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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Why not talk about repression? Radical activism and its responses to repression

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ABSTRACT: By exploring silence as a response to repression, this study contributes to the literature on the dynamic relationship between protest and repression; it examines the ways in which certain radical activists responded with silence to the escalating repression they were experiencing. Analysis explains how and why they remained silent, and the consequences of that silence for individual activists and collective mobilization. Based on a case study of the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign in the UK, this article includes the reflections of activists who experienced repression first-hand. By analysing in-depth interviews and other qualitative data, the study identifies four different forms of silence among the activists facing repression: silence as a strategy, silence as a cultural trait, silence due to over-confidence and silence resulting from the normalization of repression. The results show how cultural and strategic dynamics play out in protestors' experiences of and responses to repression. The study demonstrates the importance of the neglected research area of the response to repression for advancing our understanding of the conditions under which repression leads either to demobilization or to mobilization.

KEYWORDS Demobilization, Movement Culture, Repression, SHAC, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty.

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1. Introduction

When targeted by repression, participants in social movements face a strategic dilemma about how to respond. Repression influences the decisions of protest groups about whether and how to continue their efforts, and such characteristics of the group as its internal culture play a major role in deciding how its members respond (Franklin 2015). Being targeted by repression also involves personal costs (Jämte and Ellefsen 2020) and strong emotions (Jasper 1998). A theory of repression should, therefore, include accounts of how individuals respond to, and cope with, repression (Linden and Klandermans 2006). These key elements are often missing from research on the protest–repression nexus. Honari (2017) argues that the failure to explain variations in the effects of repression is largely caused by this neglect of activists’ responses to repression. This study aims to classify protestors’ responses to repression during one protest campaign, to explain these responses and to discuss their implications.

This article is based on a case study of one radical social movement campaign: the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign in the UK. In 1999, this emerged out of the animal liberation movement in England, with the single aim of closing down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), at the time the world’s largest contract research laboratory using animals for product testing and research. SHAC quickly became a transnational grassroots campaign that combined lawful and unlawful means to exert economic pressure on HLS and any company that did business with HLS (Upton 2012). The most militant of the protest actions involved arson attacks on cars and other property, but most protests conducted in the course of the campaign were lawful (Mills 2012, 143–148). A risk assessment report published by Aegis Defence Services in 2004 reflects the level of concern raised by the campaign’s economic impact. The report claimed that ‘animal rights extremists’ were one of the most serious threats to the UK’s economy, because of their growing intimidation of companies linked to animal experiments (Evans 2004). In view of this, the government introduced a series of ever more repressive measures to tackle them (Ellefsen 2016). This led to the eventual demise of the campaign in 2014, after a surge in repression unprecedented in the history of the UK animal liberation movement. The repression targeting this campaign over many years makes it a eminently suitable case for studying protestors’ responses to repression.

Previous research on repression (e.g. Alimi, Demetriou, and Bosi 2015; Carey 2006; Tilly and Tarrow 2007) has shown how protestors and movement groups modify their repertoires of action and the ways they attack opponents when they are targeted by repression, for example, by escalating their use of violence (e.g. della Porta 2014; Koopmans 1997; Pierskalla 2010). These are highly visible responses to repression. Similarly, research on the repression of SHAC (e.g. Ellefsen 2018b; Ellefsen and Busher 2020; Metcalfe 2008) shows how protestors changed their targeting strategy and protest tactics as a result of escalated repression (e.g. Ellefsen 2021; Mills 2013; Upton 2012). These reactions to repression were also highly visible and strategic. This study, however, identifies a different type of response to repression, that I refer to as silence: the absence of communication about repression among the activists experiencing it. The article identifies and describes four different forms of silence seen in the campaign: strategic silence, silence as a cultural trait of the campaign, silence due to over-confidence, and silence resulting from the normalization of repression. The consequences of these responses to repression are also explicated: it is shown how strategic decisions and cultural dynamics affected responses and thus the campaign’s ability to withstand repression, with individual activists generally being left to cope on their own with the hardship it caused.

The article starts with an account of SHAC, followed by a brief review of the most relevant literature on the repression of social movements, the response to this and the role of culture. Thereafter follows a description of the ‘relational research approach’ (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001) that I draw on. After an explication of the data and methods used, I present my analysis of the four types of silence. Finally, I summarize the

findings and their implications, suggest avenues for future research and argue that similar silences are likely to be found in other radical movements.

2. Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty

The Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign was founded by three experienced organizers who had previously run animal liberation campaigns that succeeded in closing down several businesses that bred animals to sell for testing and experiments. The founders' skills were honed over years of organizing protests and developed further when, in 1999, they took on Europe's largest contract research laboratory, Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), as their target (Metcalf 2008).

