Who are *Londoners on Bikes* and what do they want? Negotiating identity and issue definition in a 'pop-up' cycle campaign

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ABSTRACT

During 2012, cycling advocacy has become increasingly prominent in the UK, particularly in London and Edinburgh. This article draws on social movement theory to explore the creation of 'pop-up campaign' Londoners on Bikes, formed to pressure the 2012 London mayoral candidates over cycling issues. Interviews and field notes are used to explore the complexities of framing cycling politically and generating a positive cycling identity in the context of stigma. In negotiating these issues, core activists drew upon their experience within other movements, including feminist and environmental campaigns. The paper concludes that the campaign made both distributional (issue-based) and recognition (identity-based) claims, seeking to influence cycling cultures and identities as well as cycling infrastructures.

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1. Introduction

This article explores the construction of a new political organisation, *Londoners on Bikes*, which has contributed to the growing political salience of cycling in London. I focus on (a) the construction of cycling identities, both among activists and their perceived constituency, and (b) the construction of a challenging, yet manageable problem, including how activists attempted to influence the framing of key issues. The article suggests that rather than overshadowing more established campaign organisations, groups such as *Londoners on Bikes* have strengthened as well as challenged them. It demonstrates the utility of applying to transport movements an approach highlighting connections between political demands and political culture, and the mutually constitutive relationship between issue conflict and identity conflict.

2. Cycling politics and policy in the UK: a new era?

I discuss elsewhere (Golbuff and Aldred, 2011; Aldred, 2012a) historical changes in the UK's national cycling policy and politics. Here, the focus is contemporary London, but this requires some brief contextualisation. Cycling in the UK declined dramatically during the decades following World War Two. From 12% of all distance travelled in 1951, cycling by the 1970s had declined to 1–2% of all distance. During this period, the distance cycled per head fell to around a fifth of its post-war levels, while the total distance travelled per head roughly doubled. Since the 1970s, cycling has remained low in modal share and absolute distance, while until 2000 private motor vehicle travel continued to grow.

Cycling has for a long time been marginal to resource allocation in the public political sphere. It has not been seen as an area where the state has some responsibility for infrastructure and services (Aldred, 2012a,b). This has been reinforced by scepticism towards 'segregation' (i.e. dedicated cycling infrastructure) among UK cycling policy communities. While a 1981 Cycling Consultation stated that 'in an ideal world' cyclists should have 'their own tracks', it cast segregation as (a) too expensive, (b) too difficult, and (c) a *local* responsibility. But policy-makers and advocates have often also seen segregation as undesirable *in principle*. The Department for Transport's 'Hierarchy of Provision' for utility cycling (Table 1.2, 2008) puts such tracks bottom or next to bottom of the list. Yet this approach sits alongside a growth in off-road, leisure-focused facilities (often created by the charity Sustrans). This has created an implicit dual network, with utility cyclists expected to use roads (perhaps with some on-road facilities) and leisure cyclists[1] and the 'less confident' expected to prefer off-road routes, even if poorly surfaced and indirect.

Rather than a state responsibility (as with roads and rail), transport policy has primarily framed cycling as an individual choice. During the 1980s, cycling appeared in political discourse, but with the cyclist constructed as a defective motorist, the 1981 Consultation paper lamenting that '[cyclists'] machines offer them almost no protection' and that '[b]icycles are not so stable as cars'. Rather than state action, the preferred policy response was to make the cyclist responsible for her own safety. Cycling policy discourse continues to stress this, encouraging helmets and high-visibility (hi-vis) clothing (both unusual in high-cycling countries) and more

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[1] Excluding touring cyclists, who tend to ride fast on roads – the traditional constituency of cyclists' organisation CTC.

recently telling cyclists to improve their visibility by riding well out from the kerb. Traditionally, cycle campaign groups have endorsed the latter (Franklin, 2010) while opposing helmet compulsion and being sceptical of hi-vis. They have consistently challenged the idea that cycling is risky. This, they fear, puts people off cycling and counteracts the 'safety in numbers' effect where more cyclists on the roads is hypothesised as leading to safer cycling (Jacobsen, 2003).

The 1990s saw the rise of the 'New Realism' in transport policy (Vigar, 2002). A broader shift towards 'active citizenship' in policy discourse saw cycling endorsed as a form of behaviour change generating health, environmental, and even economic benefits (e.g. Hillman, 1993). Since 1996, increasing cycling has been government policy, although funding remained very low compared to higher-cycling countries. During the 1990s and 2000s, many cycling groups were partially assimilated into local state organisations, participating in expert-led exercises often delivering relatively limited (if any) improvements (see e.g. Spinney, 2010; Aldred, 2012a,b). However, progress was slow or non-existent: targets were regularly missed, with growth concentrated in specific areas (often from a low baseline and/or in areas with focused interventions).

