   Im trying to get an idea of just how many

04   different groups of people are going to be in

05   central London tommorow and what cause they

06   are going to protesting under.

07   […]

08

09   Posted by 2092 on 30-04-2002 08:40 PM

10   Best is if you come down and have a look

11   yourself. Nobody knows how many groups will

12   be there, since no central organ is setted up

The extract stresses an absence of a unifying homogenous identity. Neither poster uses an individual-based terminology; they both predict the attendance of 'groups' (lines 04 & 11), but using this term in the plural further emphasizes the lack of a single ingroup identity.

On first inspection the following extract appears to afford a similar conclusion regarding the absence of a united group on Mayday. Extract 2 is framed in highly individualistic terminology, stressing each individual's own motivation for attending the Mayday demonstrations:

Extract 2:

01   Posted by 2018 on 29-04-2002 01:28 PM:

02   There are as many messages from May Day as

03   there are people but if there's one thing that

04   can be drawn from it, it's that the breadth of

05   political debate and conflict going on the UK

06   is far wider, deeper and more significant that

07   the meaningless drivel that goes on in

08   Parliament […]

There is again the rejection of possible simple characterizations and instead a stress on the heterogeneity of the Mayday attendees. The actions are situated in terms of the individual expression of political conscience: 'There are as many messages from May Day as there are people…' (lines 02-03). However, this post does not only allude to a future event, for which prediction is said to be hopeless, but also produces an immediate contrast between forms of political activity within the UK.

The extract operates in a current and continuing timeframe. There is a 'conflict going on [in] the UK' (line 05), that distinguishes the Mayday celebrants from parliamentary process. The groupings are temporally co-present within the text, and situated as a current significant contrast. The temporal immediacy of the distinction ensures its relevance for these political activities. The terms of the group distinction are the levels of significance of political debate. Although no ingroup is homogeneously defined, the characteristics upon which a contrast can be drawn with

those involved in parliamentary politics are presented: the width, depth, and significance of their political activity.

The use of immediate contrast in presenting social categorizations is more conspicuous in post-event discussion. In discussions about the experience of the 2002 demonstration the ingroup category becomes tied to particular moments of activist experience. The actions in London and elsewhere focus the discussion of group identity arising out of the physical conflict on the day. Some of the ingroup categorizations are linked to very specific actions, such as this clash between celebrants and police in Trafalgar Square, in which the contrast between ingroup and outgroup occurs at a point when physical power is expressed by one group over the other:

Extract 3:

01   Posted by 2001 on 07-05-2002 09:59 AM:

02   […] And in trafalgar square the police may

03   have been polite but they were also stopping

04   us from marching where we wanted and it seemed

05   as if they were going to keep us penned in for

06   ages so I'm not surprised people were angry (i

07   was mightily pissed of and it appears I should

08   add sober as well).

The narrow frame of reference in the above extract marks a difference between it and previous pluralist accounts of the Mayday demonstrations. The deictic 'we' that is invoked refers to those experiencing the police lines and the event produces a normative ingroup opinion of being pissed off with the police. Unlike the above pluralist accounts this extract bounds the ingroup through the temporal moment of the event it describes: the synchronic co-presence of activists and police.

The use of temporal references allows posters to discuss group identifications in terms of fixed moments in time. Moments of conflict (or of celebration) are preserved. Such temporal abstraction supports the discussion of closed ingroup categories incorporating only those present at the particular event in discussion.

Origin Histories

One common orientation to temporality within the discussions is in terms of the origins of the Mayday demonstrations. On the discussion boards a variety of historical allusions are presented, demonstrating the rhetorical purposes for which histories can be mobilised.

In 2002 pre-event publicity proposed that action on May 1st should be focussed around the central London district of Mayfair. This publicity proposed several different historical origins of the events, the site of demonstration, and the behaviours associated with the day. Within the discussions of the publicity material that proposed the event links are made between eighteenth century practice and the 2002 events. The following extract features direct reproduction of the publicity material:

Extract 4a:

01   Posted by 2012 on 12-03-2002 11:38 AM:

02   […]

