

# **THE ORGANIZATION OF DISSENT**

ATTAC-Denmark as a case study of the interaction between changing media frames and internally disagreeing activists of a social movement confronted with a crisis demonstrates the key role of organization in the effective expression of dissent.

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## ABSTRACT

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The European Union summit in Gothenburg, June 14-16, 2001, became something of a 'Seattle of Scandinavia'. Large and colorful demonstrations dominated the streets; a few violent clashes dominated the news coverage.

This paper analyze how activists from the Danish branch of a particular, and particularly prominent, alternative globalization movement – ATTAC – related to changing media framings, external criticisms, and their own internal disagreements over violent clashes between police and activists.

It therefore leaves aside the portrayal of social movements as passive victims of media framing or their reification as unified agents pursuing pre-defined agendas. I instead take a closer look at the practical challenges faced by internally disagreeing activists trying to generate a position of publicity and power around overlapping aspirations by maintaining a movement that is politically and practically only a singular ('a' movement) in so far as it can *organize* the expression of dissent from media frames, from external critics, and from other activists in a way that *express* a form of singularity that the different involved stakeholders, observers and audiences can accept and relate to the agenda allegedly pursued.

On the basis of newspaper and TV coverage, interviews with centrally located activists, and scrutiny of debates on the movement's online forums and in local committees, I uncover the precise train of interactions and events ATTAC became involved in following the Gothenburg summit. My starting point is the evening of June 15, where a young, unnamed rank-and-file activist affiliated with ATTAC was brought to speak for and represent the movement in a highly controversial way in a national primetime news TV broadcast.

Through analysis of the reaction of external critics, journalists and audiences to this news clip, and the flurry of attempts on behalf of activists to set the record straight (in quite a variety of different ways!), I present a number of empirically based conclusions as to the concrete communicative and interactive challenges social movement activists face in attempts to express their dissent, and conclude by underlining how organization is still – even in the face of talk about 'multitudes', 'smart mobs' and 'network armies' – the key to power and movement autonomy.

[The paper is a part of a larger and on-going project about ATTAC]

## The Question

”Who are you”?<sup>1</sup> That is the question the alternative globalization movement ATTAC was faced with in the wake of the violence that accompanied the June 14-16 EU summit in Gothenburg, Sweden. For a grassroots movement wholly dependent on volunteers and popular support for any transformative power it may have, the considerable outrage and disappointment sparked – even amongst activists and sympathizers – by the alleged role of the movement in these clashes represented a serious problem. The idea that ATTAC endorsed, or had even participated in, violence as a political mean was clearly dissonant with its framing and self-expression as peaceful and democratic. The way in which its proponents reacted to the problem suddenly at their hands provides the empirical material to pursue *my* question here: how are expressions of grassroots driven dissent effectively organized? My work so far with this case study suggests that for movements like ATTAC it takes a disassociation of two drives commonly observed in social movements, namely (a) the drive from difference towards homogeneity amongst constituents, and (b) the drive from an informal network organization to a formal organization with authorized decision-making procedures.<sup>2</sup> The trick seems to be to one the one hand maintain the difference that allows for the generation of power but still, on the other, achieve formal organization to allow effective and authoritative decision-making in times of crisis. The trick is, in other words, procedural and the argument here not chained to the substance of the movement studied.

To get to this point, let me cheat and provide a preliminary answer to the opening question as context for what follows. ATTAC originates in France, but by the time it in December 2000 first appeared in Denmark, it was firmly established internationally with over eighty-five thousand members of its more than fifteen national organizations. Ideologically, it is, despite national

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<sup>1</sup> ‘ATTAC har allerede ødelagt sig selv’, by Normann Aa. Nielsen, [www.information.dk](http://www.information.dk), June 15, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Luther P. Gerlach 2001, ‘The Structure of Social Movements: Environmental Activism and its Opponents’, in John Arquilla & David F. Ronfeldt (eds.) *Networks and Netwars*, RAND Publications.

variations and occasional internal disagreements, always to be found within the alternative globalization movement. It presents itself as fundamentally a popular movement for the expansion of democracy to encompass issues raised by different processes of globalization. According to the international Platform (and the Danish platform is identical),

the goals are:

- to reconquer space lost by democracy to the sphere of finance,
- to oppose any new abandonment of national sovereignty on the pretext of the "rights" of investors and merchants,
- to create a democratic space at the global level.