In 2010, there was a dramatic shift in political regime: thirteen years of Labour government came to an end, replaced by a Coalition (unusual in the UK) between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. This new government quickly moved to distance itself from Labour's 'sustainable transport' rhetoric. Its first Transport Secretary, Philip Hammond, pledged to 'end the war on the motorist',[2] seen as signalling a switch back to road-building and increased motor subsidies. Early on it abolished Cycling England, which had co-ordinated the previous government's Cycling Cities and Towns programme.

Initially, there seemed little reaction to this; yet changes were under way. A new wave of cycling blogs had begun, often critical both of current cycling policy and cycle campaigning. Within London, three of the most influential[3] have been 'Crap Cycling and Walking in Waltham Forest' (August 2007–August 2011; August 2012–October 2012), 'I Bike London' (September 2009–), and 'Cyclists in the City' (August 2010–). Cyclists increasingly use other forms of social media to share information about, complain about, and comment on cycling environments. Off-line, a series of cycle protests took place in London in 2011 in response to (a) planned changes to speed limits and cycling facilities on Blackfriars Bridge, (b) two deaths at a roundabout at the end of a new 'Cycling Superhighway', and (c) a death at the King's Cross gyratory system.

Most spectacularly perhaps, the mainstream *Times* on February 2nd, 2012 began its 'cyclesafe'[4] campaign. The protests continued into 2012, with large rides in London and Edinburgh on 28th April. Alongside bloggers and new activists, the more mainstream London Cycling Campaign (LCC) organised protests, developing a high profile 'Go Dutch' campaign calling for 'clear space for cycling on main roads'. During the early Coalition years, we can identify a shift in the focus of cycling politics: collaboration with state organisations and processes (such as that described in Batterbury (2003)) continues, but plays a less prominent role overall, with an increased use of social media by shorter-term, issues-based advocacy campaigns. *Londoners on Bikes* should be seen within this changed political landscape, which has prompted more traditional and longer-established organisations to re-consider their strategy and goals.

Finally, certain characteristics of London need to be outlined. It is certainly not a traditional 'cycling city' in the UK, historically having low levels of cycling. Cycling remains only 2% of all journeys (similar to national levels), although over the past decade it has grown sharply at certain times and places (commuting from Inner to Central London). But London is exceptional in other salient ways. It is privileged in political discourse; policy change and political contestation in the nation's capital gain disproportionate coverage. It has relatively high levels of expenditure on public transport per head: in London, this figure was £774 in 2010/2011, while the next highest spending region, the North West, only spent £337 (House of Commons Transport Committee, 2012). Finally, the 2011 Census reveals that car ownership per head is *falling* in the capital; the proportion of non-car owners among Inner London households has now passed 50%. This provides many cycle campaigners with a sense that social trends are finally on their sense.

3. Social movements and cycling

This section explores where cycling movements sit within the social movement literature. Within the diverse approaches comprising social movement theory, the main divide is between resource mobilisation theorists (e.g. Tarrow, 1994: movements as responses of excluded groups to grievances) and a more cultural approach seeing movements as seeking 'to change dominant normative and cultural codes by gaining recognition for new identities' (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 286). Broadly, the debate is over what movements *do*: are they rational political actors making specific demands, or do they communicate new visions of the world, constructing new shared identities (Melucci, 1989)? As Furness (2010, 218) puts it, rather than 'merely changing the ways we get from Point A to Point B', is bicycle politics 'a chance to figure out where we want to go'?

Many social movement theorists, particularly within the cultural tradition, root their analysis in a posited social transformation: hence, the term 'new social movement theory'. McDonald (2002) identifies this change as a shift to a networked society; for Touraine (1981), one of the founders of new social movement theory, it was a programmed, post-industrial society. While specific theoretical frameworks differ, writers claim that social transformation has changed the nature of social movements. Choup (2008, pp. 193–194) explains 'social movements in the past came together for material or service needs. They now come together based on their newly constructed collective identity [...] which may or may not lead to resource-seeking collective action.'

While this 'old'/'new' distinction is often made, I would argue that it can underestimate the complexity of movements 'new' and 'old', which contain organisations focused on distribution as well as those concentrating on recognition, often with overlap. In this vein, Calhoun (1993) urges analysts not to assume *a priori* the degree to which a movement is instrumental (often seen as a characteristic of 'old' movements), or to which it declines to engage with the state (often seen as a characteristic of 'new' movements). Following Calhoun, I keep an open mind over questions of issues versus identities. This means analysing how activists seek to frame themselves, their audience, and the 'problem' they face, adapting values and motivations as they communicate with constituents (Della Porta and Diani, 1999). Movements frame issues by presenting issues and actors in specific ways, thus helping to shape action. For example, an earlier paper (Tepe and Aldred, 2011) analysed cars and CO_2 policies in Germany and the UK, arguing that the German framings enabled certain kinds of political responses that were blocked in the UK.