03   Now one of the most opulent and cloistered areas

04   in the capital, full of luxury pads, exclusive

05   shops, fancy hotels and national embassies, it

06   takes its name from the fair which was held every

07   year from 1 May for 15 days until its suppression

08   in the mid-18th century. Mayfair was once a

09   teeming hotbed of fun, frolics and freedom for

10   the working masses, in what is now Shepherds

11   Market.

The invocation of the May fairs provides at least a 250-year history of activity. The origins of the area's name are given, and act as a direct link between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. Mention of the 'working masses' collapses the temporal distance between past and present celebrations; the similarity to 'working classes' recalls current left-wing political terminology (though see Giner [1976] for an alternative etymology). Later in the same posting

the elisions between previous and expected Mayday celebrants are extended. Ostensibly, only the participants of the eighteenth century celebrations are listed:

Extract 4b:

12   Circus performers, magicians, pagan priestesses,

13   vagabonds, alchemists, nomads, witches and

14   outlaws made merry in the mossy lanes and shacks

15   to celebrate the over-turning of the elitist and

16   prohibitive class system they were increasingly

17   subject to - if only for a short time.

On observing the list of olde world characters, it is apparent that they all have present day correlates within a popular stereotype of the constituency of the Mayday activities: the circus performers (line 12) of the old fairs could be aligned with the present day artists of performance protest, the nomads (line 13) with present-day travellers, pagan priestesses (line 12) represent the interest in 'New Age' mysticism, and outlaws (line 14) seems an all-inclusive term within the contemporary context.

Rather than representing the historical Mayfairs, the extract is notable for how the list of supposedly eighteenth century attendants in fact applies to current celebrants. Whilst New Ageism may be an acceptable aspect of twenty-first century life, no pyre-fearing witch would be so open during the years of the witch-hunts. A similar phenomenon is seen with the mention of class politics (lines 15-17). The terminology is relevant in current left-wing movements, but is unusual in its application to the pre-industrial May fairs.

The role of the past in this extract therefore appears to offer little in terms of historical record. Rather we see a symbiotic relationship between the supposed actors of eighteenth century Maydays with the desired attendants three hundred years later. The presented social identities of the historical Maydays propose the actions of the current celebrants. Equally the actions of the current celebrants determine the interpretation of the historical social actors.

Four forms of action were proposed for the 2002 Mayday in Mayfair: a 'travelling circus', a 'wake for capitalism', a game of football, and a 'critical mass' bike ride. Of these, two

proposed activities invoke tradition: 'Carniball' and 'Critical Mass'. Within the text Carniball's origins are located in the Fifteenth century, with the description of the increasing politicisation of the event for four hundred years:

Extract 4c:

18   3.Carniball!

19

20   A rambling, co-operative gigantic game with balls

21   that reclaims the UK's precursor to football

22   gameball - in a carnivalesque way.Gameball was a

23   mass multi-sided festival of play, enjoyed in

24   villages throughout the country in the 15th and

25   16th century.

Although the description suggests that the football game will be carnivalesque, it is proposed that participants will be involved in the act of recreation; they will be involved in a game that has gone on for five hundred years. Of course, the game has changed during that time; the text cites the increasing political activity associated with the game and the cooperative, multi-ball, no-rules proposal for 2002 is different again. However, though such changes have occurred, poster 2012 supports the continuation of such games.

This use of tradition therefore does not introduce identity labels; instead it proposes an activity by which to define group membership. This is similarly seen in the description of the critical mass event:

Extract 4d:

26   4. Critical Mass

27   Mass bicycle (or wheel barrow/horse and cart)

28   rides are a traditional part of mayday

29   celebrations today as much as they were in the

30   past. Villagers and townsfolk often took to the

31   streets and lanes, together, in a show of

32   leisurely strength and solidarity.

Wheeled processions are here presented as a traditional activity on Mayday. By joining the procession participants are portrayed as continuing this rite. No period of origin is offered for this activity; instead it is stated that they 'are a traditional part of mayday celebrations today as much as they were in the past' (lines 29-30). This may be due to the relatively recent invention of the bicycle in comparison with the longer time periods discussed in the circus and carniball sections.

Extract 4a-d is suggestive of various possible implications of the discussion of time in group representation. As noted above, the pre-event publicity for Mayday in Mayfair stresses a several-hundred year lineage of the 2002 London demonstration. Within that gross temporal projection multiple forms of temporality are invoked in relation to social identifications. The pre-event publicity situates the origins of Mayday in carnival and celebration. The focus on a particular aspect of 'tradition' supports the mobilisation of certain activities as suitable for a Mayday demonstration.