The campaign had a core group of 10–12 organizers, who functioned as its strategic hub and ran SHAC UK. The core group was responsible for setting the strategic direction of the entire campaign by researching and publicizing the companies linked to HLS that they selected as protest targets. This information was widely disseminated through SHAC's email list of 10,000 subscribers, newsletters, leaflets, websites and activist media (Upton 2012). A host of organizations, groups and individuals then acted on that information, employing lawful and unlawful repertoires. In addition to HLS itself, anyone doing business with HLS was considered a legitimate target. This led shareholders, customers, service providers and over 200 companies—some of them among the world's largest corporations—to cut their links with HLS (Donovan and Coupe 2013). HLS was brought to the brink of bankruptcy, and its financial position and ability to function as a company were severely damaged (Upton 2011). For the campaigners, every company that withdrew from doing business with HLS represented a victory that gave them confidence, public attention and emotional energy (Jasper 2011).

The tactics employed during the SHAC campaign included a wide variety of 'direct action' techniques designed to put pressure on those targeted, while avoiding an effective law enforcement response (Liddick 2006, 123). Through direct action, campaigners sought redress by directly targeting the people, institutions and practices they wished to change (Moore and Shephard 2013). Many protests were directed at the leaders of target companies, in their homes. Direct action often involved unlawful repertoires, which led to frequent contact with the police and law enforcement. SHAC organizers and other key activists had plenty of experience of the challenge of operating on the edge of the law (see Pellow 2014, chapter 4).

The repression of SHAC was innovative, and developed over the years: new laws were introduced and existing ones modified or used in new ways to target SHAC's strategy of economic pressure. One law (the Serious Organized Crime and Police Act, sections 145 and 146), for example, criminalized interference with the contractual relationships of research organizations and their affiliates, which was precisely what SHAC was doing (Ellefsen 2016). The Crown Prosecution Service used a combination of laws on conspiracy and blackmail to target SHAC organizers and succeeded in obtaining prison sentences of up to 11 years. Legal and criminal justice measures further limited campaigners' opportunities for lawful protest, criminalized previously lawful conduct and increased punishment for both minor and more serious unlawful actions (Mills 2013). Through its criminal justice arm, the state creatively used every tool in the toolbox to break up the campaign.

In the early years of the campaign, a large number and wide variety of people joined in the effort to close down HLS. The core SHAC organizing group and many other key activists involved, however, had their background in the UK animal liberation movement, which has always been radical and oriented towards direct action. This included open support for unlawful, clandestine groups like the Animal Liberation Front. The animal liberation movement thus differs from the larger mainstream moderate UK animal rights move-

ment, which rarely breaks the law (Scarce 2006, 139–141). Over the years, the animal liberation movement, from which SHAC emerged, had often been the target of repression. The rationale of direct action that has characterized the UK animal liberation movement also featured in the SHAC campaign, particularly among core organizers and key activists. These cultural traits of the movement and its association with a certain mindset and experience among activists, I argue, were crucial determinants of the way organizers and participating protestors perceived, responded to and experienced repression during SHAC's existence, from 1999 to 2014, when the campaign dissolved after all its core organizers had been imprisoned.

The SHAC campaign is notable for the unprecedented repression it triggered, which makes it a suitable case for studying protestors' responses to repression, not only during individual protest events but over an entire campaign, in this case, one that lasted for 15 years. SHAC was targeted by agents who steadily escalated their repression, making it a key element of what protestors had to deal with in their activism. Studying responses to repression over a single campaign also provides the opportunity to trace the part played by these responses in the campaign's mobilization and demobilization.

3. Repression, response and culture

Repression involves efforts by external actors to prevent, control or constrain protests and social movements (Earl 2011). There has been extensive research on the protest–repression nexus. It is a key area for those seeking to understand the ways in which the state and opponents of movements try to control protestors, how movements are affected by these attempts and how repressive agents and protestors affect each other during interactions (e.g. Davenport 2015; Earl 2003, 2006; McAdam 1983). Most research on the protest–repression relationship has analysed the general and public dimension of social movements, that is, the impact of repression on the frequency of public protest (Chang 2008, 652). This strand of research has also examined how a regime's capacity for repression and propensity to practise it affect opportunities for protest (e.g. Tilly and Tarrow 2007). The repertoires, forms and styles of repression have been studied (e.g. Ferree 2004; Linden and Klandermans 2006; for a review see Earl 2011), as have its political, biographical and cultural outcomes (e.g. Santuro and Azab 2020; Fallon, Aunio, and Kim 2018).