Perhaps surprisingly, social movement theory has been relatively little used within the transport literature. There are two key exceptions: firstly, anti-roads protests and more generally

links between environmental and transport campaigns (e.g. Wall, 1999; Plows, 2006) and secondly, the fuel protests of 2000 (e.g. Docherty et al., 2003). Much of the literature is centred around environmental politics, shaping the movements and organisations chosen for investigation, and approaches to them. For example, Docherty et al. (2003, p. 2) stress that '[o]ur interest in the fuel protesters thus arises out of a concern for the challenge they pose to environmentalism.' Thus transport becomes viewed within an anti/environmentalist nexus; a productive framing but not one I pursue here, thus complementing this work.

The article builds on the recent work of several authors, developing their insights to further explore issues around identity and framing. Paterson (2007) uses a political economy approach to analyse pro-and anti-car movements; Furness (2010) uses a similar perspective to analyse (mainly US-based) cycling movements, arguing that bicycle politics should be transformative rather than merely redistributive. Productively discussing relationships between cycling and other social identities (gender, 'race', class), Furness does not explicitly address the question of a cycling identity (or not) in itself.

Dave Horton has provided fascinating explorations of the history of cycling in relation to social movements in general (2009) and environmentalism (2006). The 2006 paper is based on the experiences of environmental activists, rather than cycling movements or organisations per se. The 2009 paper covers a wide range of movements, linking changes in how social movements mobilise the bicycle to the distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements, in which 'a key characteristic of [the latter] is their production of conflicts centred [...] on fundamental questioning and critique of dominant conceptions of 'the good'. As well as being located with an environmentalist politics, bicycle movements today are thus (ideally) associated with transformative politics that challenge 'progress', as with Furness's work.

Given the focus upon cycling politics as transformative and/or environmentalist, it is not surprising that *Critical Mass* (CM) often figures as the paradigmatic bicycle movement. CM is a monthly series of mass bicycle rides in over a hundred cities. Apparently leaderless and dis-organised, it is seen variously as 'a protest, a form of street theater, a method of commuting, a party, and a social space' (Blickstein and Hanson, 2001, 352). During Critical Mass rides, Horton (2006) argues, 'an alternative, sustainable society is being, however temporarily, brought into existence'. Critical Mass's organisational form epitomises the radical 'new'; engaged with civil society rather than the state, prioritising *being* rather than negotiating; transforming the city through practice rather than asking for funding or for bike tracks.

Here, by contrast, I focus on an organisation, *Londoners on Bikes,* which seems purely goal-driven, with the straightforward aim of influencing a Mayoral election. Yet, I argue, like Critical Mass it seeks to intervene in cycling identities and cultures; one of its actions was even an intervention in Critical Mass itself. *Londoners on Bikes* has been heavily reliant on social media and on networked organisational strategies, as were the activists discussed by Donald (2002). On close examination, it does not fit neatly into either 'old' or 'new' moulds. Exploring an apparently 'instrumental' organisation and how it intervenes in cultures, and organises and judges success, can develop our understanding of what social movements do in a transportation context.

4. Methodology

This paper is based upon a small project combining interviews, ethnographic observations, and two online surveys; this paper focuses on the first two types of data, in order to explore activists' perceptions and beliefs. The project studied the group *Londoners*

on Bikes [LOB], a 'pop-up campaign' created in January that year to influence the London mayoral election by mobilising the 'bike vote'. LOB hoped to sign-up 10,000 people; in the end, it achieved 6633, still generally seen as a positive achievement by those involved. Activists organised both online and offline, with social media used to arrange meet-ups and actions, and email lists used effectively to crowd-source funding for interventions. A number of interviewees gave potted histories of the group, describing how connected it was to the 'new blogging':

> [Name deleted] immediately set up a meeting with the LCC for us [...] and then he set up a meeting with the two main cycling bloggers [...] from the two most read London cycling blogs, and again, who'd been behind the call for action on Blackfriars Bridge. (LOB6).

