Transnationality as a Liability?
The Anti-Nuclear Movement at Malville

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In the literature on social movements, the specifically transnational dimensions of certain movements and mobilisations are often discussed primarily in terms of their advantages or potential advantages. For example, by working in cross-border networks, activists may be able to circumvent limitations in their own country, apply pressure from abroad against local opponents and select the best terrain for fighting for their cause from among various national and international venues. For activists working on local or national issues that have parallels abroad, perhaps the most important advantage of "going transnational" is that it allows them to see their own problems from a different perspective and learn from peers who may approach matters in a different way. Though social scientists have amply described such positive aspects of transnational activism (the "boomerang effect", political opportunities, diffusion)[1], less attention has been paid to its occasional disadvantages, though these are by no means hidden from view. Borrowed strategies and allies abroad can be turned to a movement's disadvantage when they depart too much from the local context or are used to substitute for, rather than complement, a strong local movement.

This paper will examine in detail one infamous instance of transnational activism gone awry. At the international demonstration against the Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) "Super-Phénix" in Creys-Malville, France on 31 July 1977, one demonstrator was killed, three people lost limbs and hundreds were injured when police used hand grenades against demonstrators. This protest was plagued by a number of problems that were only marginally related to the transnational character of the mobilisation, but the French government played up foreign participation, notably by West German demonstrators, as a means of undermining the protest. The prefect of the Isère département, charged by the Interior Minister with coordinating police action at the demonstration, spoke of a "second German occupation" of the region, and the rightwing press insinuated that "West German terrorists" from the Red Army Faction were among the demonstrators. By attributing blame to German

protesters, the French government sought to draw attention away from the actions of its own police forces while simultaneously making it appear that opposition to nuclear power was a foreign, even anti-French phenomenon. The failure of the 1977 protest in Malville demonstrates how, in the absence of good coordination and strong local support, international solidarity and transnational protest participation can be turned from an advantage into a liability for a social movement.

In order to explain why things went wrong at Malville, I will first situate the event within a chronology of anti-nuclear and related protests in both France and West Germany [2] during the 1970s, thereby showing how transnational linkages helped protest(ers) move back and forth between these two countries and how a certain "model" of protest developed that seemed to work well until 1976. I will then discuss how developments in West Germany in late 1976 led to a rapid change in the conditions of protest in France in 1977. Finally, I will look at the 1977 protest itself, pointing out how transnational issues did and did not contribute to its tragic outcome.

A Transnational Chronology of Anti-Nuclear Protest

"Malville" actually happened twice: the history of the violent demonstration that took place in the hamlet of Creys-Malville, France (about halfway between Lyon and Geneva) on 31st July 1977 begins at the latest a year earlier, when a non-violent occupation of the construction site of the future nuclear power plant took place from 3rd to 8th July 1976. But the non-violent actions of July 1976 are themselves inscribed in a longer history of transnationally networked, local struggles in Europe during the 1970s that contributed to the emergence of a transnational anti-nuclear movement.

In considering the history of the transnational anti-nuclear movement in its French and German dimensions, the most appropriate starting point is to be found, perhaps unsurprisingly, along the Franco-German border. In Alsace and Baden, activists from both sides of the Rhine fought together against a nuclear power plant in Fessenheim (France, starting in 1971), a lead processing plant in Marckolsheim (France, 1974-1975) and planned nuclear power plants in Breisach and Wyhl (West Germany, 1972 and 1973-1983). These local mobilisations were closely interrelated: Fessenheim and Breisach helped sensitise the population on both sides of the border to issues of nuclear power. In Marckolsheim, the more tangible case of "good, old, classic environmental pollution" brought them together, with French and German citizens jointly occupying the construction site for the planned (but never built) chemical plant. After the successful "dress rehearsal" at Marckolsheim in France, the spectacular, long-term site occupation in Wyhl unleashed a wave of contestation that washed over West Germany and France, with further

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(2) I restrict myself to these two countries because of their importance to one another in this and some other specific cases (see below). However, it should be noted that activists in both countries were also attuned to events in Switzerland, Sweden, Britain, the United States, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Japan and elsewhere.

effects felt in Switzerland and as far away as the United States[3]. Along the border, a certain kind of transnational activism came quite naturally, with the same activists moving back and forth across the border to exchange information and participate in one another's protests. This laid the foundation for an important Franco-German alliance within the transnational movement against nuclear power.