It is simply a question of taking back, together, the future of our world.<sup>3</sup>

Given the global state of affairs suspended between nationalism and liberalization, I trust it is unnecessary to explain why I consider such an agenda and the policies recommended (abolition of debt from developing countries, introduction of a Tobin tax on monetary speculation, etc.) an expression of dissent.

Now, its dissensual ideological position did not mean that ATTAC was marginal. Indeed, no nascent movement in recent Danish history has appeared with such initial force. ATTAC was met with broad sympathy from the majority of the political spectrum, ranging from the extreme left, over the reigning Social Democratic-Social Liberal government, and even to occasional Christian Democrats and Conservatives. From day one, it generated enthusiastic activism from thousands of volunteers, coming both from the usual suspects of intellectuals, trade unions, grassroots and party activists, and from the previously unengaged. Similarly, it was met with massive media attention; being covered almost 50% more than the country's largest social movement (The Danish Federation for the Conservation of Nature) in 2001. The broad base of its initial support was characteristic of ATTAC, and what made it stand out as a potentially particularly powerful movement of dissent.<sup>4</sup> Given that no large collective identities with necessary ties to

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<sup>3</sup> Platform of the International Movement ATTAC, ATTAC-Danmarks grundlag.

<sup>4</sup> I speak about ATTAC in the past here because the movement is no longer what it was, but has been reduced to a minute group of no political relevance. In my paper 'The Return to Tradition and Implosion of ATTAC in Denmark',

ATTAC's political position exists, and the formation of one seems like more than a daunting task, an inclusive expression allowing for collective identification with a movement from a broad base of internally different and disagreeing constituents is a necessary precondition for transformative power.<sup>5</sup>

Newspaper coverage across the board of Denmark's two largest broadsheets and most important left-liberal daily (*Jyllands-Posten*, *Politiken*, and *Information*, respectively) gives a clear indication of the media framing of the movement during its first 6 months.<sup>6</sup> Barring somewhat more critical coverage on the center-right wing *Jyllands-Posten*, the framing is overwhelmingly positive and charitable. The movement's ideological platform is fairly accurately portrayed; activists are allowed to speak for themselves, and to reply when critical remarks are made. ATTAC was generally portrayed as a movement with democratic aspirations, that pursued concrete goals everyone seemed to recognize, and as an alternative to the then-dominant narratives about - and political agendas for - globalization. Everyone, even *Jyllands-Posten*, recognize ATTAC as a legitimate and democratic movement.<sup>7</sup> Its main goals are accurately portrayed and not subject to the ridicule that other parts of the alternative globalization movement are sometimes met with.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, everyone recognize ATTAC's claim to be an alternative to and dissent from the dominant narrative about and political form of globalization.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it for a short period of time came to represent the alternative

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presented at the 'Media, Culture, and the Politics of Small Things' conference, May 6, 2006 at the New School for Social Research, I analyse the movement's decline in greater details.

<sup>5</sup> Zygmunt Baumann 2000, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, UK; Axel Honneth 1995, *The Fragmented World of the Social*, SUNY Press, USA; Russell J. Dalton & Martin P. Wattenberg (eds) 2002, *Parties without Partisans*, Oxford University Press, USA & UK.

<sup>6</sup> For more details on the empirical material behind the analysis, please consult the appendix.

<sup>7</sup> 'Globale spilleregler', editorial by Lars Mogensen, *Information*, January 29, 2001, 'En bevægelse med stykker - og svagheder', editorial, *Politiken*, January 27, 2001, 'En dødssejler', editorial, *Jyllands-Posten*, February 18, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> 'Til (mod)angreb', editorial, *Information*, December 20, 2000, 'Tobinskat er ikke utopi', op-ed by Christian Friis Bach, *Politiken*, February 2, 2001, 'ATTAC breder sig i Danmark', *Jyllands-Posten*, February 15, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Editorial, *Jyllands-Posten*, March 10.

globalization movement and popular skepticism about the particular kind of globalization usually politically pursued *as such*.