Within the pre-event publicity for the 2002 event in Mayfair group construction occurs in a variety of forms. Limited mention is made of the contemporary salient outgroups; there is a passing reference to current use of buildings in Mayfair (lines 05-07) and to state and capital actors. However, in the rest of the statement identification is encouraged with historical (or mythical) ingroup actors rather than against contemporary outgroup members.

The historical reference to the May fairs supports different forms of identification. The identity labels discussed in terms of eighteenth century celebrants neatly incorporate current actors. More common than the provision of identity labels though is the ascription of identity through action. The May fair origin story provides a reference for the behaviours to be anticipated on May 1st 2002. The utility of temporal accounts therefore becomes a significant consideration for the identity theorist. This presentation of the Mayday actions in Mayfair 2002 is anchored within a tradition that supports particular forms of behaviour such as folk sports and concern with environmental actions.

However, the English May fair is not the only origin history proposed for Mayday. An alternative historical narrative cited elsewhere in the discussions as the precedent for the London Mayday demonstrations recalls an 1886 action in the USA. The Haymarket Martyrs are presented in the following extract as both the political origins of Mayday, and as being explicitly associated with anarchism. This association can be used to limit the applicability of the current demonstrations to particular political ideologies.

Extract 5:

01   Posted by 3021 on 21-02-2003 11:12 PM:

02   "The first May Day, in 1886, was a call for

03   eight-hour workdays by the workers in many

04   American cities; it is now mostly associated with

05   the Haymarket Martyrs. A bomb thrown by an

06   unknown person at a labor rally in Chicago's

07   Haymarket Square killed one policeman;

08   authorities rounded up whom they considered to be

09   the leaders of the local labor movement and put

10   them on trial.

Unlike the approximate dates seen in relation to the Mayfair activity, the reader is now informed that the first Mayday occurred in 1886. Rather than the previously discussed network of traditions associated with numerous actor-identities and possible group activities, in this posting Mayday becomes a specific commemoration of a particular event. That is not to say that the constitution of Mayday is not still open for debate, however the meaning of a specific historical episode (in this case the Haymarket Martyrs), becomes central to that debate.

The association between the Haymarket Martyrs and Mayday is recurrently cited to define the boundaries of legitimate action on Mayday. Here poster 3031 challenges a criticism made previously of the website publicizing the 2003 event:

Extract 6:

01   Posted by 3031 on 31-03-2003 03:34 PM:

02   quote:

03

04   quote:

05   --

06   We have organizing meetings every two weeks.

07   These are completely un-arduous, fun and

08   friendly, and anyone interested in helping out,

09   and organising in a non- hierarchical way can

10   come along.

11   --

12   This could mean that the people organising this

13   bit of MayDay could have big problems getting any

14   of the organised unions involved, or union

15   stewards etc

16

17   Why?

18   Are trade unionists incapable of organising in a

19   non-hierarchical way?

20

21   And if you remember, [3012], Mayday commemorates

22   the execution of 4 anarchists, who wouldn't have

23   been happy for Trots to hijack it...

By evoking the possibility of the event being 'hijacked', the above post introduces the concept of ownership of the Mayday demonstrations, and legitimate social group involvement in the celebrations. The poster claims the authority of the Haymarket Martyrs in order to distance the day from the trade union organized actions. Again a symbiotic temporal relationship is drawn between political groupings associated with the 2003 actions and 1886. The anarchists of 1886, it

is proposed, would not have been happy for current day Trotskyists to stake a claim on Mayday. The poster therefore claims authority from former group members (or at least individuals who have subsequently been identified as ingroup members).

The current section highlights potential roles that origin stories can have in social identity processes. Their common appearance is complicated by the variety of ways in which such stories can be mobilized to promote (or challenge) social identification. In the above section tradition is used to support both old and novel forms of identity, whether through the adoption of identity labels or through the promotion of particular activities. The invocation of particular events can be a rhetorical tool to define group boundaries, but such events are typically open to argumentation: either by challenging a particular interpretation or by citing an alternative example as being equally (or more) relevant to a current debate.