To study LOB, I and a paid student intern, Maria Bühner, attended meetings of the organisation in April and May, taking notes. We attended events (e.g. the LCC Big Ride, which called for safer streets for cycling, attended by around 10,000 cyclists on Saturday 28 April 2012) and activities (e.g. flyering), and were part of the Google Group used for discussion and organisation. After the Mayoral election we conducted nine in-depth interviews with key activists, having identified 11 of these. The nine interviewees ranged in age from 23 to 59, with six aged thirty or under. Five were female. One was a student, two worked in IT, three were journalists or former journalists, two worked in charity marketing, and one was a theatre producer.

The interviews were relatively unstructured and covered people's involvement in LOB including any specific role. We also carried out two online surveys; the first, aimed at participants in the LCC Big Ride, attracted 186 responses, and the second, an 'exit survey' for LOB, attracted 227 responses. The former sought to find out more about who attended the Big Ride and their motivations for doing so, while the latter probed views on cycling in London and of the LOB campaign and its success (or otherwise). This methodology generated varied material related to identities, values, and organisational strategies employed by cycle advocates. Analysing the interviews further provided more detailed information on specific issues, such as how the name expressed a distinctive perspective on cycling, and how participants constructed cycling as a political problem. These interviews, and field notes from meetings observations, were analysed using qualitative software NVivo to explore topics related to identity and issue framing.

5. Findings

This section is divided into two parts. The first deals with discourses of identities, showing how activists struggled to define both themselves and their constituencies. The second covers how the advocates dealt with the framing of issues; in particular framing cycling as actually being an issue of concern in this context, of selecting appropriate demands, and finally a specific frame shift that the campaign sought (re-politicising danger). Data from interviews and meetings are used to show that the activists both used and challenged the discursive resources available to them, as they constructed identities and agendas. While their campaign can be seen in some respects as deeply rooted within existing systems, it also contained within it transformative potential, some of which has been realised.

5.1. Findings #1: identities

5.1.1. Commuters, not cyclists?

Writing before the rise of new cycling advocacy, I argued (2012) that cyclists remain stigmatised in the UK, despite government

promotion of cycling. This research shows activists responding to such pressures, struggling to create non-stigmatising, inclusive yet coherent cycling-related identities. There was a strong activist narrative around not identifying with dominant images of cyclists, or perhaps not even being a 'cyclist' at all:

> I don't see myself as a cyclist, I don't wear a helmet, I don't like the idea of wearing fluorescent jackets so that car drivers have an excuse not to hit me. (LOB4)

> I've never cycled anywhere with a group or anything, or been on a cycling holiday, God forbid. I've just used, I've just always cycled my whole life. (LOB7)

> I am probably a mid green (laughs) as far as that's concerned, but that's not something I associate with cycling. I cycle because I hate the Tube. [...] I guess I, my cycling identity's probably quite functional, actually. It's the way I go round, although I do love it (laughs). (LOB5)

Cycling is just 'functional'; yet also something one enjoys, potentially threatening the 'functional' definition. This relates to dominant policy definitions of transport as lost time, simply about 'getting from A to B'. While transportation in general is never so simple, cyclists as a marginalised road user group are under particular pressure to define their cycling as 'utilitarian' (Aldred and Jungnickel, 2012); hence the laugh as LOB5 ruefully admits to 'loving' cycling. Similarly LOB7 would not dream of going on a cycling holiday (where cycling is purely for 'leisure').

The figure of 'the commuter' loomed large within attempts to create a defensible cycling-related identity. Commuting is one of the most 'legitimate' uses of road space, being (a) purposeful rather than leisure-oriented and (b) enabling paid work. It chimes with London identities; after 150 years of suburbanisation, many Londoners feel defined (often negatively!) by the space between home and work. Commuter identities also appeared in the LOB survey; respondents were asked to describe themselves as a cyclist, and 30% of those who answered used the word 'commuter' (well ahead of other functional definitions, such as 'leisure cyclist'). By contrast, only 12% of respondents to the LCC Big Ride survey used the word 'commuter', preferring definitions based around competence or experience. The popularity of 'commuter' links LOB to the growth of cycle commuting in Inner London, which has fed into the (re)definition of cycling as a political issue.

The claim to a 'commuter' identity also references categorisation of cyclists used within UK cycling policy discourse. LTN 2/08 lists these, starting with the 'fast commuter', followed by 'utility cyclist', 'inexperienced and/or leisure cyclist', 'child', and 'users of specialised equipment'. Transport for London refers to the 'hardened commuter' in its the London Cycle Design Standards (TfL, 2005, 17): 'Cyclists will vary at one extreme from the hardened commuter or cycle courier, to at the other extreme children who are for the first time learning road sense, and novice or elderly cyclists who may be apprehensive about cycling generally.' In referring to London commuter identities, new cycling advocates simultaneously claim this privileged category and challenge it, by arguing that commuters should not have to be 'hardened' or 'fast' to deal with an everyday and mundane event (getting to work).