It is important to remember that the anti-nuclear movement was not composed only of "anti-nuclear" activists, but built on cross-border networks connecting local struggles that were not necessarily related to nuclear power or environmental protection. The central hub of many protest networks was *le Larzac*, a plateau in southern France where small farmers and peasant families fought the expansion of a military camp within their midst (1971-1981). Protest there attracted international attention when the locals hosted spectacular rallies in 1973, 1974, and 1977 that drew crowds of 50,000-100,000 people. Activists of all persuasions who came to Malville in 1977 – not only from Grenoble, Lyon, Paris and Strasbourg, but also from Freiburg, Frankfurt, Hamburg and elsewhere – had previously attended rallies on the Larzac. Internationally, the Larzac was a special inspiration to advocates of non-violence: members of the *Gewaltfreie Aktion Freiburg* (a German group for non-violent action based in the university town nearest to Wyhl) visited the Larzac and the anarcho-pacifist journal *Graswurzelrevolution* regularly published reports on the struggle. German activists with other ideological orientations also had networks connecting them to protest and protesters on the Larzac and elsewhere in France. For example, the Maoist-inspired *Kommunistischer Bund*, many of whose members came to Malville in 1977, was allied with the French *Organisation Communiste des Travailleurs*; OCT was among the groups responsible for crowd control at the 1977 Malville demonstration and the successor to two post-1968 communist groups that were very active in the network of *Comités Larzac*[4]. In Hamburg, a separate *Larzac-Freundeskreis* also existed that was independent of both the non-violent and communist groups; other German activists belonged to the different, but partially overlapping support networks for workers striking at the Lip watch factory in Besançon or at the nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in La Hague. In each of these cases, protest in France and in West Germany was linked together by direct, personal contacts within these networks of local protest. In general, the solidarity that West German protesters expressed with their French comrades was only partially reciprocated, as West German activists paid far more attention to developments abroad than did the French. Nevertheless, these networks fostered exchange,

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(3) Immediately after the occupations in Marckolsheim and Wyhl, a third site occupation took place in the Rhine border area to block the construction of a nuclear power plant in Kaiseraugst, Switzerland. The 1977 occupation of the construction site for a nuclear power plant in Seabrook, New Hampshire was also directly inspired by the actions at Wyhl.

(4) The *Gauche ouvrière et paysanne* (GOP) and the *Organisation communiste 'Révolution'* (OCR) merged in December 1976. Both were involved in the network of *Comités Larzac*, which organised national protests and local events in cities across France to support the Larzac. GOP especially was involved from a very early stage and helped plan the 1973 rally.

however unequal, and reinforced linkages between protest in France and West Germany.

Over time, a certain model evolved from the collective experiences activists accumulated in local struggles within these networks. The early mobilisations along the border (in Fessenheim and Marckolsheim) demonstrated that activists from abroad could effectively contribute to local protests. On the Larzac, the keys to the movement's success were non-violence and local control over the supporting movement – important at a time when large segments of society still feared infiltration by "gauchistes" and the violence they associated with them. Emissaries from the Larzac and protesters with experience there carried these lessons with them to other protests, including the one in Wyhl[5]. To the strategies of non-violence and local control, Wyhl added the element of site occupation: this not only had the practical effect of halting construction, but the long-term occupation also allowed for trust-building contact between the local population and some of its outside supporters, who provided a permanent presence on the site when locals were busy at work or on the farm[6]. Though each of these protests depended on specific local conditions, together they seemed to constitute a coherent image of the possibilities for local protests of international importance, wherever they might occur.

The different elements of this unofficial model of local mobilisation seemed to come together in a happy synthesis, if only briefly, at the 1976 demonstration in Malville. First of all, this protest attracted transnational participation from German, Swiss and Italian activists, many of whom had been inspired by the aforementioned actions. Chaïm Nissim, a Swiss member of the 1976 Malville coordinating committee, remembers wanting to try a non-violent site occupation in Malville after attending a protest in Kaiseraugst, Switzerland, where both strategy and supporters had been imported from nearby Wyhl[7]. Police estimated that 5,000 demonstrators were present at the protest march on 3rd July 1976, of which at least 150 came from abroad (given that the activist paper La Gueule Ouverte wrote of 20,000 total demonstrators, the number of foreign activists may also have been considerably higher)[8]. Though this figure would be dwarfed the following year (when Germans came in far greater numbers), the authorities appear to have been alarmed by the presence of international activists. In a taste of things to come, the Prefect of Isère, René Jannin, condemned foreign participation in protests in France as "abnormal", promising identity checks

(5) A number of people involved in Wyhl had contact with people on the Larzac, including several interviewed for this project (Walter Moßmann, Raymond Schirmer and Marie-Reine Haug, Peter Modler).