Relations with Non-Mayday Events

Whilst origin narratives present an initial state for a social group, presented above as traditional Mayday rites or as working class struggle, group identification on Mayday is also extrapolated by comparison with alternative political campaigns. In extract 7 the discussion again distinguishes between the 2002 Mayday in Mayfair event and the trade union march. In particular, it is argued that the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the related group Globalise Resistance (GR) are acting illegitimately in attempts to represent themselves as leading the anti-capitalist movement (they were involved in the organization and publicity campaign for the trade union march):

Extract 7:
01   Posted by 2026 on 26-03-2002 03:04 PM:
02   […]
03   [2015] is quite right to raise concerns over the
04   GR/SWP attempt to monopilise the anti-
05   capitalist movement..and with justification...
06   where were GR/SWP when Clairemount Road was being
07   reduced to rubble for the m-11 link ....they were

08   nowhere..and now this grouping seem to think they

09   can speak on every one else`s behalf?

10   […] while unity may be our strength that does not

11   mean to say we follow whoever into some blindly

12   driven ideolical entry....our diversity mayto

13   some seem like a weakness (no central apparatus

14   etcetc) however it is also OUR STRENGTH

In contrast to statements of the origins of the Mayday celebrations, the current posting draws a parallel between Mayday and similar recent actions rather than conflating them as instances of the same event. A title is given to a social group, 'the anti-capitalist movement' (lines 04-05), and a particular event – the M11 road-building protest of the early 1990s – is introduced to reveal the absence of the SWP. This absence is here taken to indicate their lack of entitlement to speak for the whole movement.

The linking of the Claremont Road actions with the Mayday celebrations draws out assumptions regarding the expected political campaigns associated with Mayday. The UK anti-road building campaign of the early 1990s, most associated with the M11 link-road campaign and the building of the Newbury bypass, is considered as a necessary precursor to the current actions. The SWP do not have the appropriate campaigning lineage to claim authority within the Mayday actions.

This method of relating events across time and across topics allows participants to broaden (or narrow) group identity. For example, the absence of the lineage claim developed from the Claremont Road campaign is used to reject the SWP's claim of representation for Mayday event.

Prospective History

Whilst the majority of historical references look back in time, identity is also represented through prospective history, i.e. participants claim possible futures that define the group.

In 2004 the main attention of the discussions switched from London to Dublin, where on May 1st a major gathering of European political leaders occurred to inaugurate the accession of

ten new countries to the European Union. In preparation for the demonstrations the Irish Garda had acquired two vehicle-mounted water cannons from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). These would typically be used during crowd disturbances in the sectarian conflicts of Northern Ireland. The water cannons were deployed at around nine o'clock in the evening to force back marchers converging on the site of the celebratory banquet following the accession. A reference to the cannons on the bulletin board system neatly collapses references to the island of Ireland's troubled past with predictions of future conflict:

Extract 8:

01   Posted by 4002, 15-05-2004 01:40 PM

02   When I heard water cannon had been used in Dublin, my first

03   thought was 'it'll be plastic bullets next time'.

Poster 4002's mention of plastic bullets draws a comparison between the Republic of Ireland's Garda and the PSNI. The similarity introduces a raft of assumptions about the legitimacy of the actions in relation to the politics of Northern Ireland and their import into Dublin.

The representation of prospective histories therefore has a special place in identity processes, as the constructed futures need not be tethered to an event that has already occurred; in the current case the generation of a worst case scenario maintains and possibly increases the tensions between police and demonstrators.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Temporal Anchoring and Social Identity

This paper examined temporality in identity accounts within online discussions around a series of political demonstration events. Various temporal features in discussants' postings play distinct roles in developing the relevance and content of social groupings. The results extend previous consideration of identity representation, by highlighting the role of immediate social contrast and prospective histories alongside Liu and Hilton's (2005) historical focus for different purposes of

representing social groupings. By examining the online discussions we can observe the generation and use of the different temporalities that occur as individuals discuss group identification, seeing how these change the nature of the groups and the conflicts being discussed, and relate them to well-established social psychological processes.

The use of immediate social contrast in order to determine ingroup and outgroup differentiation is already a familiar aspect of self-categorization theory (e.g. Abrams & Hogg, 2010) through the principles of the meta-contrast ratio, the principle way of differentiating ingroup and outgroup. This mechanistic formula expresses an individual's identity categorization in terms of their collective similarity to others within a social context.