The movement's initial explosive growth was boosted by this special position it was given in the first wave of charitable media attention.<sup>10</sup> The people attracted to the movement did, however, quickly manage to establish its relative autonomy from the media frame.<sup>11</sup> While the journalistic coverage set the agenda and largely defined what ATTAC was considered to be for the first few months, the establishment of a loose network of local committees and informal coordination groups soon produced a communicative infrastructure that supplemented face-to-face meetings with email lists and on-line debates. This infrastructure not only served for internal interaction, but also as source for, way of influencing, and alternative to, journalistic coverage. For anyone with an Internet connection, these fora made sure that ATTAC did not suffer the fate so common for social movements where the media frame, "the processed image ... *become* 'the movement' for wider publics and institutions who have few alternative sources of information".<sup>12</sup> Instead, activists who established themselves within this network started to replace media anointed darlings as spokespersons from March 2001 and onwards, and the dawning agreements reached by the people actually involved in the movement started to set the agenda and define the movement around the same time. One example of how forceful this internally-driven redefinition was is that a whole set of social movements, trade unions, political parties, and NGOs that the initial media frame had cast as obvious constituent elements in any Danish branch of ATTAC gave up direct engagement in the movement as the activists involved agreed and made publicly clear that they found that ATTAC should establish itself independently before entering into relations with existing organizations – who often have capacities the activists feared could be used to twist the fledgling to

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<sup>10</sup> Bolette M. Christensen 2002, 'The Case of ATTAC: A case of constructive journalism', MODINET Working Paper no.1.

<sup>11</sup> For a conceptualisation of media frames, see Todd Gitlin 1980, *The Whole World is Watching*, University of California Press, USA, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Gitlin, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

serve external ends.<sup>13</sup> ATTAC did not *separate* itself from the media frame, but in the spring of 2001, the actual, organizational movement acquired a degree of autonomy that meant it could no longer be *reduced* to its framing – ATTAC went from being an expression to also being a self-expression. It is the self-expressive answer to the question raised by the Gothenburg events that I analyze below.

The way in which this self-expression is perceived here takes the introduction of a theoretical notion, namely Goffman's notion of a 'team'. I draw on Goffman here instead of traditional Social Movement Theory for two reasons. First, these approaches pay little attention to the performative expression that is central to the situation at hand. Secondly, faced with the dissonance and a changing media frame, it is not enough for ATTAC to *be* peaceful (or violent); it has to *express* what it is. Social Movement Theories all from the outset define a 'social movement' as always-already *having* a collective identity and a more or less unified agency – and thus take as a given precisely what will prove to be problematic here.<sup>14</sup> When the dissonance violence-peaceful is introduced and internal disagreements erupt, ATTAC no longer has a collective identity.

The notion of a team, a group of actors defined by their expressive interdependence, captures these two problematiques.<sup>15</sup> ATTAC is a team in the sense that its proponents have to cooperate even in the face of differences and disagreements if they are to maintain both the self-expression of ATTAC – indeed its very cohesion - and their own role within it. Think of the members of a theatre troupe faced with an onstage crisis – there is no chance of opting out of the

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<sup>13</sup> Interviews with Kenneth Haar and Lars Bohn.

<sup>14</sup> Adding network theory as an emerging fourth approach within social movement theory in addition to the canonical ones of political opportunity, resource mobilisation and cultural framing, examples of definitions of social movements as sharing a 'collective identity' can be found in all four – see, respectively, Sidney Tarrow 1998, *Power in Movement*. Cambridge University Press, USA & UK, p. 4-5; John D. McCarthy & Mayer N. Zald 1977, 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 6, pp. 1212-1241, pp. 1217-18; Alberto Melucci 1985, 'The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements', *Social Research*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter 1985), pp.789-816, p. 793; and Mario Diani 1992, 'The Concept of Social Movement', *Sociological Review*, 40: pp. 1-25.

<sup>15</sup> Erving Goffman 1959, *The Presentations of Self in Everyday Life*, Doubleday Anchor, USA, p. 104.

interdependence, no hive mind that ensures automatic coordination. Given the existence of a media framing of ATTAC, self-expression does not reign supreme, but nor does the processed image. The team concept captures that ATTAC is not a reified actor, but not a passive victim of framing either. Thus, when I use the term 'the movement' about ATTAC it is therefore not to reify it as a unitary agent, but because the proponents in their self-expression refer to their team as 'the movement'/'ATTAC' and because the media frame express it as such.