(6) For an astute analysis of the complicated relationship between locals and outsiders in Wyhl, see Jens Ivo ENGELS, *Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik: Ideenwelt und politische Verhaltensstile in Naturschutz und Umweltbewegung 1950-1980*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2006, p. 355-364.

(7) Chaïm NISSIM, interview with the author, 28 January 2010.

(8) The first figure appears to be based on a count of vehicles with Swiss and German number plates, which the police meticulously recorded. Grenoble, Archives Départementales (AD) de l'Isère, 6253 W 37 and 6299 W 15, Notes n° 468 and 488 des Renseignements Généraux (RG), 15 and 26 July 1976; *La Gueule Ouverte*, n° 113, 7 July 1976, p. 1.

throughout the region and commenting, "there is a certain limit to [our] hospitality"[9].

As a non-violent action as well, the site occupation was largely a success: police reports note repeatedly that demonstrators "showed no signs of aggression"[10], even as they gathered rocks (to create a diversion) and cut open the perimeter fence. After briefly entering the site, protesters negotiated with the authorities to de-escalate the situation and voluntarily limited their occupation to the area of the breach in the fence[11]. During the several days that they remained there, protesters played football with the CRS (French riot police), launched an "opération haricot" to plant beans on the power company's land, and made "no attempt at penetrating [the site]" any further[12]. As in Wyhl, the possibility of a long-term occupation facilitated contact and trust-building between locals and outsiders. Local farmers brought food for the protesters, who in turn hosted information sessions for the locals about nuclear power[13]. Perhaps out of a desire to prevent this contact from deepening, the government gave orders to evict the demonstrators on 8th July. At 6:00 that morning, the few hundred camping demonstrators were "brutally" removed from the site by five companies of CRS (approximately 600 police)[14]. After what had otherwise been a calm, even playful ("bon enfant") protest, this show of force angered the non-violent protesters, many of whom went home with bitter memories of the police intervention[15]. In part as a result of the police action, the good relations between locals and their outside supporters that had been so vital in other struggles remained underdeveloped in Malville. Moreover, the protest would go down as only a mixed success, with important consequences for the mobilisation the following year.

A changing situation

The ambiguous end to the 1976 demonstration led to two important changes in the structure of the Malville support movement thereafter. On the one hand, the symbolic site occupation had been a great success that attracted considerable attention, leading to a rapid expansion of the movement's supporters. According to Odile Lanza (one of the organisers in both 1976 and 1977), the coordinating group swelled in a matter of months from a group of 10 to meetings of 60 people; at the "Morestel conference" in February

(9) Claude FRANCILLON, "Drôle de guerre sur le site de Super-Phénix", in *Le Monde*, 19 July 1976.

(10) Grenoble, AD de l'Isère, 6253 W 37, Rapport du Service Gendarmerie, s.d.

(11) Among those leading the negotiations with the authorities was Lanza del Vasto, a religious pacifist who had played a catalysing role in the protests on the Larzac. He had also visited Marckolsheim and was invited to Malville by the protest's organisers.

(12) Rapport du Service Gendarmerie, *op. cit.* (footnote 10) For 5-7 July.

(13) See, for example, the film *Juillet 76 à Malville*, which contains several interviews with sympathetic local farmers. French authorities also expressed concern about protesters' initial success in reaching the local population. RG Note 468, *op. cit.* (footnote 8).

(14) COLLECTIF D'ENQUÊTE, *Aujourd'hui Malville, demain la France*, Claix, La Pensée Sauvage, 1978, p. 8.