The current study captures how this immediate social contrast is presented: participants are adept at invoking contrasts in fixed moments of time by labelling the relevant in- and outgroups at that time. Moments of conflict (or of celebration) are preserved. Whilst this immediacy can create closed ingroup categories, incorporating only those present at the particular event under discussion, Condor (1996) warns that when the focus of the psychologist remains at this micro-perspective, then both change and stability of identity across time are lost; the analytic period exists only in the instant. The current paper emphasises this point, by showing that whilst this time period is relevant for participants in the construction of local identities fixed at a moment in time, such as the possible protestors (extract 2) or the physically clashing groups of extract 3, other temporalities are used by the online participants to construct group identities. A focus on immediate social contrast does not speak to the way in which identity can be drawn from a longer term temporal lineage, such as is seen when participants use origin histories or references outside of the immediate conflict.

Differing origin stories of the Mayday celebrations and demonstrations are shown to support distinct forms of identity and identification process. The distinction between identity labels and proposed actions is drawn. Historical justification can support and justify the continuation of activities considered traditional, even (as in extract 4a-d) when such activities promote shifting identification. Alongside justification through tradition, the examples show the rhetorical value of specific events, and their contestability.

The use of origin histories shows the influence of longer-term narratives, in order to anchor (e.g. Moscovici, 2000; Farr & Moscovici, 1984) current events to previous movements

and causes. In extract 4 we see advertising literature that attempts to anchor Mayday in multiple origins, thus appealing to wider constituencies, whilst retaining its identity in opposition to the state (from claims about 'outlaws' [4a] to discussion of villager and townsfolk 'solidarity' [4c]).

Whilst individuals often have shared reference points that allow lists to be compiled of major international historical references (e.g., Liu, Goldstein-Hawes, & Hilton, 2005; Pennebaker, Paez, Deschamps et al., 2006), the Mayday demonstrations are claimed to have different origins and to involve different types of traditional activity. As Elcheroth and colleagues argue: 'what *counts is the power to shape mutual expectations within a collective'* (2011, p.745, emphasis in original), and the contestation of these origin points can therefore be seen as a contest for the right to speak as the most representative voice of Mayday.

Billig (1991; see also McKinlay, Potter & Wetherell, 1993) in particular has considered the contested flexibility in social representation. In particular Billig interrogates the use of the term 'anchoring', as a term describing the relating of a novel concept with something that is already familiar. He reminds us that anchors are rhetorical tools that can be deployed for particular purposes, suggesting that anchoring is not an uncontested process with a final product, but is itself a flexible project with the potential to be manipulated: 'anchors not only can be cast, … they can be hauled up' (Billig, 1991, p. 74). This process is seen in extracts 4-6: with the introduction of the Chicago Mayday origin, the political conflict of the event shifts to a division between anarchists and 'Trots' (6). This alternative origin history sees the anchor being drawn up from an English medieval tradition to labour conflicts in nineteenth century USA in order to demonstrate the conflicting identities of anarchist and socialist organizations at the demonstrations.

Alongside origin histories, the legitimacy of a group identity can also be created out of relations with other events (as can illegitimacy). For example, in extract 7 reference to the Claremont Road campaign is used by the participant to exclude the Globalise Resistance group from the legitimate ingroup. For this participant Claremont Road therefore becomes a keystone part of Mayday; participation in this other event is a necessary part of the current conflict. In other discussions this event is not referenced and therefore this distinction (made central in extract 7's discussion) is not made at all.

The suggestion in extract 8 that the Republic of Ireland's Garda will eventually use plastic bullets on protestors in the same way as the Northern Ireland police force have previously done presents a bleak future. However, the dystopic image also reinforces the clashing identities of demonstrators and police actors, by presenting a continuing conflict. The use of possible futures to construct current identity allows a broad sweep of imagination on the part of those using them; the future focus opens up all kinds of possibilities for presenting hypothetical changes in group identities and relations.

Overall, the four different forms of temporal orientation observed in the construction of social identities around the Mayday demonstrations show the significance of incorporating a temporal outlook into social psychological research on identities. The online, textual base of the discussion boards requires individuals to construct their identities through the written word, and when doing so different forms of time recur. Time, in each of the different forms discussed here, offers a way of metaphorically anchoring identity to particular events (here using Billig's notion of the anchor that is both dropped and drawn up depending upon rhetorical purpose). It is notable that although some of those times can be a shared representation (such as origin histories), others are not, but rather are generated through individual experience (for example, the personal experience of crowd conflict in extract 3).

Conclusions

In contrast to the global or cultural level of analysis at which much of the work on historical social representations has focussed, this paper has concentrated on the way that individuals have drawn temporality into their own arguments for group membership or conflict. The representations presented by participants in the discussion are not necessarily those most commonly found or shared regarding Mayday on a wider basis; however they have been applied in the specific discussions to develop the terms of the political clashes of the major demonstrations.