5.1.2. 'I am a Londoner'

Narratives describing the creation of the group illustrate how being a 'Londoner' was, like being a 'commuter', another way of shelving the problematic 'cyclist' image. Both identities attempt to break out of a perceived cycling niche, in reaching out to more broadly shared narratives; although like all identities, they both possess their own implicit exclusions.

I said "[...] my boyfriend suggested Londoners on Bikes and I think that's really good because..." and I didn't really get really far because [LOB6] immediately went, "Yeah, that's perfect because that's about London. So, our identity is Londoners on Bikes and it puts the Londoner first and not the bikes first". (LOB7)

> [W]e had to make it clear that it was about London. (LOB6)

The focus on 'Londoners' linked to the specific aim of pressuring Mayoral election candidates; however, it also fitted well with participants' backgrounds. Many were younger people not born in London and being 'a Londoner' is for them a flexible, elective identity, comfortable partly because it is seen as inclusive, not necessitating relinquishing other identities.

> I think most people who I know anyway... my primary... I identify myself as a Londoner and I am much more comfortable saying that I am a Londoner than I am English or British or erm... of course I feel committed to being English or being British but it is not a completely unambiguous relationship and you know you have to decide if you're going to be English or British or European or whatever it might be but I have No... even though I wasn't born here I have No... I am totally a Londoner you know and I like that. (LOB9)

Activists identifying with 'London' are motivated to imagine a 'better London' with streets filled with bicycles rather than motor vehicles. This is implicitly transformational; linking an identity claim with a mission to transform urban space, as well as drawing a distinction between themselves and campaigns focused on 'cyclists'. However, the focus on appealing to London *residents*, like the Mayoral election itself, potentially marginalises those who commute from outside London. The 2001 Census counted 722,000 people commuting into London, with over 350,000 of these travelling into Central London.[5] One activist put a contrasting case for LOB's constituency being defined by mobility rather than by residency:

> [P]eople like me, we don't have a vote in the election, don't live in London, you know. So, I was doing all of this, but I can't vote, and a lot of people that we spoke to said, "Well, I'm going to the station, you know. I don't have a vote, but the issue is still an important issue", so, actually Londoners on Bikes is not about, shouldn't be about people who live in London, it should be about people who cycle in London (LOB1).

This connects to tensions in UK cycling advocacy more broadly. While London occupies a privileged place in UK political discourse, it is also seen as nationally and internationally exceptional. Thus, during the Greater London Assembly 2012 inquiry into cycling (to which I gave evidence), one Assembly Member repeatedly questioned whether London could learn lessons from other cities, given its unique nature. Conversely, cycling advocates outside London may, where cycling in London appears to be gaining ground, find that their contexts are defined as being so different to London that similar gains are not possible. Thus the London identity, like the commuter identity, both challenges and creates limits and dichotomies of place and identity.

5.1.3. Defining a constituency

When activists sought alternative self-descriptions to 'cyclist', this was partly about seeking to relate to a perceived constituency. Advocates sought to construct something different to existing cycling sub/cultures, which they saw as exclusive or limited in their

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[5] http://legacy.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/factsandfigures/dmag-briefing-2007-03.pdf.

appeal; yet alongside this they had to bring existing cycling sub/cultures together. Such challenges are common to many other social movements seeking to bring together people who also perhaps 'don't have much in common with each other' [LOB8]. How this constituency is constructed (and the boundaries to it) then shapes the perception of commonalities and differences and the types of action considered.

> [LOB10]: I tried to spread the word on [name of internet forum], it was horrible. I started a thread on LOB and a guy had already started a thread called Beards, slagging us off. They're the macho cyclist type on there. (fieldnotes, 10/4/12)

> I think Londoners on Bikes campaign has been really successful in getting a really wide range of types of cyclist involved where, because cycling can be quite tribal, can't it? You've got, you know, your couriers and your fixed wheel people and your really cyclists with clip on shoes that go on massive long rides at weekends and, you know, all sorts of different groups that often don't have much in common with each other. (LOB8)

The words 'cycling' and 'cyclists' were seen as in themselves problematic and generating discrimination; initially the group were frightened of negative responses:

> [W]e wanted it to be about the fact that cyclists are people you know soft squidgy people on bicycles rather than a different breed of cyclists. (LOB9)

> [T]here is something dehumanising about the term "cyclist", it sort of removes the fact that you are dealing with people. (LOB4)

> I think it was [blogger] who said to us, "You know, you have to be careful of the word cycle, because cyclists are in Lycra and they do jump red lights and therefore don't use the word cyclist". That may or may not have been right. Anyway, we took that advice seriously. We didn't want to be sort of easily dismissed as being the radical fringe of cycling. (LOB6)