(15) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

1977, where the official strategy of the protest for the upcoming Summer was to be elaborated, "there were no longer 60 of us, there were 200"[16]. This overwhelming influx of newcomers reinforced the ranks of (ex-) Maoists and (new) "autonomes"[17] whose anti-authoritarian principles led them to reject the kind of control over other demonstrators upon which successful non-violent actions depended[18]. At the same time, the heavy-handed eviction of protesters by police in 1976 had left a nasty aftertaste, giving some credence to the impression that the non-violent strategy had been a failure: non-violence, it was argued, had not prevented the police from roughing up demonstrators, nor had it halted construction of "Super-Phénix". In the end, neither the committed pacifists nor the more militant groups could impose their own strategy on the others. In May 1977, *Super-Pholix*, the common organ of the ideologically diverse Malville committees, published an appeal calling for demonstrators "to penetrate the site and destroy all that is there to be destroyed of the future [nuclear power] plant"[19]. A month later, the next edition of *Super-Pholix* published a different, much milder appeal calling for "peaceful marches converging at the site"[20]. Indecision and confusion about the protest strategy reigned, not least among German demonstrators, who noted a conspicuous difference in the tone of the two protest appeals[21]. After the ambiguous experience of 1976, the new, enlarged movement against "Super-Phénix" was unable to define a clear strategy for its action.

If the support movement for Malville changed between July 1976 and July 1977, so too did the conditions of protest. Why? The answer is closely related to the hardening attitude of the state toward demonstrators – in West Germany. On 26th October 1976 (a Tuesday evening in late Autumn, chosen in order to maximally inconvenience protesters)[22], the government of the West German federal state of Schleswig-Holstein announced its approval for a nuclear power plant in Brokdorf. Only hours later, under cover of the night and with heavy police escort, construction vehicles arrived at the site and set to work building an elaborate barrier (with a wide ditch, barbed wire, concrete-reinforced fencing and numerous smaller obstacles) around the perimeter[23]. Anti-nuclear protesters were incensed and, over the course of the next few weeks, tried with varying degrees of violence and non-violence

(16) Odile LANZA, interview with the author, 29 January 2010.

(17) In France and especially West Germany, autonomism emerged in the late 1970s as an alternative to the then-declining communist and socialist organisations that dominated the radical left immediately after 1968. See GERONIMO, *Feuer und Flamme: Zur Geschichte der Autonomen*, Berlin, ID Verlag, sixth edition, 2002 and George KATSIAFICAS, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life*, Oakland, CA, AK Press, updated edition, 2006.

(18) Similar arguments are put forward in Pièces et Main d'Oeuvre, "Memento Malville", http://www.piecesetmaindoeuvre.com/IMG/pdf/MementoMalville.pdf (14 June 2005), 10 January 2010.

(19) *Super-Pholix*, n° 12, p. 2.

(20) *Super-Pholix*, n° 13, p. 1.

(21) GEWERKSCHAFT ERZIEHUNG UND WISSENSCHAFT (GEW), ed., *Kriminalisierung von AKW-Gegnern am Beispiel: Malville*, Berlin, GEW, 1977, p. 28.

(22) Stuttgart, Hauptstaatsarchiv, EA 2-303 Bü 1967, "Dokumentation der Landespolizei Schleswig-Holstein über die Polizeieinsätze in Brokdorf in der Zeit von Oktober 1976 bis Februar 1977 (Teil I)", p. 17-19.

(23) Hamburg, Staatsarchiv, 331-1 II Abl. 17, "Verlaufsbericht", 3 November 1976.

for the demonstrators' walkie-talkie communications system, was escorted to the border and barred from re-entering France, thereby further hampering protest coordination. Already the night before, Prefect Jannin had declared at a press conference to the national media that "Morestel has been occupied for a second time by the Germans. That, at least, is what I have just been told. This afternoon, they broke into the offices of the mayor of Morestel by smashing a window"[36]. This declaration was disingenuous at best, cynical and xenophobic at worst[37]. Clear harassment of foreigners continued after the protest was over, with extra identity checks for cars with foreign number plates, especially German ones. Hours after the demonstration and several miles from where confrontations between demonstrators and police had taken place earlier in the day, police arrested 11 Germans, 2 Swiss, and 6 French citizens. Charges were dropped against some, but all foreigners who had been detained were expelled from France and barred re-entry. In the end, six demonstrators – five of them German – were sentenced to prison terms of up to six months[38]. The police thus effectively exploited the transnational character of the demonstration against it, fostering xenophobia, arbitrarily expelling foreigners and making them into scapegoats.