Whilst the use of temporal anchors provides a method of constructing in- and outgroup identity and defining the terms of the political conflict, as Reicher and Hopkins (2001) note with particular reference to history, the use of accounts to support particular identity claims is rarely considered definitive and unproblematic. They remain points for argumentation, as seen in the

current paper where the origins of Mayday are disputed. Tileagă (2009) discusses the contestation of historical accounts in terms of "coming to terms with the past" in Eastern Europe. The processes that Tileagă describes for the Romanian state in terms of reconciling the current state with the years of Communist dictatorship are very active, based upon overcoming or even consciously "redesigning" the past. History requires "rewriting" in order to incorporate the victims of previous regimes. This suggests a second dimension of temporality as relevant for identity – that of the individual across time (Levine, 2003). The temporal anchors used in the current study have been constructed to suit particular purposes at particular times; they are as liable to change as the requirements of the political situation alter.

Considering participants' use of time as a rhetorical tool to anchor the meaning and boundaries of social identities provides a valuable tool with which to consider one of the impacts of a temporal focus on work within social identity and social representations. It provides a way of looking at the resources available to individuals in the conceptualization of social groups, as well as a potential obstacle in shifting social identity. It offers an alternative to microtime variance as a mechanism of identity categorization, providing a way of constructing change and stability in identities and conflict through shifting temporal frames (Billig's [1991] lifting of the anchor). It similarly highlights that there are many forms of temporality that are involved in the construction of identity alongside the familiar notion of history. More attention must therefore be given to the multiple forms of temporality in identity processes; temporal anchoring operates as an important sense-making tool for the formulation and presentation of identity.

REFERENCES

Abbot, A. (2001). *Time matters.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2010). Social identity and self-categorization. In J. F. Dovidio, M. Hewstone, P. Glick, & V. M. Esses (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination* (pp. 179-193). London: SAGE.

Armistead, N. (Ed.) (1974). *Reconstructing social psychology.* Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Education.

Billig, M. (1991). *Ideology and opinions: Studies in rhetorical psychology.* London: Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in Psychology, 3*, 77-101.

Breakwell, G. M. (1993). Social representations and social identity. *Papers on Social Representations, 2*, 1-21.

Breakwell, G. M. (2010). Resisting representations and identity processes. *Papers on Social Representations, 19*, 6.1-6.11.

Breakwell, G. M. (2011). Empirical approaches to social representations and identity processes: 20 years on. *Papers on Social Representations, 20,* 17.1-17.4.

Cinnirella, M. (1998). Exploring temporal aspects of social identity: The concept of possible social identities. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 28,* 227-248.

Condor, S. (1996). Social identity and time. In W. P. Robinson (Ed.), *Social groups and identities* (pp. 285-316). Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Drury, J., & Reicher, S. D. (2000). Collective action and psychological change: The emergence of new social identities. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 39,* 579-604.

Elcheroth, G., Doise, W., & Reicher, S. (2011). On the knowledge of politics and the politics of knowledge: How a social representations approach helps us rethink the subject of political psychology. *Political Psychology, 32,* 729-758.

Farr, R., & Moscovici, S. (Eds.) (1984). *Social representations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gergen, K. J. (1973). Social psychology as history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 26,* 309-320.

Giner, S. (1976). *Mass society.* London: Martin Robertson.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* Chicago: Aldine.

Harré, R., & Secord, P. F. (1972). *The explanation of social behaviour.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Jones, S. G. (1997). The internet and its social culture. In S.G. Jones (Ed.), *Virtual culture: Identity and communication in cybersociety* (pp. 7-35). London: Sage.

Lamy, M. G., Liu, J. H., & Ward, C. (2011). "Integrating paradigms, methodological implications": Using history to embody Breakwell's (1993) theoretical links between Social Identity Theory and Social Representations Theory. *Papers on Social Representations, 20,* 15.1-15.7.

Levine, M. (2003). Times, theories and practices in social psychology. *Theory and Psychology, 13,* 53-72.

Liu, J. H., Goldstein-Hawes, R., Hilton, D., Huang, L.-L., Gastardo-Conaco, C., Dresler-Hawke, E., … Hidaka, Y. (2005). Social representations of events and people in world history across 12 cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 36*, 171-191.