> We were very fearful at the beginning that we'd just, I don't know if we ever, you know, when you read pieces in the papers and the comments section underneath is just full of people going, saying horrible things. (LOB7)

Yet in tension with this limitation of 'cycling identity' was the fact that the group had to build its political constituency around other people who currently cycled (whether defined as cyclists or 'people who cycle' or 'people on bikes'):

> [I]t's a little bit of a paradox, in a way. The campaign was directed at committed cyclists but the demand from us committed cyclists was to open roads up. [...] So, it's a civic minded thing. And we thought Londoners on Bikes kind of caught that, and was, conjured an image of the Alan Bennett cyclist, rather than the helmet and Lycra cyclist. Anybody could think of themselves as being a Londoner on a bike. (LOB3)

> I think in the end we realised that we had to reach everybody. As far, our reach could really only go as far as people using bikes and people who love people using bikes, or people who, you know, care about people using bikes. (LOB5)

This problem is one recognised by other cycling organisations, or indeed to other social movements. Movements based around, for example, ethnic, religious or gender identities, have to convince potential members that that particular identity is especially important. TfL (2011) reports that 35% of London households own a bicycle; 30% of men and 16% of women have cycled in the past year. However, only 5% of Londoners who commute currently do so by bicycle. Thus framing identities around 'commuting' could be seen

as exclusive; however, by stressing 'commuter' rather than just 'cycle commuter' it also attempts to reach those who perhaps own and occasionally use a bicycle, but do not use one for their commute.

5.2. Findings #2: issues

5.2.1. Framing cycling as a contestable political issue

As well as constructing defensible activist identities, LOB needed to construct a problem that was challenging yet manageable. The first step was to frame cycling as a 'political' issue, and to convince others to do likewise. In meetings that I attended people stressed the importance of politicising cycling, often saying that they had themselves only relatively recently come to see cycling as political:

> [LOB9] says part of LOB's job is 'just making people realise it is a political question, what the roads are like.' She says 'I only realised it a year ago.' (fieldnotes, 2/4/12).

> I was not really erm... a bicycle advocate before [...] basically, so I would say Londoners on Bikes has not changed my views, but I would say that they have given me a manifestation of it and a vocabulary for it. (LOB5)

> [I]n general, it's only until you go abroad that you realise how big a deal of my life this actually is, compared to what I ever thought it was, which is really interesting to see. (LOB2, from a high-cycling country)

The narrative about coming to see cycling as political, was accompanied by a description of the movement as 'young' or 'new'; providing a space in which action could occur and new identities and values be promoted:

> I was really struck on [the Blackfriars protest] ride by how we didn't have any songs to sing [...] there's usually like, you know, people do chanting and have placards, and there were very few placards and no songs, and it was completely silent. [...] it really struck me how like, yeah, how young the bike, the cycling community was in terms of politics. We didn't have any, we didn't have anything to shout. (LOB7)

> [W]hat I had a strong sense of with Londoners on Bikes was that here was an unrepresented natural political grouping, which I hadn't had a sense of in any of these other campaigns. So, these other campaigns were very crowded political spaces, but this is not a crowded political space. (LOB6)

Activists clearly distinguished their interest in bicycles as primarily political, rather than in bikes per se. They saw this as facilitating both identity and issue goals: the former through protecting their non-'cyclist' identity and legitimising the campaign as not purely for existing 'committed cyclists'; the latter by linking it to broader social and environmental issues.

> I come to it as I said as someone who is very much interested in issues around fairness and political change and like creating a better future rather than someone who just really loves sprockets and chain rings. (LOB9)

Of course, politicising cycling is itself potentially limiting (excluding those who do not see cycling as political); and activists were aware of this. However, my previous research (Aldred, 2010) suggests a politicised cycling identity can be less off-putting in itself to 'everyday cyclists' than one that is more narrowly bicycle-focused.

While most activists were new to bicycle advocacy, many had other campaigning experience (environmentalism, housing issues, women's charities, internet privacy). This helped them generate a vocabulary to critique the problem of cycling. One described cycling as 'a rights issue', drawing parallels with conflict zones and gender-based violence:

I've seen a lot of parallels between victim blaming of cyclists and victim blaming of women erm… in gender based violence, so, for me, I think that was a trigger. It was like, "I've seen this before. I know what's going on here. This is wrong". (LOB5)

However, while the campaign drew from such issues, activists strove to keep it separate from them, and centred around 'safe cycling'.