The unfamiliarity of foreigners with the context in which they were protesting also put them at a disadvantage during the demonstration, with German protesters misreading the situation in Malville in a number of ways. According to Bernard Dréano, an experienced demonstrator and OCT member from Paris, the Germans were unfamiliar with the "choreography" of protest in France, the subtle ways in which police and demonstrators measured the gravity of the situation and acted to control outbreaks of violence[39]. Furthermore, he argues, the helmets and gas masks that had become acceptable defensive attire in Germany came across as much more aggressive in France. Indeed, police and press reports repeatedly mentioned Germans in the same breath as "helmeted and armed" demonstrators (a phrase which itself conflated defensive and offensive behaviour)[40]. The memories of activists today diverge on the issue of demonstrator violence: some noted a heightened aggressiveness among German protesters, others recall violent

grappling hook). Aside from the (unprepared) Molotov cocktails cited above, there were some other offensive weapons (17 clubs, 5 slingshots and one tear gas grenade). Rapport du Colonel Roy, *op. cit.* (footnote 30), Annexe II: 'Matériel découvert'.

(36) Grenoble, AD de l'Isère, 6857 W 36, Lettre de M. Rabatel au Ministre de l'Intérieur, s.d. In the press, this statement was widely quoted with the reference to "les Allemands" replaced by the pejorative term "les Boches".

(37) The police's own report makes no mention of German involvement in this minor incident and emphasises that peaceful protesters quickly brought the situation under control; activist sources identify the culprits as a few drunken Parisians ("5 loulous à l'accent parigot, complètement saouls") Jean-Louis HURST, "Une rumeur : « les Allemands »", in *Libération*, 1 August 1977, p. 6.

(38) Germans thus constituted between 2 and 8% of the 20,000-60,000 demonstrators, but 68% of those detained and 83% of those convicted. COLLECTIF D'ENQUÊTE, *Aujourd'hui Malville, op. cit.* (footnote 14), p. 193-194.

(39) Bernard DRÉANO, interview with the author, 20 January 2010.

(40) For example, police reports mention "the hostile attitude of the campers, the majority of German nationality and a certain number of whom were wearing helmets and armed with clubs and truncheons". Grenoble, AD de l'Isère, 6857 W 36, "Manifestation contre la centrale nucléaire de Creys-Malville des 30 et 31 juillet", s.d.

demonstrators conversing freely amongst one another in French (the only thing they all agree on is that the police were vastly more violent). Whatever the facts may be, it is certainly possible that some German demonstrators expected a militarised protest like the ones that had occurred in Brokdorf, and acted accordingly. However, most of them also knew they had less control over the situation than in their own country and that "defensive" measures were therefore a safer bet. Even these could backfire badly in the French setting though. For example, it was not an uncommon practice among some demonstrators in West Germany to pick up smoke-emitting tear gas grenades and throw them back toward police lines[41] – but French tear gas grenades explode instead of fuming. Not knowing this, a 19-year-old from Bremen had his hand blown off in Malville while attempting to dispose of a tear gas grenade[42]. The divergent contexts of protest in France and Germany led to dangerous miscalculations in the violent atmosphere of Malville.

However, it was not merely Germans that were out of their element in Malville. A range of problems totally unconnected to its transnational participation plagued the protest. The local committees that were supposed to form the backbone of the movement were relatively weak; unlike at other protest sites in France and West Germany, the mobilisation in Malville only really took off once the power company had already taken care of land purchases, administrative procedures, and other potential points of blockage, so many locals were resigned about the project. Even the regional organisers from the "Coordination Rhône-Alpes", better prepared to manage the protest than the local farmers, were overwhelmed by the new circumstances and broadened participation after 1976. An innovative system by which local committees were paired with regional and, in turn, national/European ones was supposed to relay information to distant sympathisers in advance, but it worked better in theory than in practice. In the week before the demonstration, the limited preparations that had already been made were thrown into disarray when the prefect of Isère issued a series of orders banning protest-related activity and giving carte blanche to the police[43]. Even the protest march itself was arduous, winding through miles of country roads, past fields and swamps, across a terrain that few of the tens of thousands present would have known well. To add to the confusion, the demonstration occurred in the midst of a three-day torrential downpour[44]. Protesters of every stripe thus found

(41) GEW, *Kriminalisierung, op. cit.* (footnote 21), p. 15.

(42) Some West German demonstrators cited this as an example of the poor organisation at Malville: "The organisers... utterly failed. ... There is experience with the French cops, concerning both their tactics and their weapons. ... Certain people would still have their hands or feet if ... [they had known] that – unlike the German tear gas thingamajigs – [the French ones] can't be thrown back". "Diskussionspapier zu Malville", *op. cit.* (footnote 33).