All in all, this is what a broad answer to the question 'who are you, ATTAC?' would have been the day before the Gothenburg summit: a predominantly center-left, but relatively broad based team of quite different volunteers, gathered around a platform pursuing an alternative to actually existing globalization, initially carried upon a wave of 'good press', but in June also established as an informal network with the infrastructural means to express itself relatively independently of journalistic coverage.

### **June 15, 09:04 PM**

What was the Gothenburg summit, then? It was something of a Seattle experience for Scandinavia. Large, varied and colorful peaceful demonstrations dominated the streets of the city. A few serious and violent clashes between police and protestors dominated the news coverage. For ATTAC-Denmark, it represented three things: (1) a shift in the media frame towards a more skeptical and less charitable coverage, (2) a growth in the number of critical questions raised by both sympathizers and critics in op-ed debates and on on-line fora affiliated with the movement, (3) an aggravation of internal ideological and political differences as the same questions are raised by some activists, but rejected by others. All three ultimately boils down to a challenge to the movement's self-expression and (at least some of) its proponents' self-understanding. All three boil

down to the opening question: ‘who are you, ATTAC?’ And as the following examples will demonstrate, all three things happened quickly.

Reg (1). On the second day of the summit (June 15), police and demonstrators clash in the center of Gothenburg. Several people are injured in what is the most serious violent encounter between police and civilians in Scandinavia since the early twentieth century. For ATTAC-Denmark, the identity between the fledgling movement and the alternative globalization movement as such now proves to be a mixed blessing, as the newspaper coverage the next morning leave behind the past six month’s frame and starts to portray ATTAC as violent or at least sympathetic to violence.<sup>16</sup> According to a headline in *Information*, the newspaper most sympathetic to ATTAC, “stone throwing crushed the dialogue”.<sup>17</sup> The whole frame is now clearly critical and dissonant with both the previous one and the movement’s attempts at self-expression, as the use of violence as a political mean question ATTAC’s claims to be a peaceful and democratic movement. It is also less charitable, as the coverage works partly through guilt by association. ATTAC-as-such had no relation to the events that developed into confrontation, and indeed the organization was formally involved elsewhere during the clash, but people active in the establishment of ATTAC-Denmark *did* participate, at the very least in the events just prior to the clash. As none of the newspaper journalists present manage to find a member of ATTAC who is willing to act as a source for the articles associating the movement with the clashes (nor for that matter distance the movement from them), the only direct link between ATTAC and the violence is made in the evening version of *Danish Broadcasting’s* evening news (which has the second largest audience of national prime time news programs). Here, a single rank-and-file protestor whom I have been unable to identify, and who according to my sources had no particular right to speak on behalf of ATTAC was identified simply as an ATTAC-member and allowed and made to represent and speak for the movement. The

<sup>16</sup> See the press-coverage in ‘Europa og USA: Bush go home’, *Politiken*, June 15, 2001, ‘Tumulsten under kontrol’, *Jyllands-Posten*, June 15, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Stenkast knuste dialogen’, *Information*, June 16, 2001.

young activist employed the opportunity to condone violence as a political mean, and blame the Swedish authorities, the police, and the ‘fascists’ for instigating the violence.<sup>18</sup>

Reg. (2). This particular interview became a key to the reaction the clash provoked from sympathizers and critics. The on-line debate hosted by *Information* is representative – it is here the question is formulated directly with its almost existential overtones the very same night: “who are you, ATTAC?”.<sup>19</sup> Op-ed pieces by both sympathizers and critics in several newspapers ask the same question over the next couple of days.<sup>20</sup> The majority opinion is clear: “If ATTAC does not distance itself strongly from violent conduct, the organization will be stone-dead.”<sup>21</sup> The question and its critical thrust, provoked by the events in Gothenburg, and the media-reinforced linkage between them and ATTAC, is from June 15 then channeled back into the news coverage as sources for further critical stories in a self-reinforcing spiral of criticism that by now appear to have more of a substantial backing.

Reg. (3). So is, a little later, the internal criticism and questioning that the events in Gothenburg provoke. Moderate activists react immediately to the events on the movement’s own on-line debate. A little after midnight - about four hours after the news broadcast with the interview - the first formal suggestion as to a course of action is made: “ATTAC should be able to put together a press release over the weekend where we: 1) distance ourselves from those who want to change the world through hatred and violence”.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see below, ATTAC proved completely unable to do so. Unfortunate for the movement, but if anything can be learned from this failure, potentially enlightening for those interested in how expressions of grassroots driven dissent are effectively organized.