Liu, J. H., & Hilton, D. J. (2005). How the past weighs on the present: Social representations of history and their role in identity politics. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 44,* 1-21.

Liu, J. H., & László, J. (2007). A narrative theory of history and identity: Social identity, social representations, society and the individual. In G. Moloney & I. Walker (Eds.), *Social representations and identity: Content, process and power* (pp. 85-107). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

McGrath, J. E., & Kelly, J. R. (1986). *Time and human interaction: Towards a social psychology of time.* New York: Guilford.

McGrath, J. E. & Tschan, F. (2004). *Temporal matters in social psychology.* Washington, DC: APA.

McGrath, J. E. (1988). *The social psychology of time: New perspectives.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

McKinlay, A., Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1993). Discourse analysis and social representations. In G. Breakwell & D. Canter (Eds.), *Empirical approaches to social representations* (pp.134-156). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moscovici, S. (2000). *Social representations: Explorations in social psychology.* London: Polity.

Pennebaker, J. W., Paez, D., Deschamps, J.-C., Rentfrow, J., Davis, M., Techio, E. M., Slawuta, P., Zlobina, A., & Zubieta, E. (2006). The social psychology of history: Defining the most important events of the last 10, 100, and 1000 years. *Psicologia Politica, 32,* 15-32.

Reicher, S. D. (1996a). 'The Battle of Westminster': Developing the social identity model of crowd behaviour and development of collective conflict. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 26,* 115-134.

Reicher, S. (1996b). Social identity and social change: Rethinking the context of social psychology. In W. P. Robinson (Ed.), *Social groups and identities: Developing the legacy of Henri Tajfel* (pp. 317-336). London: Butterworth.

Reicher, S. D. (1997). Laying the ground for a common social psychology. In T. Ibanez & L. Iniguez (Eds.), *Critical social psychology* (pp. 83-94). London: Sage.

Reicher, S. D. (2001). The psychology of group dynamics. In M. A. Hogg & R. S. Tindale (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Group processes* (pp.182-207). Oxford: Blackwell.

Reicher, S. D. & Hopkins, N. (1996a). Seeking influence through characterising self-categories: an analysis of anti-abortionist rhetoric. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 35,* 297-311.

Reicher, S. D. & Hopkins, N. (1996b). Self-category construction in political rhetoric: an analysis of Thatcher's and Kinnock's speeches concerning the British miner's strike (1984-5). *European Journal of Social Psychology, 26,* 353-371.

Reicher, S. D., & Hopkins, N. (2001). *Self and nation.* London: Sage.

Ring, K. (1967). Experimental social psychology: Some sober questions about some frivolous values. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 3,* 113-123.

Sani, F., Bowe, M., & Herrera, M. (2008a). Perceived collective continuity: Seeing groups as temporally enduring entities. In F. Sani (Ed.), *Self continuity: Individual and collective perspectives.* New York: Psychology Press.

Sani, F., Bowe, M., & Herrera, M. (2008b). Perceived collective continuity and social well-being: Exploring the connections. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 38,* 365–374.

Sani, F., Herrera, M., & Bowe, M. (2009). Perceived collective continuity and ingroup identification as defence against death awareness. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45,* 242-245.

Sibley, C. G., Liu, J. H., Duckitt, J., & Khan, S. S. (2008). Social representations of history and the legitimation of social inequality: The form and function of historical negation. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 38,* 542-565.

Slife, B. (1993). *Time and psychological explanation.* New York: SUNY Press.

Tajfel, H. (1972). Experiments in a vacuum. In J. Israel & H. Tajfel (Eds.), *The context of social psychology: a critical assessment* (pp.69-119). London: Academic Press.

Tajfel, H. (1974). Intergroup behaviour, social comparison and social change. *Unpublished Katz-Newcomb Lectures*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tileagă, C. (2009). The social organization of representations of history: The textual accomplishment of coming to terms with the past. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 48,* 337-355.

ROBERT LOWE is a psychology lecturer in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University (Cheshire Campus). Alongside an interest in temporal processes in social psychology, his research examines the impact of social group memberships in everyday life, particularly in relation to conflict and to individual and collective health.

Department Of Interdisciplinary Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University (Cheshire Campus). Crewe Green Road, Crewe, CW1 5DU. Tel: 0161 247 5792.

Email: r.lowe@mmu.ac.uk