(43) Prefect Jannin's decrees (a) banned the demonstration, (b) forbade parking or camping in the region for the week and (c) barred all automobile traffic within a 6 km radius of the site for the weekend. Police subsequently thanked the prefect for permitting them to "operate in full legality" while repressing the protest. Rapport du Colonel Roy, *op. cit.* (footnote 30).

(44) This may seem banal, but it is noted in every description of the protest and is often the first thing interviewees remember today about the protest. As Bernard Dréano (see footnote 39) put it, "It rained... that's important, the story would have been different if it hadn't rained." The CRS also noted that "meteorological factors" were "very favourable to

themselves in an unfamiliar environment, poorly organised and without a clear strategy.

In the end though, the greatest problem was the violence that occurred during the Sunday demonstration. Video footage shot by activists at the front line clearly shows many protesters wielding wooden clubs, and the television news showed demonstrators throwing Molotov cocktails at police.[45] After the protest, police reported finding several other homemade explosives as well as more than 40 iron bars and metal rods in the fields where the confrontation took place. Nevertheless, violent demonstrators constituted only a small minority of those present (internally, the police spoke of only 3-400, even though the Interior Minister announced on television that "1,000 out of 20,000" were violent[46]); photos and footage from the march show thousands upon thousands of peaceful marchers armed with nothing more than umbrellas. Prior to the demonstration, Prefect René Jannin had repeatedly emphasised his willingness to use swift and decisive force to protect the reactor site, which he characterised as "un bien national"[47]. Twenty minutes into the confrontation with demonstrators, the prefect (given full powers by Minister of the Interior Christian Bonnet, who in turn personally kept President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing informed of developments) authorised police to use both tear gas and "grenades offensives" (stun grenades that can be lethal at close range) against demonstrators[48]. One police officer lost his hand when he failed to lob a grenade fast enough; another grenade exploded just in front of a demonstrator from Lyon, who then had to have part of his right leg amputated. Worst of all, the blast from a grenade was responsible for the death of Vital Michalon, a non-violent, 31-year-old physics teacher who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. According to the coroner's report, Michalon died from "pulmonary lesions of the kind that one finds in [victims of] an explosion"[49]. Violence may have come from all sides during the protest, but the force exercised by the authorities was overwhelming, lethal and indiscriminate.

Nevertheless, much of the attention of the press focused on violent, West German demonstrators – culprits that were certainly more imagined than real. Even the day before the protest, the far-right *L'Aurore* quoted an anonymous CRS officer as saying "it seems that among them there are fanatics from the Baader gang flanking veritable commandos, trained in hand-to-hand combat, who proved themselves last year under similar circumstances in the Federal Republic of Germany"[50]. The association with Andreas Baader and the Red Army Faction was a facile one with absolutely no basis in reality

the police". Fontainebleau, Archives Nationales, 19850718, art. 25, Rapport du Commandant Henry Manent, s.d.

(45) Initiative Fortschrittlicher Filmemacher, *Weil ich das Leben liebe*, 34 mins.; Antenne 2, Journal de 20 h, 1 August 1977.

(46) TF 1, Journal de 20 h, 31 July 1977.

(47) Antenne 2, Journal de 20 h, 28 July 1977.

(48) Police supposedly employed them in order to frighten demonstrators with the noise of their explosions, but they are extremely dangerous at close range. "Une grenade à main OF 37", in *Libération*, 4 August 1977, p. 6.

(49) "C'est une explosion qui a tué le manifestant de Creys-Malville", in *Le Matin*, 3 August 1977, p. 11.

(50) "Malville : L'état de siège", in *L'Aurore*, 31 July 1977.

(demonstrations were never part of the RAF's modus operandi, nor were its members particularly interested in the issue of nuclear power), but it was emotionally potent, coming as it did in the midst of the RAF's "Offensive 77" (a commando group killed the banker Jürgen Ponto that same Saturday)[51]. Within the next few days, *L'Aurore, France-Soir, Minute,* and *Le Parisien Libéré* all mentioned Germans in connection with violence at Malville on their front pages. The moderate and liberal press generally avoided conflating the two, but Jannin's statement about Morestel being "occupied by the Germans for the second time" was repeated in nearly every article. In West Germany itself, proponents of nuclear energy used the image of violent West German demonstrators as a bludgeon to attack their domestic opponents, thus reinforcing the idea that Germans were responsible for the violence. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published an editorial – quoted on French television the next day – regretting "that West German violence was exported to France"; in Bonn, a government spokesman apologised for the behaviour of German demonstrators[52]. Taken together, imputations such as these helped code violence according to nationality, such that "the division French/German was equated with non-violent/violent"[53].