Debate continues about what levels and forms of repression demobilize movements: high levels of repression have proved effective in eliminating protest in some cases, but have been counterproductive in others (Combes and Filieule 2011; della Porta 2014; Opp 1994). Yet despite all this research on repression and its impact on protest, we still know surprisingly little about how movement activists perceive, experience and respond to different forms of repression (Moss 2014, 263; see also Chang 2008). A major challenge for researchers is thus to provide a better explanation of the conditions under which repression deters mobilization and those under which repression encourages it. Examining how protestors respond to repression and the perceptions and experiences associated with their responses can help us do that—and this is what this article sets out to do.

While research has shown how repression leads movements to make strategic adaptations (Koopmans 1993; McAdam 1983; Meyer and Staggenborg 2008) and how protestors change their strategies through processes of interaction with agents of repression (Alimi et al. 2015; Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2015; della Porta 2014), before such tactical shifts take place, there are perceptions and considerations at work among protestors that are highly relevant to understanding their response to repression. In addition, there are other less visible and less strategic ways of responding to repression, as this article makes clear. The broad line of research examining political opportunity structures assumes that a movement's choice of repertoires results from activists' assessments of the opportunities and threats in their environment, where repression is one of

the key factors (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). This line of research, however, rarely makes the assessments and responses themselves the subject of inquiry (see Doherty and Hayes 2014 for an exception), in the way this study does.

Cultural approaches have become increasingly important in the sociology of social movements (Jasper 1997) and are very useful for grasping the perceptions and norms shared by protestors in this case study. Culture consists of ‘shared mental worlds and their perceived embodiments’, such as words, artefacts, rituals and any other ‘actions or creations that carry symbolic meanings’ (Jasper 2007, 60). Culture, which is important for the study of movements, comprises shared cognitive understandings of what the world is like, as well as shared moral principles and emotions (Jasper 2007). By bringing cultural dynamics into the study of social movements and their response to repression, researchers are able not only to more fully describe the experiential and intersubjective dimension of a movement’s history, but also—even more importantly—to offer a better understanding of what causes mobilization and demobilization (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001, 301). Paying attention to culture can thus enhance research on responses to repression by providing richer and deeper explanations of the trajectories of these reactions to repression in the movement milieu. In the decisions made by activists and in their responses to repression, cultural and strategic concerns or influences will interact (Polletta and Kretschmer 2015). Considerable cultural influence is exerted by the social norms or expectations regarding appropriate behaviour prevailing in the movement milieu or organization in question (Jasper 1998). This study seeks to contribute by increasing our insight into the cultural and strategic dynamics at play when protestors relate to repression.

4. A relational approach

This study’s analysis draws on the ‘relational’ approach to social movements, as originally formulated in the dynamics of contention research agenda (McAdam et al. 2001; Tarrow and Tilly 2007). The overarching aim of this paradigm is ‘to explain actions and trajectories by examining the way actors relate and react to each other, and are linked in patterns of interdependence’ (Malthaner 2011, 256). The locus of analysis is the ‘series of actual interactions in time’ (Alimi et al. 2015, 13), which in my case are explored retrospectively. This type of approach reflects an emerging consensus within the field of social movement studies that sees its subject matter as mainly comprising, ‘complicated and contingent sets of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutional actors’ (Alimi et al. 2012, 26).

Using a relational approach, I see protest and the repression of protest as dynamic and contingent practices that evolve over time throughout processes (series of events) consisting of interactions between key players. In the SHAC case, protestors and agents of repression are two important categories of contending players. In contrast to static research approaches that consider actors independent of their interactions with others, my aim in using the relational approach is to grasp the interactive, open-ended nature of protest—and the repression of protest—and how these practices and their consequences evolve along with, and because of, the opponents’ actions towards each other in specific contexts.

Rather than analysing social movements or social movement organizations in isolation, the relational approach often seeks to direct an interactive focus on episodes of contention that ‘involve interaction among claim-makers, their allies, their opponents, the government, the media, and the mass public’ (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 91). Many social movement scholars share this aspiration to move beyond the traditional social movement canon in order to explicate the relational dynamics of contention (Tarrow 2015). This also applies to the ‘strategic interactionist approach’ (Jasper and Duyvendak 2015) that has been important in developing and broadening the relational approach paradigm through far-reaching critique and by examining the micro-

level of social movements and culture to better grasp agency, creativity and the strategic aspects of contentious interaction (Jasper 2006, 2011).

This study does not follow interaction sequences across an entire wave or episode of contention. This has already been done in several studies of SHAC. That literature also provides details of the repressive tactics and the players involved. This study's focus, by contrast, is on one aspect of the interaction between protestors and the agents of repression: the activists' response to this repression. This study thus actively builds upon, and seeks to add to, the existing research on the relational dynamics of the conflict surrounding the SHAC campaign in the UK, while also making a broader contribution to the literature on the repression of protest.