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<sup>18</sup> TV-Avisen, Danmarks Radio 1, June 15, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> ‘ATTAC har allerede ødelagt sig selv’, by Normann Aa. Nielsen, [www.information.dk](http://www.information.dk), June 15, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Stenhoveder, editorial, *Jyllands-Posten*, June 19, 2001, see also op-eds like ‘ATTAC er tavs’, by Henrik Kahler, *Jyllands-Posten*, June 19, 2001, and ‘Hvad siger ATTAC?’, by Jens Rohde, *Jyllands-Posten*, June 19, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Attac tag jer sammen’, by Lars, [www.information.dk](http://www.information.dk), June 17, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Pressemeddelelse: Afstandtagen fra vold’, from: Helgi Breiner, [www.groupcare.dk](http://www.groupcare.dk), June 16, 2001.

To summarize: within less than two days, the whole expression ‘ATTAC’ has been changed. A question has been raised, not only by journalists and critics, but also by sympathizers and activists. The media has amplified it. ‘ATTAC’ has ceased to have a clear meaning, and the movement that rallies under that name is faced with a demand for an answer to the question: who are you? The new media frame suggested ‘violent rabble’, the self-expression ‘peaceful popular democratic dissidents’. The dissonance is clear. Analysis of the reaction to this dissonance and the questions and problems it provoked allow me to shed light on the question I have raised because it (a) pertains to the expression of what ATTAC (taken to be an example of grassroots driven dissent) is with (b) two clear criteria for effectiveness, namely maintaining transformative power build on broad-based popular support and maintaining the ability to self-express the movement against a changing media frame, and finally (c) has two clear organizational components, namely how answers are coordinated and produced, and how attempts are made at rallying the ‘we’ that is ATTAC-as-a-team behind them.

### **The production of answers**

The immediate reaction takes the form of intense on-line (and, especially amongst those in Gothenburg, face-to-face) debate and two press releases publicized under the name ‘ATTAC’ over the next two days.

The first was written by two veteran leftist activists, is released on June 16, the morning after the clash, and is approved by majority decision by a small group of about 20-40 predominantly leftist ATTAC activists present in Gothenburg.<sup>23</sup> It did make a gesture at distancing ATTAC from violence, but also stated “the police bear a large part of the responsibility for the fact

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<sup>23</sup> Present moderates and leftist disagree about the actual number. No matter what, it is small compared to the estimated 1000 activists in the movement, and estimated 100 present in Gothenburg.

that the violence escalated.”<sup>24</sup> This point became the key to journalistic interpretations of it – and indeed to internal debates over it – and it fails to placate moderate activists, sympathizers, let alone journalists and critics.<sup>25</sup> In terms of effectiveness and organization, this release appears partisan, fails to maintain the peaceful self-expression, only attempts to coordinate with a small fraction of the team, and completely fails to rally the movement behind it.

The second press release tries to rename the clash not as violent, but as “unpeaceful”, and is made available on-line June 16 at 09:50 AM for comments. It is sent out 11:40 AM, signed by the single leftist activist who wrote it in his capacity as coordinator of a local committee.<sup>26</sup> Again, this is hardly the way to salvage the pieces of ATTAC’s image as a peaceful and democratic movement, and moderates criticize the author severely for speaking so rashly in the name of the movement. Perhaps they can find some solace in the fact that the media chose to ignore this release. They can find little in the fact that other leftists suggest that ATTAC should write a press release expressing solidarity with the protestors who fought the police.<sup>27</sup> Again, when it comes to effectiveness and organization, the release is less than impressive. It is partisan bordering on the parochial, almost rejects the previous peaceful self-expression, only allows an hour and fifty minutes for coordination, and is closer to dividing the movement than to ensuring its cohesion.