[T]here were people within the group who have very strong opinions about liveability, quite a lot of ideas about, I think there is environmentalism there, but that wasn't the aim. I think that the key aim was around safe cycling. (LOB5)

Through this discourse, the cycling issue was narrated as a contestable political issue that gained some of its power from being relatively discrete and contained; drawing on other political discourses yet not subsumed within them. It was simultaneously linked to other political issues and limited in relation to them.

5.2.2. Framing demands and political accountability

Although this was periodically debated during the campaign, activists decided not to make specific demands, drawing on a discourse of being concerned citizens rather than experts (or 'usual suspects'). Partly, this related to a wish to avoid debates around 'segregation':

[S]ome of us, powerfully helped by [bloggers], said, "No, let's stay right out of that. It's a minefield", you know, "We're not going to build consensus around any of that. Just make the roads safer, that's something we can all agree on". (LOB3)

Instead, the group challenged Mayoral candidates to make their case; using the metaphor of an online bidding site:

[W]hat we often described it as was an Ebay auction, we were just saying to the candidates bid for our vote, you know, you are the ones with the policy teams, you're the ones who understand London, we are not going to get into an argument over what needs to be done at this junction or that junction, you tell us what you are going to do. (LOB6)
We just decided to campaign for, to put pressure on the candidates to do something because there were other experts and many better placed people to give advice on what would be best. (LOB7)

Identifying the locus of action meant re-framing the role of the Mayor and the political chain of command. LOB activists insisted (a) the Mayor *controlled* transport in London and (b) that transport was the key or only area for which s/he has this responsibility. This foregrounded the Mayor's role in running Transport for London over other roles, such as responsibility for spatial planning. This claim had to be *made* simple and obvious, through the campaign which repeatedly stated that Transport for London's decisions were political and determined by the Mayor.

Prior experience of activism provided activists with a benchmark and expectations. They felt that this campaign could be seen as relatively tangible and winnable, despite the lack of concrete demands. It did not require a shake-up of the whole system; rather, it was about accommodating bicycles within an existing system.

[T]he idea of changing something so fundamental as the world financial system or property rights is quite a big ask whereas the idea of making a difference to the city in which you live so that people can travel around it on bikes seems much more achievable. (LOB4)
[I]t wasn't about trying to stop a war in another country, it was a very practical thing, on my doorstep, that I did everyday […] I could see the end and there was a goal. (LOB7)

We simply had to gather enough electoral pledges to make the candidates notice the biking vote and change their agenda, in order to try and attract it. So, it was very much within, working within the political system that we had. (LOB6)

The short-term, clearly defined nature of the campaign allowed temporary involvement without identity threat. Participants did not have to become semi-professionalised bicycle advocates; they could be involved for a discrete period only.

I haven't got involved particularly in London Cycle [Cycling] Campaign, although I think they're brilliant, but it just seems a bigger, long term thing. I was really attracted to seeing, you know, how much difference can you make in this short few months. (LOB8)

Avoiding specific demands allowed activists to measure success in different ways; while the bike vote did not swing the election, and the group fell short of 10,000 pledges, three-quarters of the 227 survey respondents thought it had been 'successful' or 'very successful'. Interviewees argued that they had succeeded through increasing the political salience of cycling, building a movement and shifting people's views (including their own).

5.2.3. Frame shift: the re-politicisation of danger

Finally, I discuss an example of an issue where LOB helped to force a 'frame shift', around the re-politicisation of danger. I noted above that cycling advocates have traditionally resisted 'dangerization' instead stressing that cycling on roads is a healthy and safe activity. The new wave of cycling advocacy has been more favourable to 'segregation' and sought to re-introduce danger to the debate, politicising rather than individualising it. Many involved in LOB said that they felt able to cycle in London, but were speaking for others who felt too frightened:

I've been a keen cyclist in London for years, you know, I've commuted to work for years and cycled around, and think it's a shame that more people don't feel able to do that, and it is because of safety on the roads. (LOB8)

Participants challenged the idea of 'safety in numbers' ('SIN'); or more cyclists leading to safer cycling (Jacobsen, 2003). The concept continues to be much debated, particularly given the limited conclusions that can be drawn from cross-sectional evidence alone. Activists particularly criticised what they saw as the use of SIN to impose individual responsibility, where the individual cyclist rather than the state must make cycling safer for others:

[It's] like saying, well, let's send lots of people over the top in the Somme, because some of them will get there and the rest of them will be brought down by machine guns, like, you can't say well, let's just keep throwing lots of nice soft bodies into the path of the cars until the cars get used to avoiding them, because people are going to get hurt before that possibly happens and it's just irresponsible. (LOB9)