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In the immediate aftermath of the Malville demonstration, solidarity protests occurred across France, West Germany and other parts of Europe. Activists from Marckolsheim and Wyhl came together again for a torchlight procession at the Pont du Rhin near Neuf-Brisach. In Hamburg, the *Kommunistischer Bund* managed to bring together 1,000 people for a spontaneous demonstration, the strength of which caught police by surprise[54]. Protests in Geneva were so damaging to France's image—and diplomatic property—that the Consul General there felt compelled to inform the French Ambassador in Bern and the Prefect of Isère[55]. In spite of this immediate wave of solidarity, the long-term impact of the 1977 protest at Malville was discouraging for the anti-nuclear movement in France. Some of those interviewed for this project described the protest at Malville as a trauma that provoked feelings of powerlessness; one interviewee who went to Malville refused even to talk about it, immediately changing the subject to focus instead on the more creative, small-scale protests that took place thereafter. The 1977 protest in Malville was the last mass anti-nuclear demonstration in France for several years, and those that eventually followed it either took the form of festivals (La Hague, 1980) or separated militant confrontations

(51) Siegfried Buback had already been killed in April and the kidnapping and eventual murder of Hanns Martin Schleyer would take place a month later.

(52) COLLECTIF D'ENQUÊTE, *Aujourd'hui Malville, op. cit.* (footnote 14), p. 167, GEW, *Kriminalisierung, op. cit.* (footnote 21), p. 21.

(53) GEW, *Kriminalisierung, op. cit.* (footnote 21), p. 18.

(54) Hamburg, Staatsarchiv, 331-1 II, Az. 20.37-3, Abl. 17, 1977, Bd. 14, Infoberichte 84/77 and 87/77, 1 and 8 August 1977 (respectively).

(55) Grenoble, AD de l'Isère, 6857 W 35, lettre du Consul Général de France à Genève, 10 August 1977.

from mass protest events (Plogoff, 1980). In both France and West Germany, the battle cries calling for large-scale site occupations, so prevalent in the preceding years, were dropped almost overnight, at least for a time. When, in 1980, West German demonstrators declared the "Free Republic of Wendland" on land destined for the planned nuclear waste disposal site at Gorleben, their site occupation came as the culmination of years of discussion and months of practical preparation that involved numerous non-violent training sessions and careful coordination between local, regional and (inter-) national anti-nuclear groups. In a way, the success of the mobilisation in Gorleben was made possible by the earlier failure in Malville: shock at the death of an innocent demonstrator gave anti-nuclear activists pause, ushering in a prolonged period of reflection and a search for new, often non-violent protest strategies[56].

Conclusions

For social movement actors and for social scientists alike, it can be very difficult to predict beforehand the success or failure of a particular protest event. As the example of Malville demonstrates, protest experience in one place and time is not always a reliable indicator of what will happen elsewhere – or even in the same place a year later. Protesters and their adversaries constantly adapt to one another, changing their strategies to tune their actions to the expectations, emotions and perceived conditions of the moment. Within their calculations, transnationality is neither a simple variable nor one with unambiguous consequences: "transnationality" itself can take various forms, and different "transnational" dimensions of a protest can work towards different, even contradictory ends. The protest at Creys-Malville in July 1977 was part of a transnational movement against nuclear power that had begun to develop in the early 1970s, with support networks that criss-crossed ideological and geographical boundaries. The perception that "Super-Phénix", an internationally financed and state-backed project, posed a threat that could reach across national borders led many West Germans to join their French comrades for the protest, greatly increasing the size and significance of the demonstration. However, their unfamiliarity with the situation in France led to dangerous missteps and made it easier for the French government – which also cooperated with its allies across borders – to defeat the demonstrators.