5. Data and methods

In my qualitative research design, I triangulated sources of data and methods for gathering them. Primary data were collected between 2012 and 2014 by interviewing 20 UK activists and doing participant observation at four events that focused on the repression of animal liberation activism: a two-day conference in Spain (2012), a three-day conference in Luxembourg (2013), an afternoon workshop in London and a similar event in Bristol (2014). Interviews were designed to explore the interaction between the activists and the agents of repression, and thematically focused on the campaign's *modus operandi*, and how protest–repression interactions impacted the campaign's evolution. Participant observation focused on the protestors' experiences of and responses to the repression of SHAC and other sections of the animal liberation movement.

I sought interviewees who were (or had been) part of, or close to, SHAC's core organizing group. Given my knowledge about the campaign, I was aware that these people would know most about the developing repression and would have the most extensive first-hand experience of it. Most interviewees had served, or were awaiting, prison sentences for animal liberation protest. In the analysis, I distinguish between three categories of interviewees: SHAC organizers, SHAC activists (heavily involved in SHAC, but not part of the core organizing group), and animal liberation activists (not directly involved in SHAC, but well-informed about it). Interviewees' names are replaced with pseudonyms. As Linden and Klandermans (2006) make clear, accounts of how protestors respond to repression, should take into account what type of protestors they are. Protestors may be 'revolutionaries', who take pride in stigma and continue their activism despite mounting repression, or 'compliers', who participate with a certain reluctance and shy away from repression, and this will significantly affect how they respond in interviews (226–227). The SHAC interviewees clearly belong to the revolutionary type.

Secondary data were gathered between 2012 and 2017 and include publications from animal liberation activists (e.g. pamphlets) and the SHAC campaign (e.g. newsletters), various publicly available documents (e.g. court documents from the SHAC trials), and UK news media coverage of SHAC (obtained by searches in the Factiva database). Movement publications and news media coverage of the SHAC campaign were used to create a rough timeline of the evolution of repression and the SHAC campaign, and movement publications were also used to examine intra-movement discussions about repression and the successes and failures of the campaign. In the analysis, I rely most heavily on the interview data and movement publications. Much of the secondary data and data obtained through participant observation are not quoted in the article, but were important because they provided necessary background details and a deeper understanding.

The data material was coded and analysed using NVivo software, following the principle of inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2008). I began by identifying the important elements of the data relating

to the activists' responses to repression and how they perceived and experienced it. To achieve the aim of the study, codes and themes were then created and revised during a process whereby I sought to identify patterns of different silences that appeared in response to repression. The resulting structure of codes and themes was used as a guide in the analysis section to report the patterns I identified.

6. Results: Silences observed among protestors who experienced repression

My analysis of the data brought to light four different types of silence (absence of communication about experienced repression) among activists in the SHAC campaign: silence as a strategy, silence as a cultural trait, silence due to over-confidence and silence resulting from the normalization of repression. Each of these silences is dealt with in the following paragraphs, which describe the type of response each of them represents, their rationale and some of their consequences.

6.1 Silence as a strategy

Strategic silence is the choice by key SHAC organizers to make no external (public) communication about repression. This type of silence is reflected in their policy of downplaying the seriousness of escalating repression—or at least, avoiding drawing attention to it—in the texts and printed material they produced and distributed throughout the movement.

In the newsletters produced by core organizers, the extensive police raids against SHAC on 1 May 2007 are hardly mentioned (SHAC 2007), even though this date marked the peak of the repression: 32 addresses were raided in England, Belgium and the Netherlands and as a result several organizers were remanded in custody (Mills 2013). There was also strategic silence in SHAC's publications when new laws directly affecting SHAC were passed and many other measures were introduced by the UK government and criminal justice agencies to break it up (Ellefsen 2018b). Organizers clearly actively downplayed repression in the written material distributed within the movement. The same silence also prevailed on the SHAC website,¹ which was maintained by the core group.

Two strategic rationales were mentioned by activists to explain why they did not consider repression an issue worthy of broad attention. First, the core group did not want resources and attention to be taken away from the anti-HLS campaign, which would have been the result of an increased focus on repression and additional anti-repression work:

Other anarchist networks, they have a defendant solidarity network, which covers everything [different forms of repression]. But I think, with animal rights we've never really had that sort of thing, because we don't want to take people away from campaigning. We've seen that kind of helping and supporting the activists as not part of the struggle, and the less activists there are, the more obvious it is that we can't really afford to take people away to do support [work]. (Vicky, SHAC organizer)

Escalating repression made the lack of human resources an even greater issue, as some activists were demobilized and others imprisoned, and supporting activists targeted by repression was not generally perceived to be of strategic importance to the campaign. A similar view appears in the critical reflections of Roger (an animal liberation activist):

¹ www.shac.net; the site is no longer available online.