Both SIN and the re-politicisation of danger continues to be debated, as what is defined as an 'acceptable' level of risk is challenged and re-constructed. However, activists have succeeded in helping to shift debate towards what transport authorities should do to keep cyclists safe, rather than what individual cyclists should do. Given the context of continuing stigmatisation of cyclists (DfT, 2010; Aldred, 2012c) this is some achievement. At the same time, activists worried that a disproportionate focus on road danger could be seen as 'too negative', in what became a very negative Mayoral campaign more broadly. One way the group addressed this was through its communication style, which included a chatty email style praised by online survey respondents, and the pink

branding, seen as a non-confrontational, non-aligned colour that would attract interest. Again issues and identities were brought together, as a positive tone was used in an attempt to make politicisation more inclusive and less threatening.

6. Conclusion

What does the data contribute to social movement theory more broadly? It contributes to the case originally made by Calhoun (1993) that a chronological distinction between 'old' (concerned with materialities) and 'new' (concerned with identities) social movements may obscure important similarities. Rather, we should explore *how* issues and identities are co-articulated and/or how they conflict. Identities are not purely a means to an (issue-based) end but neither are issue claims purely the expression of identities. Struggling to fit the two together, to ensure that each positively supports the other, is what social movements do. In this case, for example, activists attempted to negotiate problematic 'cyclist' identities partly by framing demands as broad political questions rather than getting (as they saw it) bogged down in technicalities more appropriate to cycling experts.

More specifically, the data has implications for how we understand the potential of cycling advocacy to effect changes in policy and practice. The *Londoners on Bikes* group had cultural as well as instrumental goals and outcomes, with identity issues related to (but not reducible to) political goals and definitions of success. The organisation explicitly sought to limit its campaign to cycling-specific issues, to avoid environmental discourses, and was purely focused on an election. But I would argue that its implications are more far-reaching than this would suggest. It was responding to changes in the demographics of London cycling, seeking to connect with 'commuters' and 'Londoners' not previously involved with cycling activism, and to affect the behaviour of existing advocates and campaign groups. Thus its legacy included its contribution to radicalising the existing campaigning scene, with participants claiming that the established London Cycling Campaign had 'got a new lease of life' (LOB7) or had become 'a little more bold' (LOB4) due to groups such as *Londoners on Bikes* 'pushing the envelope a little bit' (LOB9). This included the LCC's organisation of events such as the 'Big Ride' (see above).

While the campaign was explicitly arguing for change within the existing transport system, activists also sought to shift cultures and cycling identities, as well as imagining a transformed 'London'. They were not necessarily committed to acting upon a shared group identity; rather they sought to disrupt and intervene in existing definitions of cycling identities. Struggles around both distribution and recognition are both very much present and interrelated. In some respects, groups like LOB may appear to mark a shift towards accommodation within the system; and some cycle campaigners explicitly welcome a severance with 'environmentalism' on these grounds. However, this would miss the profound impacts of these interventions, in helping to reframe long-standing assumptions about cycling policy and politics. They have contributed to opening up a broader political space in which cycling appears as (potentially) an object of public responsibility.

The rise of *Londoners on Bikes* should be seen within the broader rise of new cycling advocacy (Aldred, 2012a). Blogging has played a key role in this, as has data sharing and the use of video recordings to highlight and comment upon driver behaviour and/or cycling infrastructure. The growth of cycle blogging has created a new layer of experts, who usually hold down 'day jobs' and so are perceived as different from paid representatives of campaign organisations. This separation is not complete – some bloggers are active in advocacy organisations – but it has helped generate space

for new discourses, new identities, and new strategies within cycling advocacy. This increased space for challenge and debate has led to the rise of often time-limited and/or issue-based campaigns such as LOB, the LCC's own 'Go Dutch' (which was in part a response to the pressure from other advocates to promote Continental solutions), and the *Times* cyclesafe campaign, which has used participatory mapping to represent 'danger hotspots'.

Finally, while debates within UK cycle advocacy communities continue to be sharp and sometimes acrimonious (Aldred, 2012a), the overall picture is of an expanded and heterogeneous movement. Interestingly, existing advocacy organisations have been both strengthened and challenged by new groups such as *Londoners on Bikes*. LCC's 'Go Dutch' campaign explicitly endorses segregated cycling infrastructure in some contexts, a clear shift in position from the group, and a politically successful one, with all five main Mayoral candidates endorsing the campaign. *Londoners on Bikes* may or may not re-appear in future elections; however, it has helped strengthen and pluralise cycling advocacy in the UK, rather than drawing resources away from established groups. Debates over identities and issues have been re-invigorated and at the time of writing, cycling's political profile within the UK capital at least remains high.

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