Transnational participation thus contributed to the very real problem of violence at the 1977 Malville demonstration, but not necessarily in the way that the French government sought to portray it. Rather than a horde of German hooligans crossing Rhine and Rhône to smash a prestige project of the French state, it was primarily French activists and French police that ramped up their own conflict using techniques and symbols borrowed from abroad. Nevertheless, several aspects of this transnational movement made

(56) See, for example, the section "Nach der Schlacht um Malville – Vor einem Neuanfang in Gorleben" in Dieter HALBACH & Gerd PANZER, *Zwischen Gorleben und Stadtleben*, Berlin, ADHE-Verlag, 1980, p. 58ff.

it easy to scapegoat foreigners for the violence. In terms of participation, the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s had always been asymmetrical, with more Germans getting involved in French protest than vice versa. German protesters who came to Malville received little information about the local situation and contradictory guidance on the strategy to follow; their better organisation only further isolated them from French protesters. In addition, the local movement in Malville was weak and probably unable to support a protest of such large dimensions. Upon returning home, West German protesters expressed shock "that the local movement did not have the clarity and strength that we had assumed"[57]. Compounding the problem of violence, which allowed the movement to be easily smeared, the other great problem of Malville was thus that a transnational movement was in essence substituted for a local one, with foreign demonstrators used to mask a shortfall of local ones. Instead, the large, international protest in 1977 exposed this weakness and simultaneously gave the government a way to exploit it: by making it look as if all resistance to nuclear power was of foreign origin, the authorities could belittle, marginalise, and perhaps ultimately eliminate that opposition which did exist at home.

ABSTRACT

Transnationality as a Liability? The Anti-Nuclear Movement at Malville

In social movement studies, transnational activism is often conceived in terms of its advantages. However, transnationality can also be a complicating factor that affects protest in ambivalent or contradictory ways. This article explores in detail one infamous case where the transnational nature of protest was turned from an advantage into a liability for its protagonists. At the protest march against the nuclear power plant in Creys-Malville, France on 31 July 1977, French authorities blamed demonstrators from West Germany for violence that left one innocent protester dead and three people seriously wounded. By situating this protest in a transnational chronology of French and German anti-nuclear protests, this article shows how events in West Germany did have an important effect on those in France, but also how transnationality was conflated with more fundamental problems related to the local protest mobilisation.

Transnationality – Anti-nuclear protest – Creys-Malville – France – West Germany

SAMENVATTING

Transnationaliteit als handicap? De antinucleaire beweging in Malville

In het onderzoek naar sociale bewegingen wordt transnationaliteit vaak als een voordeel gezien. Het kan echter ook nadelig uitwerken en een ambivalente of tegengestelde impact hebben. Dit artikel werkt een case uit waar het transnationale karakter van een troef wijzigde in een blok aan het been. Tijdens de betoging tegen

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(57) "Diskussionspapier zu Malville", *op. cit.* (footnote 33).

een kernreactor in het Franse Creys-Malville op 31 juli 1977, werden West-Duitse deelnemers door de Franse autoriteiten beschuldigd van geweld dat tot een dode en drie gewonden had geleid. Door dit protest in een transnationaal en chronologisch overzicht te plaatsen van Frans en West-Duits verzet tegen kernenergie, toont dit artikel hoe gebeurtenissen in West-Duitsland een belangrijke invloed hadden op die in Frankrijk, maar ook hoe transnationaliteit interageerde met fundamentelere problemen van locale mobilisatie.

Transnationaliteit – protest tegen kernenergie – Creys-Malville – Frankrijk, West-Duitsland

RÉSUMÉ

La transnationalité comme handicap? Le mouvement antinucléaire à Malville

Dans l'étude des mouvements sociaux, la transnationalité est souvent présentée comme un atout. En réalité, elle peut également constituer un handicap et avoir un impact ambivalent ou contradictoire. Cet article étudie un cas bien précis, d'où il appert que l'atout se transforma effectivement en handicap. Lors d'une manifestation contre le réacteur nucléaire de Creys-Malville, le 31 juillet 1977, des participants ouest-allemands furent accusés de violence par les autorités françaises. Ces incidents causèrent la mort d'une personne et en blessèrent trois autres. En resituant ces incidents dans le cadre des protestations antinucléaires en France et en Allemagne, cet article démontre que les événements en République fédérale allemande eurent un impact considérable en France, mais également que la transnationalité a interagi avec des problèmes plus fondamentaux de mobilisation locale.

Transnationalité – mouvement antinucléaire – Creys-Malville – France – Allemagne occidentale