Once you went to prison, you were of no real use to the campaign. Then it was the job of the ALF [Animal Liberation Front] support group to look after you. If you fell by the wayside, well, that's your problem, deal with it. The movement will look after you, but SHAC must roll on.

Well-established support structures existed in the animal liberation movement during the SHAC campaign, but these mainly provided support for imprisoned activists. The escalating action against SHAC brought new forms of repression, and the old support structures could no longer meet the changing needs of activists (Ellefsen 2018b).

The second strategic reason put forward by organizers for downplaying repression externally was the recognition that it might discourage campaigners. As Bob (SHAC organizer) says, 'That is the danger with any repression campaign, people may start to read a lot about it, in whatever campaign, and think, "I don't want any of this to happen to me". And then they just stop doing things.'

Fighting repression was a subject rarely raised in SHAC publications, except in general terms, to encourage the support of prisoners. The same line of reasoning as that put forward by Bob is apparent in the reflections of Laura (a SHAC organizer) on how they reported the on-going repression in activist media:

A lot happened that never got reported on as far as repression was concerned. Because we understood that there's a degree to which you could report on it and receive sympathy and support. And then there's a degree to which you can report on it and scare away your base and frighten away the people who you're relying on to assist you in moving things forward.

Strategic silence was also part of the broader narrative of the SHAC campaign that was disseminated by core activists to the wider activist community. In this narrative, there were also other strategic reasons for not talking about the escalating repression, as Dave (SHAC activist) explained:

Within the polemic of SHAC, they do that Shakespeare quote, 'If you haven't got the stomach, leave the battlefield'. So, each day of repression, more people did leave the battlefield, but you will never see that reflected [in publications]. In the SHAC publications, everything just became bigger, bigger, stronger. Huntingdon [HLS] became weaker and weaker. SHAC just went from strength to strength. Which wasn't the reality.

This statement highlights the gap between the way repression was strategically downplayed and the actual impact it had on the campaign—a contradiction that becomes even more evident when narratives in movement texts are compared with the later reflections of the organizers. There was a clear discrepancy between how political threats were presented by the organizers and how these threats played out in real life. This strategic silence also stands in stark contrast to the strategic 'innovations' and 'adaptations' of the SHAC campaign (Ellefsen 2018a) in how it targeted opponents, which constantly evolved in SHAC's 'strategic interaction' (Jasper 2013, 1262) with actors outside the movement in the course of its 15-year existence (Ellefsen and Busher 2020).

An important consequence of strategic silence was that information about repression was not disseminated; repression was not made an issue worthy of serious attention, and therefore did not lead to new initiatives that might have inspired a different response and better protection of individual activists, and could have made it possible to continue the campaign.

While strategic silence was part of the lack of communication about repression to the public and wider campaign, the other three silences were internal to the SHAC activist milieu and were closely related to its culture and that of the wider animal liberation movement.

6.2 Silence as a cultural trait

Silence as a cultural trait is the absence of internal communication about repression among activists in the wider SHAC campaign. This type of silence was found primarily in the interview data and to a lesser extent in movement publications, and reflects the norm of keeping silent about the personal experiences and hardships of repression that activists saw as being integral to their culture.

The internal culture of a movement is important for understanding activists' choices about how to respond to repression. Their criteria for assessing potential responses are partly shaped by cultural structures (e.g. movement norms and narratives about how repression should be perceived) that predate particular instances of decision-making (Polletta and Kretschmer 2015). A key cultural trait of the SHAC milieu was that activists kept silent about the negative impact of repression because they were expected to handle it individually when they engaged in the battlefield. This norm is acknowledged by Rebecka (SHAC organizer): 'I think everyone feels the pressure that they are expected to be a super-human and ... not be affected by it [repression].' The same cultural trait, and part of its underlying rationale, was described by Joan (SHAC organizer):

There are these cultural patterns. And I think the main one that the animal liberation movement carries, is that: 'whatever they [the state] do to us, it's not gonna be as bad as they do to animals.' So, therefore, we could just like ... keep our mouths shut and get on with it.

In interviews, the rationale for this type of silence was explained by activists as being related to the norm of strict prioritization in the battle for animal liberation, which meant not drawing attention to or talking about the individual challenges of being repressed:

The movement has always come from a position of action. Action has been prioritized, and it's always ... what I find remarkable is that people are prepared to take huge risks and make huge sacrifices to help animals, but when it comes to helping themselves, they're kind of a bit like 'whoooo'. It's just like not done. (Peter, SHAC activist)

The notion that repression was 'unimportant' was also maintained by animal liberation prisoners. They presented an image of being unaffected by repression.² From inside prison, they frequently shared their views and experiences with the wider movement through articles in activist media and thus were an important influence, as is made clear by Rebecka (SHAC organizer):

It was almost expected of you that you're just going to be able to cope [with repression]. You'll notice when you look at like animal rights prisoners. Like you know, how they are always like I-don't-care-attitude. Like, oh, prison is fine, and everything is fine, and everyone puts on this kind of [laughter] ... look at me, I'm un-touchable.