It is notable that no actual proposal for a press release is forthcoming from moderate activists. While the leftists act (with no backing), and the moderates talk about how one can secure backing (but do not act), a group of centrally placed activists are slowly putting together a press release they find will find a balance between the different strands within the movement.<sup>28</sup> Now that the spotlight is on the movement, and the question has been posed, the internal disagreements

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<sup>24</sup> ‘ATTAC Danmark mod vold’, press release, June 16, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Stenkast knuste dialogen’, *Information*, June 16, 2001, ‘Stenhoveder’, editorial, *Jyllands-Posten*, June 19, 2001 for coverage, for debate, see ‘vedr. Pressemeddelelse ang. volden i Gothenburg’, by Lars Jørgensen, June 18, 2001 and ‘Pinligt – Attac Sverige og Finland!’, from: Martin Dohn, [www.groupcare.dk](http://www.groupcare.dk), June 16, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Presseudtalelse afsendes’, from: Jørgen Madsen, [www.groupcare.dk](http://www.groupcare.dk), June 16, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> ‘RE: Pinligt – Attac Sverige og Finland!’, from Klaus Jensen, [www.groupcare.dk](http://www.groupcare.dk), June 15, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Kenneth Haar.

themselves of course become part of the coverage of the movement.<sup>29</sup> Finally, six days after the clash, on a June 22 meeting that had been scheduled a long time before, and only by chance happen to coincide more or less with ATTAC's predicament, the national coordination group send out their own press release representing what the majority of the coordination group will vouch for, and what they believe the movement should vouch for – according to the release, ATTAC “condemn violent demonstrations.”<sup>30</sup> Here is finally a press release that expresses ATTAC's broad base and reiterates the self-expression as peaceful. It is coordinated through a partly behind-the-scenes obscure internal process, but still sanctioned by the closest thing the movement comes to a democratic authoritative body, and manages to project a ‘we’ for ATTAC that is not immediately challenged by other activists. Thus, by most of the above parameters, it has the attributes of a relative success. But it took six days to produce it.

Now, six days is not a lot of time. The three different press releases can be read in a few minutes. The difference in their relative authority to speak on behalf of the movement is easy to ascertain, if one wants to. But given the operations and pace of news institutions, this is not effective self-expression.<sup>31</sup> The ‘official’ press release is never mentioned in the national newspapers or news broadcasts, and the doubts over ATTAC's identity and democratic nature lingers on.

The violence associated with ATTAC through the framing of the movement as equivalent with the alternative globalization movement as such, through the interview on the national news broadcast, and through the media-amplified first press coverage that was interpreted as fitting into the new storylines all came to express the movement and contributed to the

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Frustrationer i ATTAC efter uro’, *Information*, June 18, 2001, ‘ATTAC tager afstand fra vold i Gothenburg’, *Politiken*, June 18, 2001, ‘Vold: Danske ATTAC undsiger vold’, *Jyllands-Posten*, June 18, 2001.

<sup>30</sup> ‘ATTAC: De få ødelagde det for de mange’, press release, June 22, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> This should not be taken as a criticism of those people involved in the events. ATTAC did not have mechanisms of accountability and decision-making at this time, and the lack of organizational systematisation of accountability and decision-making made their challenge almost insurmountable.

dissonance from the initial framing and self-expression. On these occasions, actors came to speak under the name ATTAC with little or no democratic authority or accountability, and on the basis of little or no collective decision-making. Neither were coordinated, sanctioned, or rallied a ‘we’ behind them. The inability to produce a reaction to the dissonance provoked resulted in an unmitigated disaster as self-expression, judged by the criteria for efficacy outlined above.<sup>32</sup> The movement failed to react promptly in a way in tune with its broad popular support – the support its power was predicated upon – and failed to assert its autonomous self-expression against a changing media frame.

### **Organization is still power**

Insufficient and unsuitable organization was the key to this failure. The slow and inefficient coordination of a sanctioned reaction to the Gothenburg events, and the lack of ability to maintain team loyalty and constituent identification with a ‘we’ behind the reactions produced were key problems. The ‘most’ authoritative reaction eventually produced was too little too late to be amplified by the media. The solution seems to be formal organization that allows for coordinated, authoritatively sanctioned reactions, and, if the internal democracy works, a higher chance of maintaining a ‘we’ and cohesion – all, crucially given clear procedures, much faster and with someone accountable if an appropriate reaction is not produced. *Especially* in a movement with an internally different and disagreeing constituency, this is of prime importance.