The cultural trait of silence was even pointed out by a SHAC organizer in the US, who had an outsider's perspective on the UK movement: 'I mentioned earlier some of the culture of silence that we had here in the US. I would say that that's very, very strong in England' (Laura, SHAC organizer, US). When silence about

² Letters from prisoners were regularly printed in the newsletter of the Animal Liberation Front Supporters Group in the UK, particularly between 2004 and 2014. Many of the newsletters were retrieved from the webpage of the ALF SG in 2014, <http://www.alfsg.org.uk/>.

repression is a cultural trait in an activist milieu, it determines the kind of display of emotion deemed appropriate (Jacobsson and Lindblom 2013; see also Groves 2001 on emotion work in the animal rights movement). While silence is an integral part of the activist culture, some of the silence reflects, or is related to, the particular characteristics of the SHAC milieu. Avoiding making repression too big an issue is understandable for a direct action movement that frequently clashes with law enforcement. Drawing a veil over repression can thus avoid triggering fear of state sanctions, which is obviously an obstacle to people's willingness to take part in unlawful protest and high-risk activism.

Many of the above activist statements show how individual behaviour is related to 'modalities of organizational socialization' (Combes and Filieule 2011, 20). How activists are expected to respond to repression in the milieu of a specific movement is a 'learned cultural creation that results from the history of struggle', in the same way that activists learn repertoires of protest (Tilly 1995, 42). In a study of militant anti-fascists in Denmark, Christensen (2010) found a silence resembling that of SHAC: these activists were regularly engaged in violent encounters with neo-Nazis, they underwent arrest and interrogation, but they never shared their feelings or talked about challenging experiences of serious violence or the individual hardship involved. As with SHAC, the established norm among the anti-fascists was to be 'tough' (silent), and this left little room for the acknowledgement of insecurities, fears and vulnerabilities, which talking about personal hardship would entail (Christensen 2010, 163–164).

A consequence of cultural silence in SHAC was that individuals had little chance to raise their concerns about repression in the activist milieu, and activists devoted little time to jointly reflecting upon the challenges they faced in keeping the campaign going. Opportunities for developing new collective responses and making individual activists more resilient to repression were thus not taken advantage of.

6.3 Silence due to over-confidence

Silence due to over-confidence is an absence of internal communication about repression that was particularly evident within the tight-knit group of SHAC organizers and among other key activists. In interviews, this silence was retrospectively recognized by organizers and key activists themselves. Over-confidence arose from a distorted understanding of the actual threat posed by mounting repression, which led to silence about it. Joan (SHAC organizer) captured this mix of over-confidence and distorted understanding, which characterized the silence in the core organizing group she was a part of:

We just thought it [escalating repression] was a joke. We thought that activists giving attention to the police was kind of, I guess misguided, or it was this kind of like 'Jesus!' like 'Why are you worrying about them, they're pathetic, let's just get on with it'. I think we really, really did not give enough attention to how repression could affect us. We just kind of felt maybe ... not so much invincible, but we never had any regard for the law anyway.

This quotation reflects the mistaken perception organizers had of the increasing repression and their over-confidence that they would not be obstructed by it, both of which entailed silence about repression. The same silence was described by Mark (animal liberation activist):

We just thought that it [SHAC] could grow and grow and more people would become involved, and we could become a kind of unstoppable force. But ... is the state gonna allow you to do that? Well, of course it's not. A point will come when they'll say, 'right, we can't handle this. We gotta throw huge resources against it'. And we didn't foresee that. We thought, 'Oh, we'll always be able to kind of just carry on doing this forever,

and get bigger and bigger, and there's no real actions gonna be taken'. And that was naive really.

Anticipating new and innovative forms of repression before they unfold is challenging, as repression involves elements of surprise for which activists cannot prepare. The silence due to over-confidence seen in the data is closely related to the activist culture and the mood expressed in the mantra organizers often repeated in SHAC publication and activist media: 'We never give up, and we always win!' (see, e.g. SHAC 2006). Emily (SHAC activist) described this element of the mindset of core organizers:

The point is that they [organizers and key activists] were seriously deluded at that time, about repression. They couldn't accommodate to it within the mindset that they had. They thought that they were invincible, they were gonna fight and win, they couldn't be alarmed.

When trying to understand this form of silence and its underlying rationale, it should be remembered that the founders of SHAC, organizers and key activists were well used to repression, because of their previous engagement in direct action protest campaigns. During their time as activists, they developed skills such as taking security precautions that helped protect them from repression. They had encountered repression but still managed to cope with it and successfully close down several private companies through their campaigns (Donovan and Coupe 2013). The fact that organizers and activists had prior experience of repression meant it was something they expected and could overcome. This is likely to have been a factor in how they later responded to repression in the SHAC campaign, when they were too confident that they could carry on regardless. Previous experience, where repression did not impede success, seemingly militated against the use of time and energy to analyse the impact of the increasing repression SHAC was now facing.

Activists' willingness to admit defeat (e.g. by repression) is also impacted by how much they are sacrificing for a movement or campaign. A key characteristic of my interviewees was their high level of commitment and sacrifice. The greater the sacrifice involved in joining a group and remaining committed to it, the higher the cost of defection will be, according to Combes and Fillieule (2011); the greater the effort activists have made, the more difficult it is for them to admit that it was in vain. This might help explain why SHAC activists remained silent and over-confident, and why some SHAC organizers also continued their efforts, despite obvious risks, after the chance of success had faded, massive demobilization had occurred and the likelihood of imprisonment for anyone involved in organizing the campaign was overwhelming.

The two main ways of responding to repression by activists identified by Jämte and Ellefsen (2020) help explain the silence resulting from over-confidence and its consequences: groups can either 'turn outward', engaging in the public sphere, mobilizing for anti-repression engagement and working to gain popular support beyond their own movement, or they can 'turn inward', reducing open recruitment, strengthening internal loyalty and increasing security measure to keep out informers and infiltration. SHAC mainly turned inward when repression escalated and reached a peak. This process of turning inward and remaining silent typically leads activists to become more exclusive and closed off (Combes and Filieule 2011). Research has shown that elsewhere too, activists in radical groups faced with escalating repression lose a sense of external reality and the ability to foresee the consequences of their actions as they become increasingly isolated (della Porta 2006, 198). One consequence of the continued silence arising from over-confidence among key SHAC activists was that it created obstacles to the development of a realistic understanding of and appropriate responses to the unprecedented repression they were facing.

6.4 Silence resulting from the normalization of repression

This type of silence is the absence of internal communication about repression experienced by SHAC activists who silenced themselves by internalizing repression as being ‘normal’. This silencing of the self was often found in the data, mostly in interviews, but also in discussions within the movement that I observed during activist meetings and in SHAC publications.

Joan (a SHAC organizer), who, at the time of her interview, was prevented from taking part in the animal liberation movement because of strict licence conditions and other legal restrictions related to criminal charges and trials, shared her thoughts about how repression became so normalized that it was cause for concern:

I do think the movement has definitely internalized repression. Like when Eva was sentenced, I didn’t cry or anything. And a lot of other people were really upset, and I was like ... I could tell I was really normalizing it, if anything. Six years [in prison] and I was like, Oh, it’s not so long, I took three of that. So actually, I had to take a step back and check myself. Because obviously, like fucking hell, that’s a really long time for someone that’s done like jack shit.

Vicky, another SHAC organizer who experienced on-going repression (and was later sentenced to more than five years in prison), responded differently in her real-time reflections on repression but described a similar type of silencing of the self and normalization of repression:

For me personally, repression seems almost too hard a word. I think political activists know that they are going to be attacked by the status quo and the state. I think repression to me personally is people that are in jail, being tortured, things like that. It’s a really big scale from being hassled on demos to actually being tortured. As a protester you just almost get used to ... you’re used to the police lying, you’re used to the police bullying you and taking you to court and things like that. And so ... it doesn’t actually seem like it is repression, it’s just something that happens.

Compared to Vicky, interviewees who reflected on repression in hindsight seemed better able to critically assess how the normalization and internalization of repression occurred. Post-repression reflections originate from a different situation, where activists are able to detach themselves from the direct experience of repression. In real-time reflections about on-going repression, activists are more likely to normalize what they are going through as a necessary coping strategy (Linden and Klandermans 2006), as Lisa, a SHAC organizer explained:

When you’re in the activist community you are used to this [repression].... It is only when you step back that you think, ‘Hey, wait, what’s going on?’ I wasn’t really surprised when it happened [police raid, criminal charges and trial]. I can understand why it’s happening. But there are times, like when it builds up. And every now and again I would just kind of step back and say: ‘Wait a minute!’ Like, literally we just went on the most boring, peaceful protests. Well, it’s insane.... I think it’s kind of insane, because activists would get so used to it.

While the first three forms of silences were most evident at the group and movement levels, silencing resulting from the normalization of repression occurs most clearly at the individual level, and is a reflection of how responding to repression inside the movement was left to protestors to handle on their own. An underlying rationale for this type of silence can thus be understood, as Peter (SHAC activist) said, as a more or less unconscious way for individuals to adapt to and cope with a changing external environment:

You're looking in hindsight, you've come out at the other end and things [repression] kind of get normalized. Once the state does something, once they kind of shift the accepted use of law, or the accepted role of protest, then it becomes established. And that's the reality you live with, you know.