The problems of informal network organization are clearly illustrated by the case and the pious sentiment expressed by an activist during these chaotic days in June: “I hope we can have a good internal debate before we make hasty statements to the press”.<sup>33</sup> In ATTAC’s network,

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<sup>32</sup> Although this single event did not prove fatal to the movement on its own, it dogged it for a long period after (interview with Kenneth Haar and Lars Bohn). When I stress inability here, I assume that no one were interested in the outcome produced, not even the leftists that in the internal struggles profited from it in the long run.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Hvad der skete i Göteborg’, from: Christina Kaaber-Bühler, [www.groupcare.dk](http://www.groupcare.dk), June 18, 2001.

debate was the main method of coordination, and it was not linked to any way of making it produce sanctioned decisions when necessary, it was never ‘internal’, as the case demonstrates, maintained no ‘we’, and worked too slowly. It produced nothing timely and efficient, only a few ill-timed partisan expressions invoking the movement’s name with dubious legitimacy.

After Gothenburg, ATTAC needed *precisely* a hasty statement to the press. A hasty, coordinated, and authoritatively sanctioned statement that could maintain the broad, inclusive profile and assert the movement’s self-expression against the changing media frame. For there is no time-out for debate, and a lack of team self-expression is not nothing, but a vacuum that will be filled with other-expression and parochialism. Therefore, organization is needed.

## **Conclusions**

Now this may seem like an awfully long detour to end up with the conclusion that more organization is often better than less organization. Two points will underline why the dictum ‘organization is power’ may bear reiteration in its present form.

First of all, it speaks to real debates in many movements. Many of the activists in ATTAC-Denmark were ignorant of or choose to ignore the dictum, even after the Gothenburg-experience had had time to sink in. When the movement try to agree on a set of articles in September, one of the two final proposals suggests an informal network where “all members are spokespersons for and political leaders in ATTAC-Denmark”<sup>34</sup> – in other words not only a sanctioning of the state of affairs in June, but also a removal of any prospect of authoritative team reactions overruling individual team member expressions.

These debates are, secondly, probably fuelled by different writers like Hardt & Negri, Richard Hunter and Howard Rheingold, who seem to endorse such a form of movement in their

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<sup>34</sup> ‘Statgruppens mindretalsforslag til vedtægter for ATTTAC-Danmark’, from: Henrik Bülow, von, [www.groupcare.dk](http://www.groupcare.dk), September 17, 2001. Kenneth Haar pointed out in my interview with him that this proposal was actually favoured by several leading activists.

idealization of ‘the multitude’, ‘network armies’ and ‘smart mobs’ without formal organization.<sup>35</sup> These authors are amongst those who have rightly identified the power of the many, different and disagreeing that I have also highlighted above, but ignore the challenge of maintaining and defending the capacity of autonomous self-expression that movements have to maintain to avoid hazardous dependence on fickle and potentially bellicose journalistic coverage and other forms of other-expression.<sup>36</sup>

Tying my conclusion back to the introduction, I want to underline that to insist ‘organization is still power’ does not equal a return to traditional social movement strategy with its emphasis on internal homogeneity.<sup>37</sup> As noted, the fact that few big collective identities suitable for social movement politics (with the focus being on dissent, it seems safe to leave our religious, national, and consumer identities) mean that homogeneity is the royal road to marginalization. In the aftermath of Gothenburg, what emerged as the internal majority in ATTAC-Denmark pursued a strategy of ideological homogenization that suggests they agreed with a French ATTAC-employee that Bennett can quote to the effect that “the main problem for ATTAC today concerns the unification of the movement and the way to give it a more unified content”.<sup>38</sup> In Denmark, this was achieved. The prize was a homogenous and harmonic ATTAC. The price was the reduction of the movement to a minute membership and political irrelevance.

Homogeneity and ‘unified content’ is yesterday’s solution for today’s challenge, the question of how to effectively organize grassroots driven dissent. Two drives has to be

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri 2004, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Routledge, London & New York, Howard Rheingold 2003, *Smart Mobs*, Basic Books, USA; Richard Hunter 2002, *World Without Secrets*, Wiley, USA.

<sup>36</sup> A separate problem for movements in this respect seems to be that journalists tend to have sluggish adaptive expectations, taking the image of a harmonic social movement from early twentieth century from homogenous movements like nationalism and trade unions, and therefore portray internal difference and disagreement as problematic.

<sup>37</sup> William A. Gamson, 1975, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, The Dorsey Press, USA.