Silence resulting from the normalization of repression is also related to silence as a cultural trait in the activist milieu, which discourages individuals from revealing personal hardships, and where repression is an expected part of the game. Silencing of the self and the normalization of repression related to it echo what Mulinari (2011) found in militant anti-fascists' perceptions of police violence in Sweden: a systematic, constant normalization of police violence was part of the activists' lives. Violence was 'interpreted as a part of the normal state of society, and it almost became a predictable and anticipated response' (203; author's translation). Mulinari describes how anti-fascist activists internalized a perception of police brutality as something 'natural' and 'obvious' in their situation where repression was part of daily life. This normalization closely resembles what was found in this study.

One consequence of the activists' silence and internalization of repression was that it helped keep repression as something normal that did not call for extraordinary collective responses. In the long run, silence resulting from the normalization of repression militated against the avoidance of fatigue among individual activists and the demobilization of their campaign.

7. Conclusions

This study has taken an approach to the protest–repression nexus that differs from that found in much of the existing literature. Analysis provided an explanation of how and why activists in the SHAC campaign met the escalated repression they were facing with silence and inspired a discussion of the implications of this silence for individual activists and the campaign as a whole. The four types of silence identified resulted from or were expressions of either explicit strategic decisions by organizers (silence as a strategy), cultural traits of the activist milieu and movement it was part of (silence as a cultural trait), organizational and cultural dynamics among organizers and key activists (silence due to over-confidence), or a way for individuals to cope with repression (silence resulting from the normalization of repression). By identifying silence as a movement response to repression, this study contributes to the literature on the dynamic relationship between protest and repression.

The types of silence identified in this study testify to the discrepancy between the attention activists gave to repression and the detrimental impact it had on the campaign. The silences indicate the ways, both conscious and less conscious, in which escalating repression was downplayed in the campaign's publications, milieu and internal discussions, as well as by individuals who were targeted by repressive agents. The study reveals how strategic concerns and cultural dynamics affected how organizers and key activists perceived repression and responded to it with silence. The consequences of the silence are discussed briefly in the analysis, but they deserve further attention. Besides examining how and why the silences occurred, I argue that explicating responses to repression also enhances our understanding of the consequences of repression. How protestors respond to repression will inevitably influence the impact repression has on them. The ways in which movements cope with repression internally and reach out to external actors for assistance will largely determine their ability to mobilize or pre-empt demobilization. Activists in this study raised concerns about the negative effects of silence, both in terms of weakened solidarity within the movement and neglect of self-care, as well as the inability to build solidarity outside the movement. When the collective milieu made little effort to achieve external counter-mobilization against repression and failed to build internal support struc-

tures to meet its new forms, individual activists were left to cope with repression on their own. When such collective silence is part of a radical movement's culture, it leaves the emotion work of coping with repression to individual activists (e.g. Hochschild 2003). Lack of a collective response thus meant that the impact of repression on individuals was intensified.

Combes and Filieule (2011, 24) argue that, to understand the individual effects of repression, scholars need to consider the contextual, organizational and individual levels together (see also Duyvendak and Filieule 2015). This article has done that by providing insights into the interaction between a movement and its changing context (escalated repression), into how campaigners collectively dealt with that change (their collective perceptions and responses) and into how this was experienced by individual activists. My intention has not been to detail the individual effects of repression, but to demonstrate that collective responses to repression were decisive for how it impacted the overall campaign and individual participants. Repression studies have largely neglected the fact that activists, because they perceive and interpret repression differently across milieus and have different options available to them, respond differently to repression (Honari 2017, 2018). Future research on responses to repression could examine the differences and similarities between how activists perceive, respond to and experience repression collectively and individually. One way of exploring collective perceptions and experiences is by looking at how they are narrated in 'movement texts' (Thörn 1997), while individual perceptions and experiences can be captured in interviews with activists. Comparing these two aspects of a movement or campaign can help identify contradictions between them, which can provide insights such as those offered this study.

Research on SHAC has shown that escalating repression triggered a series of strategic responses among activists which involved adaptations and changes in their chosen targets and the tactics they adopted. These responses were strategic, dramatic and highly innovative—in stark contrast to the silences seen later. This study fills a knowledge gap in the literature on this specific case, by considering the cultural and strategic dynamics that influenced activists' (silent) responses to repression. By identifying the silences, this study also contributes to the broader literature on repression by demonstrating the importance of the neglected research area of the response to repression (Honari 2017, 2018), particularly types of responses that are, perhaps, less visible and less obvious to social movement scholars.

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