<sup>38</sup> W. Lance Bennett, 2004 ‘Communicating Global Activism’, in Wim van de Donk et al (eds.) *Cyberprotest*, Routledge: London and New York, pp. 123-146, p. 136.

disassociated, the drive from difference towards homogeneity halted, the drive from informal to formal organization reinforced. If this is to be pursued in practice, a new self-understanding of what makes a key activist could be a starting point. Social movements do not need ideological leaders as much as they need organizational brokers. There are plenty of good, dissenting ideas around. There are too few effectively organized, powerful expressions of them.

### **Appendix – A note on sources**

The paper is based on analysis of media coverage, op-ed debate, material from *Information*'s online debate on ATTAC, material from ATTAC's own online debate on [www.groupcare.dk](http://www.groupcare.dk), internal documents, and a single interview.

#### *Media coverage*

Three newspapers were chosen for systematic scrutiny. *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* (JP), *Politiken* (Pol.), and *Information* (Inf.). *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken* have been chosen as representative of mainstream media coverage. *Information* as also an organ of the intellectual new and old left, and as the widely available, established media most closely affiliated with ATTAC. Together, they make up a broad spectrum of the media landscape. *Jyllands-Posten* is the most widely circulated morning broadsheet in Denmark. *Politiken* has the second-highest circulation. Where *Jyllands-Posten*'s editorial line is usually seen as centre-right, *Politiken*'s would be considered liberal or left-left. Neither had a special relationship to or involvement in ATTAC. *Information* is a daily with a more limited circulation and a more specialized demographic of mainly students, people with college degrees (often working in the public sector), and academics. Its editorial line is broadly sympathetic to the new left, but the newspaper has always maintained its independent standing, and, contrary to most Danish newspapers, it does not have a history of being affiliated with a political party. As described above, it played a central role in the emergence of ATTAC.

From all three newspapers, all articles using the term "ATTAC" in 2001 have been collected using the database *Infomedia*. This produced a total of 689 units, including op-ed debate (*Jyllands-Posten*: 120, *Politiken*: 301, *Information*: 368).

The aim guiding the collection of newspaper material were to build a data set that would allow: 1) Broader trends both over time to be analyzed not only qualitatively, but also quantitatively. 2) The making of some inferences as to the more general media coverage of the movement. 3) Simultaneous sensitivity to the fact that the movement emerged in a broad space and to a large degree defined itself in a more specialized region of the media landscape.

The data set leaves out both broadcast media and local/regional media.

#### *Information's online debate*

From January to December 2001, *Information* hosted an online debate about ATTAC on its homepage [www.information.dk](http://www.information.dk). The newspaper regularly hosts different debates related to prioritized areas of news-coverage, and have subsequently hosted debates over the strategic predicaments of political parties on the center-left, but the debate hosted on ATTAC was the first time the newspaper aligned itself so closely with a political movement. The debate was opened by a contribution made by the journalist moderating it January 8. The last contribution was made on October 30. In total, 209 contributions were made. The debate is no longer available on-line, and due to mistakes made in the digital storing of it, only the first five to seven lines of each contribution made is available.<sup>1</sup> For some, this is the whole contribution. For others, not so. Despite the flawed nature of the material, it is included in the analysis, as the debate is a central part of ATTAC's enactment.

#### *Groupcare*

In March 2001, a new on-line debating forum bearing the name 'Attac-Danmark' is set up with no central authority moderating it. It is hosted by the free, commercial host [www.groupcare.dk](http://www.groupcare.dk) (similar to Yahoo-groups). The forum is initiated by volunteers, and opened up with a first contribution on March 9 consisting of the minutes of a meeting. The last contribution to date is made March 14, 2004. In total, 849 contributions are made, 745 are made in 2001.

#### *Internal Documents*

All documents available through [www.attac.dk](http://www.attac.dk) and the 'Attac-Danmark' groupcare have been included in the data set.

#### *Interview*

Unfortunately, only two informants have agreed to participate so far. Kenneth Haar took part in a 90 minutes long semi-structured interview in May 2006. He was active in the movement from the beginning, and has been amongst the movement's official spokespersons from the first general assembly in 2001 till today. Lars Bohn took part in a similar 30 minutes interview in May 2006. He has also been active from the movement's start in a variety of roles.